

# THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

## OCTOBER 2016

### 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 are already planning their 2017 programme of events.
- Friends of Owley Wood, Weaverham, have been successful with funding applications to Woodland Trust Community Fund and Saltscape. This will provide valuable resources for site and access improvements.
- Friends of Mill and Alder Woods weren't successful in getting a woodland trust grant, but are hoping to re-submit and also look at other sources of funding.
- Friends of Clinkham, Moss Bank and Carr Mill. The annual Woodland Cup has been re-arranged and will now take place on Thursday 6 October at Windermere Playing Fields, St.Helens, adjacent to the wood.
- 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.

### WILDLIFE

#### COLLIERS MOSS

The remaining package of work to complete the WREN Biodiversity Action Fund project has almost been completed with 10 dams having been installed on Burtonwood Moss in order to hold water on the site. Final works including woodland edge management will be completed within the next few weeks.

A second funding application to the Cory Environmental Trust for £50,000 has been awarded this month and will continue to help to develop the site over the next year.

## The Mersey Forest Steering Group



The Friends Group held their first meeting on 28 September with over 20 attending and agreeing to take the group forward.

A Countryside Stewardship Scheme application was submitted to Natural England, however it was unsuccessful due to the site not reaching a sufficient score based on national thresholds.

### WOODFUEL AND FOREST INDUSTRIES

#### WOOD ALLOTMENTS

The project was awarded a grant by the Ashden Trust to develop the programme which has been used to develop a handbook to guide landowners through the process of setting up a wood allotment. Wood allotments have been showcased in a Department for Climate Change guide, and recent discussions have been held with partners about how Wood Allotments can be rolled out further.

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.

#### 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: <https://www.plunkett.co.uk/woodlands>. A referral via Sylva to support CIC Wild Rumpus based in south Cheshire has been made and further information is to be sent through.

Applications for Countryside Stewardship including woodland management plans are now closed until the autumn statement. Further news is expected in the next few weeks to inform landowners as to what grants will be available during the period where Britain remains within the EU. This will also include other Pillar 2 RDPE funds including LEADER.

#### 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. Following meetings with partner local authorities regarding an initial assessment of timber availability for the supply to the new CHP plant being built in Widnes, further discussions have also included the potential to include waste wood/arboricultural arisings as part of a supply contract.

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 well under way.

## 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.

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

### NATURE4HEALTH

Year 2 has got off to a great start! The team is currently working with nine delivery partners and since 1 July, 18 weekly activities have commenced with over 260 participants. Activities include health walks, horticultural therapy, Green Gym, Forest School and Mindful Contact with Nature. The work is supporting two PhDs on top of a full evaluation programme.

Work around developing volunteering opportunities continues. Partnerships with other services who operate volunteer programmes have been developed to broaden the range of activity available, also to avoid duplication and the use of additional resources.

## BIG POTENTIAL - CONTRACT READINESS

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 with a conference in March 2017.

## PLAY AND EDUCATION

### FOREST SCHOOL

The team has been involved in the delivery of Forest School Leader training at Griffin Wood with a full course of 16 trainees. Liverpool John Moores University is including elements of Forest School training within their teacher training courses and the training days will be delivered by the Team. An Assistant Forest School leader course, new leaders' skills day and a taster day will be held over the next few weeks at Risley Moss.

Smurfit Kappa and Ernest Cook Foundation funding has enabled the trial of family Forest School sessions at Stanley Park, Liverpool; preparation of new sites at St Teresa of Lisieux Primary School and at St Vincent de Paul School, Liverpool. Mentoring sessions will start at St Vincent's in the autumn term and spring term at St Teresa's.

The school woodland at Sutton Manor Primary School in St. Helens has been prepared for autumn mentoring sessions sponsored by NGF. A CSR day was held at the school which led to the removal of eight tonnes of rubbish from the site, a second tree planting day will take place in November.

## CULTURE AND LANDSCAPE

### SALTSCAPE

This three-year project has received a grant of £886,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to conserve and restore important features connected to the salt landscape in Cheshire. The Mersey Forest is working alongside a range of partners. Work has started on identifying woodlands and landowners within the Saltscape area for providing further support in managing their woodlands. The work will focus on the areas of Ancient Semi Natural Woodlands and Local Wildlife Sites working alongside Cheshire Wildlife Trust in delivering this element of work.

The latest site visit has taken place at Well Wood SSSI woodland owned by Cheshire Wildlife Trust near Kingsley with the offer of producing a management plan for the site. Work is continuing on the re-fresh of the Owley Wood Mangement 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. Good publicity

#### SPADES (URBAN ECOSYSTEM SERVICES ASSESSMENT TOOL)

This year-long partnership project, led by eCountability Ltd and funded by Innovate UK, is now complete. The prototype urban ecosystem services assessment tool for businesses and local authorities has been assembled and applied to the Liverpool Business Improvement Districts, together with three other case study areas in other parts of the country. The next step for eCountability is to turn the prototype into a fully functional, user friendly tool. The partnership will meanwhile formulate an agreement on intellectual property incorporated into the tool, and then begin to sell it, most likely as a service.

#### 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. Over 800 responses have already been collected.