

# THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

## JANUARY 2017

### NEWS

Secretary of State at DEFRA Andrea Leadsom visited The Mersey Forest in January; this was a hastily arranged meeting to coincide with the cabinet meeting in the NW. The Minister was focussed on the work of Mersey Forest with young people, aligned to the DEFRA policy push to reconnect young people with nature.

The **Defra Forestry Minister** visited The Mersey Forest in December where she planted a tree with pupils at St. Vincent de Paul Primary School, Liverpool. The Minister then continued with a walking meeting through the city's Business Improvement Districts (BID) where she discussed the current green infrastructure planning being delivered by forest team with members from the BID. This was followed by talks with Paul Nolan, Iain Taylor and Forestry Commission's Keith Jones around urban flood risk management and adapting to climate change.

The **national community forest conference** will be held in Birmingham on 23rd March and includes discussion around the loss of urban trees, addressing the need to reduce flood risk, health inequalities and adapt to climate change. The afternoon provides opportunity to contribute to the debate about future policy for community forestry. Further details here: <http://www.merseyforest.org.uk/news/community-forest-conference-2017/>

Following the presentation at the last Steering Group there was excellent coverage of the UNESCO award.

Chris McGloin has been seconded to the Forestry Commission from December for nine months which provides an opportunity for his continuing professional development and further strengthens the relationship between the two organisations.

### 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 hosted a visit by the senior management team from Cheshire West & Chester Council in November.

## The Mersey Forest Steering Group



- Ben Greenaway is working with the Friends of Owley Wood, Weaverham on an updated Woodland Management Plan as part of the Saltscape project, work is ongoing with the Woodland Trust grant.
- Friends of Mill and Alder Woods were successful in being awarded a Woodland Trust grant of £9600 to develop a community programme linked into woodland management.
- Friends of Clinkham, Moss Bank and Carr Mill. The annual Woodland Cup was re-arranged and took place in October.
- Church Wood Conservation Group is starting on activities linked to the Woodland Trust Community Woodland Fund. They will be training a new member of the group in chainsaw use and will look at squirrel control in the woods.

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'. 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. This has now led to the opp

### TREE PLANTING

Defra tree planting –the Defra grant for tree planting is still in discussion with a contract for delivery expected to be received over the next week.

St Teresa's of Lisieux Primary School, Liverpool have begun their programme of school ground improvements. Plans include extending an existing orchard, plus woodland and hedgerow planting to create a setting for Forest School. The project is funded partially through Smurfit Kappa Foundation.

Jo Sayers provided support for a tree planting event with Parkgate Primary School at the Ropewalk Play Area where five fruit trees were established.

Plans are underway for a number of community tree planting events in January at the Countess of Chester Country Park with support from Cllr Bryan's members' budget.

### WILDLIFE

#### COLLIERS MOSS, ST.HELENS

The Friends of the Moss group held their third meeting on 10 January with 18 people attending. The constitution was agreed and further progress was made towards establishing a programme of events, including a talk by Prof John Handley, wildlife walks with Tom Ferguson, and two cross-country running events.

The development of a regular Junior Parkrun on the site is also progressing.

## The Mersey Forest Steering Group



As far as the physical development of the site goes, the remaining package of work to complete the WREN Biodiversity Action Fund project has now successfully been completed. A tender for the capital works funded by the second tranche of Cory ETB funding (£50,000) has been published, with a view to letting the contract at the end of this month. This will be used to improve drainage, open up more footpaths and restore the Amphitheatre area. A representative from Cory ETB visited the site in December and was impressed by what she saw.

In early December, 18 members of staff from local consultancy TEP swapped their desks for bowsaws and loppers to clear nearly 250m of overgrown footpath on the site. They enjoyed the day so much; they have promised to come back again this year.

Social media for the group is being developed by Ant Young and Steve Cooper, who are leading on media for Bold Forest Park.

## WOODFUEL AND FOREST INDUSTRIES

### WOOD ALLOTMENTS

The Team are 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. There is some funding to establish one across Sefton and a meeting is to be arranged shortly.

### LANDOWNER SUPPORT

As part of the Forest Advisory Consortium England (FACE), the Mersey Forest representing the Community Forest Trust is involved with the Plunkett Foundation as part of their “Making Local Wood Work” project: [www.plunkett.co.uk/woodlands](http://www.plunkett.co.uk/woodlands).

Applications for Countryside Stewardship including new woodland planting and woodland management plans are now open: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-counrystewardship>

### BIOMASS

The 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 potential for biomass supply to the new CHP plant in Widnes. Over 20 local authorities across the north of England have met with Stobart Forestry to discuss opportunities for woodfuel supply. The Mersey Forest continues to work across the Community Forest partnership including the setting up of meetings within Heywoods, White Rose Forest and the Tees Valley area.

Timber volume assessments of some of the Mersey Forest local authorities woodland have already taken place and are due to be presented in the near future.

## WATER MANAGEMENT

### URBAN CATCHMENT FORESTRY (NATURAL COURSE)

The Team have started work on a three year LIFE+ project. Working with colleagues at Community Forest Trust, the project will focus 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 Discover The Mersey Forest website ([www.discoverthemerseyforest.co.uk](http://www.discoverthemerseyforest.co.uk)) is a popular source of information on walks, cycling routes and woodlands to visit. However, it is increasingly dated in its appearance and functionality. Furthermore, there would be important benefits from incorporating it into the main Mersey Forest website ([www.merseyforest.org.uk](http://www.merseyforest.org.uk)) rather than keeping it separate.

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

Potential has also emerged, through collaboration 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 would be achieved through integration with the Opencaching Network ([www.opencache.uk](http://www.opencache.uk)).

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

### NATURE4HEALTH

The Year 1 report was very well received and has led to many discussions with commissioners linking into the Natural Health Service Project. The results from the first year were shared at a Partnership event in November. The evaluation undertaken by LJMU showed that participants have seen a marked improvement in both their mental wellbeing and their daily levels of physical activity. On average, participants saw an 8 point increase on the 'WEMWBS' mental wellbeing scale. Levels of moderate physical activity increased by 164%, with walking up 48% and vigorous activity up 8%.

In this second year Suzanne Londra is working closely with delivery partners to find ways of embedding the projects into their service, enabling the sustainability to continue beyond the 12

weeks. This includes helping partners apply for external funding, working with public health departments and a range of voluntary sector organisations to develop ongoing partnerships.

### BIG POTENTIAL – NATURAL HEALTH SERVICE NEXT STEPS

This recently awarded project will help to develop the Natural Health Service for it to be in a place which is ready to be commissioned. It will deliver a suite of five products 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 are 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 in May 2017.

## PLAY AND EDUCATION

### FOREST SCHOOL

Forest School sessions have now started at St Vincent de Paul School, Liverpool with a newly qualified forest school leader running them for the first time. The teacher's training has been supported through funding from Smurfitt Kappa.

The grounds at St Teresa's of Lisieux Primary School, Liverpool are being improved with support from the Team, and links have been made with St John Bosco Academy to look at a suitable venue within walking distance from the primary school.

The school woodland at Sutton Manor Primary School in St.Helens, sponsored by NGF, has now seen its first mixed year group of Year 3- 6 children in six weeks of Forest School leading up to Christmas. The children selected to take part were those with identified needs such as looked-after children and those with behavioural difficulties or attainment at a lower level than their peers.

As part of their teacher training programme, 54 primary education students at LJMU undertook Forest School sessions in December.

### GREEN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

This is a new European funded project with environmental partners and schools for children with special needs across the UK, Belgium and Slovenia. The aim of this project is to utilise welcoming, eco-friendly outdoor settings for children with learning disabilities and, through an exchange of practises, develop innovative methods for outdoor learning. So far we have focussed on the first intellectual output - a review of best practices across the three countries.

To date we have had over 100 submissions. The next steps will be to collate best practice in a report to advise partners at the Slovenian meeting in March.

The Forest Team have also been asked to run a Forest School taster day for education staff and teachers by the Slovenian Forestry Institute in Ljubljana following the next meeting.

### CULTURE AND LANDSCAPE

#### SALTSCAPE

This three-year project has received a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to conserve and restore important features connected to the salt landscape in Cheshire. The Mersey Forest is managing a project to support owners of Ancient Semi Natural Woodlands. The latest site visit has taken place at Hob Hey Wood owned by Frodsham Town Council with the offer of producing a management plan for the site. Work is continuing on the re-refresh of the Owley Wood management plan.

### GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

#### LIVERPOOL BID GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

Following the successful completion of the Northwich BID Green Infrastructure Plan, the Team are currently working with the Liverpool Business Improvement District (BID) to undertake a green infrastructure audit.

#### ECOSYSTEM SERVICES OF PRIVATE GARDENS

The Team is working on a NERC project which assesses the contribution of private domestic gardens to ecosystem service provision in Manchester. This is with Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Leicester. The project is gathering information by crowd sourcing, using an online survey developed by The Mersey Forest Team. With the live survey period reaching its end, over 1,800 responses have been collected. The next step is to carry out some ecosystem services modelling using the data that have been gathered.