

THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

APRIL 2017

NEWS

Secretary of State at DEFRA Andrea Leadsom visited The Mersey Forest in January which was arranged to coincide with the cabinet meeting in the North West. The Minister visited a Forest School session at Sutton Manor Primary in St.Helens as part of our work reconnecting young people with nature.

The **National Community Forest conference** was held in Birmingham on 23rd March and included discussion around the loss of urban trees, addressing the need to reduce flood risk, health inequalities and adapting to climate change. The afternoon provided an opportunity to contribute to the debate about future policy for community forestry.

Paul Nolan, as chair of the National Community Forest Programme, has been in contact with ministers over the past 18 months about innovative funding routes to secure the long term core element of each community forest. Part of this funding may include fund management by LGPS of an endowment pot, linked to a Natural Capital Bond.

Raul Sanchez, researcher for Cartif, was based with the team for a month before moving over to Liverpool City Council as part of preparatory work for the Horizon 2020 Urban GreenUP project which commences on 1 June 2017 for five years.

Paul Nolan chair a packed out event in Liverpool, organised by Forestry Commission, looking at the current state of tree health and pests and some of the action being taken to reduce threats to trees.

Over the past three months presentations have been given to Merseyside Civic Society; Ecobuild and Wirral Coast Partnership amongst others.

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

SUPPORTING GROUPS AND NETWORKS

Supporting community groups which are delivering aspects of The Mersey Forest Plan

- **Friends of Anderton and Marbury** in Northwich, Cheshire: amongst other support, the team is helping the group in developing its web presence with a new Facebook page.

The Mersey Forest Steering Group



- The team is working with the **Friends of Owley Wood**, Weaverham on an updated Woodland Management Plan as part of the Saltscape project. The group has new members and are ahead of schedule with their access works part-funded through a Woodland Trust grant.
- **Friends of Mill and Alder Woods** are running a community programme linked into woodland management following a successful bid to Woodland Trust grant for £9,600.
- **Friends of Clinkham, Moss Bank and Carr Mill** have been undertaking a series of practical woodland management task days over the winter.
- **Church Wood Conservation Group** is starting on activities linked to the Woodland Trust Community Woodland Fund. Funding has enabled a new member of the group to become trained in chainsaw use and he will be speaking at a national Woodland Trust network event.
- **Friends of Colliers Moss** is now up and running with an activity programme planned for the next nine months. Junior Parkrun is to be held on site each Sunday, and a trail race, with 250 participants, recently used the site with good feedback.

There are two **Local Nature Partnerships** (LNP) within The Mersey Forest: Cheshire Region LNP and the Liverpool City Region LNP. The latter is known as 'Nature Connected'. The Mersey Forest Team provides the secretariat support for both groups. In Cheshire, participants at the recent joint meeting between the LNP and the Total Environment Project agreed to discuss with the LEP how to work together within the LEP's emerging Place Strategy.

TREE PLANTING

Defra Tree Planting – the forest team has been leading on negotiations with DEFRA for a four year programme of tree planting with schools. This was approved in March and will provide £1.3m of funding for projects across the national Community Forest programme, with Mersey Forest secured £350k of this funding until 2021. The launch took place in Liverpool linking into the One Tree Per Child Campaign in March with Mayor Joe Anderson at St. Teresa of Lisieux Primary.

More recent tree plantings have been with Christ the King Primary School, Liverpool; Whitefield Primary School, Liverpool; Cheyney Road Pocket Park, Chester; Sutton Manor Primary School, St. Helens and Great Crosby Primary, Sefton.

A series of community tree planting events have been held over the past three months at the Countess of Chester Country Park with support from Cllr Bryan's members' budget. This included a community planting day on 21 January with over 200 local residents, followed by weekly sessions with the local primary schools.

WILDLIFE

COLLIERS MOSS, ST.HELENS

The Cory-funded Phase 2 works began in February with vegetation clearance along routes to the south and west of the site. The contractors will return in April/May to carry out drainage improvements to the wet sections of path on the north of the site, and restoration of the amphitheatre.

Community and volunteer engagement continues, with support for the Friends of the Moss Group, who held their fourth meeting in March. A calendar of events has been developed for the site, including two trail races organised by Warrington Running Club; the first of these on 25th March was a great success. Also on the programme are: a series of guided wildlife walks by Tom Ferguson; a presentation by Prof. John Handley about the history and restoration of the site, and tree planting later in the year. Junior Parkrun is also to be held every Sunday on the site from this summer.

The Skill Mill apprentices have continued to work on the site, clearing vegetation and thinning woodland. A work programme will be developed for the team over the summer.

WOODFUEL AND FOREST INDUSTRIES

WOOD ALLOTMENTS

The Sefton Wood Allotment Group has become established and held two events. The first was an information session; the second one in March was a practical day with over 30 attending. The new committee will meet later this month to plan the activities for when the felling season starts again in November. The Team are also in discussion with Woodland Trust about how we might collaborate to develop more wood allotments across the Mersey Forest, and then more widely through the Woodland Trust network.

LANDOWNER SUPPORT

Landowners in the Sankey Valley, Sefton and Cheshire are being supported to come together to submit an application to the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund (CSFF). For each area there needs to be a total combined landholding of 2,000 hectares. If successful, there will be support for landowners to improve their land - including developing natural solutions to flooding through applications for Countryside Stewardship and other grants; access to training to help implement environmental proposals and opportunities to join with other landowners and carry out work co-operatively.

BIOMASS

The Mersey Forest is continuing to work alongside the Stobart Group, as part of the successful £5.1M Regional Growth Fund bid, to identify under-managed woodland and assess their

The Mersey Forest Steering Group

Total number of participants for year 1 = 286



potential for biomass supply to the new CHP plant in Widnes. Over 40 local authorities across the country have met with Stobart Forestry to discuss opportunities for woodfuel supply.

WATER MANAGEMENT

URBAN CATCHMENT FORESTRY (NATURAL COURSE)

The Team are working on a three year LIFE+ project with colleagues at Community Forest Trust. The project focuses on the use of Urban Catchment Forestry to deliver multiple ecosystem services in urban areas. The first part of the project involves developing opportunity mapping, which is now complete, with a delivery pilot to be developed in St.Helens.

RECREATION AND SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

NEW DISCOVER THE MERSEY FOREST

The Team has initiated a project to build a new version of Discover The Mersey Forest and incorporate it into the main Mersey Forest website. As part of the project, we intend to make the main website responsive so that it works better on mobile phones and tablets.

We are also working with Merseyside Sports Partnership to incorporate geocaching (an outdoor activity in which cachers use a GPS receiver to find a 'treasure' hidden by other participants) into the new section of the website. This will be achieved through integration with the Opencaching Network (www.opencache.uk).

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

NATURE4HEALTH

Year 2 of the Nature4Health project is now well under way, with only the final three months left. To date we have supported over 600 children and adults in areas of high need across six local authorities. This year alone we have developed a great range of partnerships with 16 community organisations, as well as departments of public health within the local authorities.

As we begin to consolidate the learning and development from Year 2, we are turning our focus in Year 3 towards securing the sustainability of all the work achieved so far to enable benefits to continue long beyond the project end. Supporting partners to embed activities within existing services, continuing to work in partnership to recruit and support volunteers and continuing to collaborate and share the valuable positive impact this project has had on participants and partners so far.

BIG POTENTIAL – NATURAL HEALTH SERVICE NEXT STEPS

This project is helping to develop the Natural Health Service for it to be in a place which is ready to be commissioned to deliver a suite of five products to be offered to people who are identified by their GP as having the potential to benefit from activity programmes in the green environment. The activities include health walking, mindful contact with nature, Forest Schools, horticulture therapy and practical conservation (Green Gym).

This project will run until October 2017 and has been funded by The Big Potential, part of the Big Lottery. The work will include a market analysis and engagement with commissioners, supply chain management, developing a new website and a conference on 9 May 2017 in Liverpool. Our work is also being picked up nationally by the NHS Commissioning and Social Prescribing team and DEFRA as part of their 25 year Plan.

One outcome of the funding has already been reached as the result of a successful health inequalities bid to Cheshire West & Chester Council.

PLAY AND EDUCATION

FOREST SCHOOL

Work is currently underway to prepare two Forest School sites at St Teresa's and Christ the King ready for starting Forest School in spring. Support is being given to Bluebell Park School, Knowsley and Green Lane School, Warrington, as part of the Green Learning Environments project below.

Jo worked with Sefton Play Council to run a week long Forest School leaders' training held in St. Helens during the last week of March. This included training for five staff from the above schools as part of our work to embed sustainability into the Forest School programme.

GREEN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

This European funded project with environmental partners and schools for children with special needs across the UK, Belgium and Slovenia is progressing well. The aim of this project is to utilise welcoming, eco-friendly outdoor settings for children with learning disabilities and, through an exchange of practices, develop innovative methods for outdoor learning. The first output - a review of best practices across the three countries – has already been achieved, and a report presented at the partner meeting in Slovenia in March.

Jo from the Forest Team ran a successful Forest School taster day for 25 education staff and teachers by the Slovenian Forestry Institute in Ljubljana following the partner meeting, and has been asked to run a similar day again next year.

NATURAL PLAY

Work has been underway to support natural play provision and activities at Cheyney Road, Wenlock Gardens, Dunham on the Hill and Thornton Le Moors in Cheshire West & Chester; Great Sankey, Glazebury and Grappenhall in Warrington.

CULTURE AND LANDSCAPE

SALTSCAPE

This three-year Heritage Lottery Funded project to conserve and restore important features connected to the salt landscape in Cheshire is drawing to a close. The Mersey Forest is managing a project to support owners of Ancient Semi Natural Woodlands. Practical woodland management is underway at Hob Hey Wood owned by Frodsham Town Council, alongside producing a management plan. Work is continuing on the refresh of the Owley Wood management plan.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

LIVERPOOL BID GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

The Team are currently working with the Liverpool Business Improvement District (BID) to undertake a green infrastructure audit. The final report is in the design stage and will be submitted to the BID this month.

URBAN GREENUP

The team has been working with colleagues at Liverpool City Council, the University of Liverpool and organisations in Valladolid (Spain) and Izmir (Turkey) to successfully bid for €10 million of Horizon 2020 European funding - four million euros of which (£3.4 million) is specifically for Liverpool.

Over the next five years partners will undertake a range of research projects and work with local communities, organisations and other stakeholders to identify and retrofit a number of 'green corridors'. The aim is to tackle environmental city issues through 'Nature Based Solutions' and deliver a range of environmental improvements including increasing biodiversity, improving air quality and alleviating surface water issues. Work will also include planting trees, introducing green walls and establishing rain gardens and sustainable urban drainage systems, whilst enhancing pedestrian and cyclist routes in and out of the city.

ECOSYSTEM SERVICES OF PRIVATE GARDENS

The team's contribution to the NERC project assessing the contribution of private domestic gardens to ecosystem service provision in Manchester is now virtually complete. The project, led by the University of Leicester and involving Manchester Metropolitan University, gathered information by crowd sourcing, using an online survey developed by The Mersey Forest Team. The live survey period is now finished. Over 1,800 responses were collected. The next step is to carry out some ecosystem services modelling using the data that has been gathered.