

THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

JULY 2014

NEWS

April, May and June have been particularly busy months with the team hosting the partner meeting for the GIFT-T! project in Chester in April. In May 'Walk in the Woods month' provided a good focus to get out and about using local community woodlands. June saw the community launch of the Mersey Forest Plan at the Green Safari Day in Warrington; a conference in Liverpool as part of International Festival of Business and Paul Nolan being honoured on the Queen's Birthday and Dr Susannah Gill named as Young European Forester of the Year.

During May the Forest Delivery Plan was produced, printed and distributed to key stakeholders. This accompanies the Forest Plan and covers the next five years from 2014-2019, with a detailed action plan for 2014/15.

ENGLISH WOODLAND GRANT SCHEME (EWGS)

The Forestry Commission and Natural England are still working together to arrive at a series of options for the New Environmental Land Management Scheme (NELMS). Members of the team are currently attending events to ensure that Community Forests are recognised within the decision making process.

NELMS will be open for applications next year for contract start dates beginning 1st January 2016. The new scheme will be a combination of Entry Level Stewardship, Higher Level Stewardship and Woodland Grant scheme options operated by Natural England and the Forestry Commission and administered by the Rural Payments Agency.

The Forestry Commissions Woodland Improvement Grant (Access and Biodiversity) and Woodland Creation Grants are now closed.

An interim Woodland Creation grant will open in early 2015 for planting yet in 2015-16. The qualifying criteria e.g. size/location for planting is yet to be decided.

ST.HELENS LANDSCAPE FUND

The fund is now closed for new applications. Work on most projects is coming to an end and final claims are in the process of being submitted. To date the £210,000 fund has supported the development and implementation of 25 projects covering 139 hectares to a current value of £371,000.

TIMBER & BIOENERGY

The wood allotments scheme is running. A number of pilots have been set up in The Mersey Forest, including one in Spud Wood, Lymm.

The £20,000 funding from the Ashden Trust is being used to create a pack for wood owners to set up wood allotments on their sites.

NATURAL HEALTH SERVICE

Over the last two years the team has been developing a proposal to move from health projects to a commissioned service from the NHS. Pilots are being developed across the Forest.

In Halton the pilot has been independently assessed by Liverpool John Moores University. The aim is to assess the effectiveness of four interventions – Green Gym, health and nature walks, horticultural therapy and Forest Schools for physical and mental wellbeing. The study is now being written up.

Within the Forest School study, physical activity has been monitored using accelerometers over a seven day period with Windmill Hill Primary School, Farnworth C of E Primary School, Westfield Primary School, and St Gerard's RC Primary School. The data is currently being analysed with the aim to disseminate these findings in a peer-reviewed journal.

Similar evaluations are being proposed for areas including Knowsley, Wigan and Cheshire.

LOCAL SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT FUND

The team are working hard ahead of planting in all the LSTF areas next planting season: out looking at potential planting areas, plotting locations for trees and mapping these.. There will be lots of opportunities for planting with community groups, churches and schools.

These green routes link residential areas to places of employment, training and education, and planting will take place in St.Helens, Knowsley, Sefton, North Liverpool and Speke. In addition to this, the team are working to encourage people to pledge to walk and cycle more and to look after trees in these areas.

To follow the latest news a blog has been set up: www.greenroutestojobs.blogspot.co.uk

SEFTON COAST WOODLANDS FOREST PLAN

The team entered entering Sefton Coast Woodlands into a Woodlands and Climate change Competition as part of this year's Royal Forestry Society Awards. There were twelve entries

and the four which were short-listed were visited by two judges. The woodlands were awarded a Highly Commended, and the certificates will be presented in Banbury in July.

COMMUNITY GROUPS

Friends of Church Wood conservation group are hoping to undertake additional under-planting this winter.

Friends of Anderton and Marbury have now completed footpath works on the approach to the Arboretum, interpretation panels and species posts are currently being designed.

Friends of Marshall's Arm, Northwich are preparing a programme of activities as well as applying for funding for interpretation panels.

Friends of Owley Wood are holding a summer barbeque to help widen their membership.

Friends of Church Wood are currently to undertake a safety survey of the mature trees in their woodland.

Friends of Woolton Woods are concerned regarding recent plans proposed to rebuild St Julies School on the main field off High Street an area they currently manage in partnership with Liverpool City Council.

GREEN STREETS

Trees have been planted in streets in Ellesmere Port and have been very well received by local residents. The street trees will provide much needed shade and an overall cooling effect over the summer months, as well as providing a habitat for wildlife and helping to alleviate flooding. All these benefits will increase as the trees continue to grow.

The team are hoping to hold a celebration event for local people involved in the project to gain feedback and allow people to plant up around the trees to add an even greater aesthetic benefit to the tree planting.

THE BIG TREE PLANT

The 2013-14 season delivered 12,168 whips, 788 standards, and 289 fruit trees across a total of 53 sites, with over 6,000 people participating in tree planting. The Big Tree Plant project is underway for the final winter season of funding. Initial schemes include Parish Primary, St.Helens; Garston Primary, Liverpool; Halsnead School & Allotments Knowsley; Churchtown Primary, Southport; Linnards Lane Recreation Ground, Wincham; Woolston Special Educational Needs Centre, Warrington and Runcorn East Station, Halton.

BOLD FOREST PARK

Working jointly with Groundwork Merseyside, the team has won a tender published by St.Helens Council to deliver community participation and business support in and around Bold Forest Park. A budget of £40,000 will help provide a programme of events and activities to develop the Forest Park as a destination for visitors and a hub for businesses. This is part of the EU Interreg funded project, Pure Hubs.

The target to get 2,000 participants using sites across the Forest Park. There will be a co-ordinated number of events, such as health walks and forest school training, delivered by a range of partners including Groundwork, St.Helens Rangers, Forestry Commission and Helena Housing Safer St.Helens. There will also be business based event in St.Helens town centre with the aim to promote local business linked to recreational use of the Forest Park, such as equestrian provision, whilst raising public awareness.

The team has also been working to improve the Bold Forest Park website (www.boldforestpark.com). New sections will list community groups, businesses and events in the area.

WEAVER VALLEY – TOTAL ENVIRONMENT

A seminar in May at Chester Racecourse to disseminate the work that has been undertaken with a range of officers and partners on the role that green infrastructure can provide within the Weaver Valley. Key issues for the area included health; water management and energy were presented by representatives from each of the groups, as well as by planning students from the University of Liverpool.

LOCAL NATURE PARTNERSHIPS

There are two Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) within The Mersey Forest: Cheshire and Warrington and the Liverpool City Region LNP. The latter to be known as ‘Nature Connected’ was formally launched in December 2013.

Work continues to build on the momentum over the past months to influence the next round of EU structural funds.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

- Continuing work to facilitate use of the [Liverpool City Region Green Infrastructure Framework](#) evidence base by the city region’s local authorities, including through an online tool for planners and others. As an example of use of the evidence base, the team has been supporting St.Helens Council to refresh their greenways policy.
- Development of the GI Valuation Toolkit and supporting a PhD candidate at the University of Liverpool. EU Interreg funding from the Hybrid Parks has allowed the

further development resulted in a new, improved version of the valuation toolkit, [version 1.3](#). The benefits provided by the green infrastructure of Northwich Woodlands was presented at the final conference in Rhodes by Cheshire West at the end of June with much interest from other EU partners in developing it further.

- The green infrastructure mapping method paper submitted to the Ecosystem Services journal Special Issue has been received back for major revisions, and will shortly be resubmitted. This is a positive result. This is part of an effort to work with the University of Liverpool to improve the profile of our green infrastructure work among the academic community by writing journal papers and speaking at conferences.
- Continuing work with Cass Associates on an Environment Agency Catchment Restoration Fund project looking at de-culverting a stretch of the River Alt.
- Continuing work on the Interreg project GIFT-T! This provides over £326,000 over three years to develop green infrastructure planning and valuation methodologies. The partner meeting held in Chester in April was very successful: the partners were very complimentary about the locations and the arrangements, and the meeting was our most productive so far. As part of GIFT-T! the team has been working on an economic valuation of the benefits provided by all of The Mersey Forest's green infrastructure.
- A conference as part of the International Festival for Business 2014 took place in Liverpool in June focussing on green infrastructure and development. The event was opened by Cllr Glare and speakers included Richard Mawdsley, Peel; Tom Armour, Arup; Dave Anderson, Cheshire West & Chester Council and Paul Nolan. Over a hundred delegates attended and there was a lively discussion during the Q&A.
- The team has completed green infrastructure plans for the Weaver and Sankey Valleys for Natural England.
- A box linking the concepts of green infrastructure and ecosystem services has been submitted to a forthcoming book called 'Handbook on Ecosystem Services' which will be published by Earthscan, and is edited by Prof Roy Haines-Young (University of Nottingham), Dr Marion Potschin (University of Nottingham), Dr Robert Fish (University of Exeter), and Professor Kerry Turner (University of East Anglia). This will be developed further through ForeStClim.
- A chapter entitled 'Planning Green Infrastructure at a Strategic Level: experience from The Mersey Forest' is being drafted for a forthcoming book called 'Handbook on Green Infrastructure: Planning, design and implementation' to be published by Edward Elgar, and edited by Danielle Sinnott, Sarah Burgess and Nick Smith from the University of West England. This is being funded through ForeStClim.
- The team has contributed to a chapter entitled 'Web-GIS tools for climate change adaptation planning in cities', for a forthcoming 'Handbook of Climate Change Adaptation' to be published by Springer-Verlag. This chapter includes a discussion of

the STAR tools developed by The Mersey Forest and The University of Manchester as part of the GRaBS project.

- The team has co-authored a paper entitled ‘Climate change adaptation in urban areas: enhancing the role of hinterland spaces as ‘climate buffers’’, which has been submitted to a special issue of the journal Building and Environment. This work was undertaken as part of the Climate Proof Cities project.
- Urban Watershed Forestry. The team are seeking to develop an Urban Watershed Forestry project that would develop a convincing business case for increased tree coverage in urban areas based on positive benefits for their role in water management (flood risk management, water resources and water quality). The idea has been taken from the US, where urban trees are used more strategically for their role in water management. So far, a seminar has been held to showcase the concept and a workshop is planned for 9 July; speakers include Bryan Seipp from the US Center for Watershed Management who will be speaking about how the concept has been put into practice there.
- We are working on a redesign of the outdated Green Infrastructure North West website (www.ginw.co.uk).

GREEN STREETS WIRRAL

Over 600 trees have now been planted over 8km of routes in streets, green spaces and gardens, as part of a three year programme to link residential areas to places of work, education and training.

The team are working with a photographer to capture a flavour of the types of business in Birkenhead who are benefiting from our work to green the area. Their stories will all be captured in our ‘A Portrait of Business’ exhibition at the Williamson Art Gallery.

A £67,000 grant from Veolia Trust has been awarded for improvements to Ilchester Park, Birkenhead, as part of the wider Wirral Green Streets programme. The team are working closely with local communities around the park to engage with planting in the area. As part of this work there is a programme of summer activities designed to help children learn how to play safely in their outdoor space and try new activities.

There will be a large celebration event ‘Ilchester Festival’ on Saturday 23rd August which will see local people delivering activities and selling food, drink and plants. There will be lots of sports activities, crafts, local singers and musicians and a parade of local artwork.

FORESTCLIM 2

- The ForeStClim extension project is under way, with £180,000 of Interreg funds to support additional work on climate change adaptation and in particular highlighting the role of trees and woodlands to the general public through a variety of media. As part of the project the team will look at linking detailed forest types to green infrastructure functions, which will help to develop silvicultural advice for use in the face of climate change.

FUNDING

REGIONAL GROWTH FUND

An application to RGF Round 5, to support the Forestry sector in the North West, was selected for Stage 2. However, a revised bid is to be developed for submission into Round 6 (deadline 30 September).

ROTUNDA COMMUNITY GARDEN

A grant from Biffa Award for £35,050 has been conditionally approved, meaning further development of the community garden project can go ahead over the summer and autumn.

SIB COMMUNITY ASSETS GRANT – SUBMITTED

A £180,000 bid has been submitted for capital development of Colliers Moss North- to improve access to the site, enhance gateways, refurbish the amphitheatre and open up the site for safe public use.

HORIZON 2020 – IN DEVELOPMENT

A number of bids into Horizon 2020, the EU trans-national programme supporting research and innovation, are being worked up. These include supporting the development of health initiatives and research into new techniques for forestry practice.

SIB INVESTMENT AND CONTRACT READINESS FUND – SUBMITTED

A bid for £51,000 has been submitted to fund the development of the Natural Health Service into a commercial enterprise.

LOCAL SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT FUND 1.5 – SUBMITTED

A proposal was submitted as part of into Merseytravel's bid into the Dept for Transport's fund for 2015/16. This would allow the extension of the current LSTF programme for a further year. Unfortunately our request for £300,000 was scaled down to £100,000 in the final bid. A decision on the bid is expected imminently.

INEOS CHLORVINLS/ENTERPRISES LANDFILL CF – APPROVED

Projects approved include total funding of £24k for a series of participative landscape improvements and health activities at Runcorn East Station to commemorate the First World War, woodland interpretation, seating, bulb planting and willow fencing at Victoria Park-Widnes, Longhorn Cattle Grazing, Access and Education Project at Widnes Warth, Sankey Interlocks Interpretation boards and St Johns Church Access Improvements and memorial garden at Lostock Gralam.

REACHING COMMUNITIES – SUBMITTED

The team has been working with partners in Sefton to support development of an application to the Reaching Communities Fund. An application and budget has been submitted.

CONSULTANCY WORK

The Wyre and Stockport Town Centre green infrastructure strategies are now complete.

The Forestry and Planning Hub commissioned by the Forestry Commission is now live at www.forestryandplanning.org.uk. The commission has been extended for a year's maintenance and updating.

Representing the Community Forest Trust, The Mersey Forest are now part of a national collaboration called FACE (Forest Advisory Consortium England). This is made up of around 10 organisations/individuals including the Sylva Foundation, Yorwoods, Silvanus Trust, Heartwoods, Cumbria Woodlands and Rural Development Initiatives. The group is currently submitting an application to a Forestry Commission tender to provide Forestry Business advisory service across the whole country.

EU PROGRAMME 2014-2020

Further work is ongoing to develop project ideas for the new EU Programme, involving considerable partnership working with a wide range of organisations. The focus now is to develop a portfolio of ready-to-go projects and engage with relevant LEPs and LNPs to take these forward.

COMMUNICATIONS

AWARDS

The Mersey Forest Plan was shortlisted for the RTPi Awards for Planning Excellence 2014 in the category 'Best Planning for Natural and Built Heritage'. The winner within this category was the 'Stonehenge Environmental Improvement Project'.