

# THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

## JANUARY 2021

### NEWS

Since July, five new members of staff have joined the Mersey Forest Team.

All of the staff are home based, and have been since March 2020, but are undertaking site visits in line with all advice.

### EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

#### SUPPORTING GROUPS AND NETWORKS

Since March 2020, all the volunteering by the Friends Groups has had to come to a stop, however the groups are still connected virtually and looking forward to resuming the voluntary activities in Summer 2021.

Discussion is ongoing with local residents around Mab Lane Community Woodland. There is a core of active and enthusiastic members who have formed a group to address some of the management issues and opportunities on the site. We will help the group to create a plan to agree priorities for the site and allocate / apply for funding to implement the plan.

#### COLLIERS MOSS, ST.HELENS

Completion of the Phase 2 pipeline remediation project is subject to approval of a planning application. It is hoped that work may be able to progress during spring/summer 2021. Community events and activities on the site have been curtailed by the lockdown, but further funding will be sought to develop the site infrastructure to support future programmes of engagement.

#### GRIFFIN WOOD

Following improved access with as a result of our partnership with Life for a Life, Griffin Wood has been very well used since last March. Unfortunately, there was a significant amount of vandalism in the woodlands at the end of April, and three bridges were destroyed. Repairs are nearly complete when full access to the mature woodland (via the bridges) can be restored.

### TREE PLANING; WOODFUEL AND FOREST INDUSTRIES

## WOOD ALLOTMENTS

The demand for places at the four wood allotment projects at Spud Wood, Sefton, Northwich Woodlands and Weaverham are exceeding availability and as a result, the team is looking to develop new Wood Allotment groups over the next year when restrictions allow.

## NORTHERN FOREST

Over 36,000 trees were planted last season with a focus on parks, country parks, farm sites, new community woodland sites, providing opportunities for volunteering and schools planting events.

This year a similar number of trees is intended with sites varying from community owned woodland, local authority and town council owned greenspace plantings and smallholders.

A programme of standard trees is being prepared to delivery Northern Forest 2.

## TREES FOR CLIMATE

The team is getting up to speed with a variety of larger sites for implementation with key relationships being formed with partners and landowners to cement delivery.

## WATER MANAGEMENT

### NATURAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT

The team have supported the Environment Agency backed natural flood management projects in Smithills, Bolton and Rochdale where around 40 run-off attenuation features have been installed to alleviate flood risk above communities that are at risk. In Smithills, works are about to go to tender for a cluster of wetland measures at two farms and one moorland site. In Rochdale, works are due to commence on slow the flow. Supporting Rochdale BC has enabled engagement with the Woodland Trust to occur and a pipeline scheme of 2.4 ha of woodland to be planted on Rochdale BC land, at Summit. At Fir Tree Farm in St. Helens, funding is being secured to install a sluice on a bund, to enable more dynamic control of flood-flows by a farmer above a community at flood risk. Finally, the schemes in New Mills and Smithills are set to be print published in the US Army Corps of Engineers, Engineering with Nature Atlas which demonstrates nature based solutions schemes around the world.

### BOSTOCK NATURAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT

Working with members of the Lower Dane Farmer Network, three locations have been identified for the installation of leaky woody dams to improve water quality and reduce downstream flood risk. Riparian tree planting will be carried out alongside the interventions to

increase the effectiveness of the measures. £30k of WEIF grant has been approved to carry out the works, which will be match funded by Northern Forest funds.

## NATURAL COURSE

The team has continued work on a three-year LIFE+ project which focuses on the use of Urban Catchment Forestry to deliver integrated water management solutions and multiple ecosystem services in urban areas. A series of case studies are now set to be loaded onto the Natural Course website, including for Crompton Moor, Smithills, Rochdale and New Mills.

## NATURAL HEALTH SERVICE

Over the last seven years the Mersey Forest team has been developing Natural Health Service. Close working with both Liverpool universities continues to provide independent and robust assessment of the impacts of the work, enabling improvements and adding to the evidence base to demonstrate efficacy of this approach.

## NATURE4HEALTH

Nature4Health is a successful project funded by The National Lottery's Community Fund to tackle health inequalities and reduce social isolation in targeted communities across The Mersey Forest. The first programme (2014–2017) provided health-promoting, enjoyable group activities in a green, therapeutic environment for just under 2,000 participants. The current programme started in June 2019 and lasts for three years. As a result of Covid-19, this has been a very challenging year with programmes have been stopping and re-starting. When in person contact has been restricted, virtual support has continued.

## CHESHIRE'S NATURAL HEALTH SERVICE

The team continues to work with a range of partners across Cheshire West to deliver the programme of activities funded by the authority's health inequalities funding. Over 3,000 participants have been involved undertaking activities including walks, mindfulness, horticulture therapy, healthy conservation and forest school. As a result of Covid-19, all programmes in Cheshire came to a halt in March, however participants have been supported throughout, and when restrictions have been lifted, the groups have been able to meet up outdoors again

## THRIVE - COMMUNITY FOREST AND WOODLAND OUTREACH

Thrive in the Forest (previously named Forest Schools in the Mersey Forest) is a three-year DEFRA and Department of Education funded project managed by Natural England which will see the team work with 28 schools across the Forest to deliver school grounds improvement, a programme of Forest Schools and Continued Professional Development (CPD) opportunities for teachers. In Year One the Forest recruited and worked with 12 of these schools and we will be

recruiting a further 12 in the 20/21 academic year. The project will align with the Green Recovery across the Mersey Forest area. Specifically, the scope of the project has been widened to facilitate a broader offer of CPD opportunities for teachers, through LJMU to include outdoor learning modules which focus on both curriculum delivery and increasing wellbeing. The delivery model has been restructured to adapt to potential risks in the coming year. This means the programme on offer to schools will primarily support schools grounds development, secondly CPD and thirdly observed Forest School sessions

## CLIMATE CHANGE

### CHESHIRE WEST CLIMATE EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

This report is being developed to support the Climate Emergency Response Plan. Susannah to lead work and Tom to help with input from LJMU and IT.

## GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

### URBAN GREENUP

This five-year €10 million Horizon 2020 European funded project started in June 2017. The Mersey Forest team is working with colleagues at Liverpool City Council and the University of Liverpool to deliver a £3.4 million programme of interventions in the city. A number of interventions to deliver 'Nature Based Solutions' have been installed across the city, including 150 large street trees along the Strand with sustainable urban drainage systems, a pollinator roof at the Royal Court Theatre, a 65m green wall at St John's Shopping Centre and a number of appearances of the PopUP Forest. The year-long baseline environmental monitoring has concluded and results are being analysed. The environmental monitoring will continue until the end of the programme in 2022.

### WHOLE PLACE LOW CARBON SOLUTIONS (ESIF)

COVID-19 restrictions have delayed progress on the sub-projects, but all are moving forward and expected to complete during 2021. Hard landscape improvements at Northbank West and Tower Road, Birkenhead have continued despite a delayed start and are on track for the planting of 187 (mainly large standard) trees to green these key transport corridors.

At Stafford Street, in Liverpool's Fabric District, work began in November to install large 29 trees. Due to the history of the site there have been numerous logistical issues with the works, but we have worked closely with the Fabric District CIC and the City Council to ensure these are being overcome. It is hoped to have the project completed by the summer.

At the Bluecoat, procurement of the low energy lighting and smart energy management system projects has been completed and work is due to start soon. This project will provide the most significant CO<sub>2</sub> savings in the Whole Place programme and is expected to complete by later Spring.

## URBAN TREE CHALLENGE FUND

As part of the largest national award of UTCF grant. 1,200 large standard trees were planted by four delivery partners last winter, with a further 4,400 trees were due to go in the ground this season. However current circumstances have created issues that have reduced this season's likely figure to around 3,500. Discussions are under way with Forestry Commission to see if an extension is possible and although there has been no formal confirmation, signs are currently positive.

It is likely that a further round of UTCF will be announced in the Spring and partners are encouraged to consider whether a joint bid could be put together.