

# THE MERSEY FOREST TEAM REPORT

## OCTOBER 2014

### NEWS

The Mersey Forest Plan has won the RTPI NW Planning Innovation award. The RTPI judging panel said: "The panel felt the Forest Plan demonstrated both innovation and collaboration across local authority boundaries and sectors. The approach to community engagement across such diverse communities and areas was particularly welcomed. The Plan was well presented and easy to follow for all those interested in contributing to the delivery of its objectives."

We have also just found out that the Plan has been shortlisted for a national award sponsored by "Planning" magazine.

The Wood Allotment project was entered into the Community Energy Awards on our behalf and was one of three finalists in the Energy Generation Project of the year.

### BIG TREE PLANT

*Continuing to plant 7,000 trees through community led schemes funded by Defra.*

The project is now underway for the final winter season of funding with the final schemes to be planted by the end of February. Schemes for the coming year include Rivington Primary, St.Helens; Enterprise South Liverpool Academy, Liverpool; Activate, Bracknell Centre Knowsley; Residents free trees, Sefton; Hunts Lock, Northwich; Meadowside Primary School, Runcorn Golf Club, Halton.

### CATCHMENT RESTORATION FUND - ALT RESTORATION PROJECT

*Realigning and de-culverting of part of the River Alt to improve water quality, reduce flood risk, and enhance biodiversity funded by the Environment Agency.*

Work continues in Liverpool alongside Cass Associates to deliver this £1.4 million project. In September the River Alt was diverted in Croxteth bringing life into the new river channel.

The main contract is almost complete, with the landscaping and planting contract due to start in November.

### COLLIERS MOSS

*Restoring woodlands for community benefits.*

The imminent acquisition of the former colliery spoil and PFA site by Community Forest Land Trust will provide an opportunity to show how community woodland can benefit local people. Cory Environmental Trust's approval of £50k will allow work to start soon on opening up and improving access to the site, encouraging greater community engagement and providing volunteering and training opportunities. Negotiations are under way with Groundwork to deliver physical works via its Social Action team. The site may also provide a new location for wood allotments. Much more investment will need to be sourced to realise the full potential of the site.

### **FORESTCLIM 2 - EXTENSION**

*Transnational work promoting trees and woodlands for climate change adaptation and developing long term plans for managing trees in a changing climate funded by EU Interreg.*

The project is progressing well, and the role of trees and woodlands in adapting to predicted climate change is being communicated to the general public, woodland owners and policy makers through a range of channels.

An information pack is also being developed for schools undertaking tree planting this season, to include a Powerpoint presentation, summary sheet and certificate.

The team is currently developing an **Urban Catchment Forestry** programme which will see the strategic use of urban trees and woodlands to reduce flooding, improve water quality, and bring wider benefits. This is inspired by work in the US, where Urban Watershed Forestry has developed over the last 10-15 years in response to the need to improve water quality and manage flooding. This project will focus on creating the business case for increased tree cover in urban areas based on their role in reducing flood risk and improving water quality. The evidence can then be used to convince engineers and decision-makers to embed trees as part of wider water management solutions.

A seminar was held in July, with speakers including Bryan Seipp from the Center for Watershed Protection in the US. This brought together 50 stakeholders, potential funders, researchers and policy makers, to raise awareness of the topic and the emerging programme. The seminar garnered significant interest and enthusiasm, with a number of organisations wanting to become partners or interested in the outcomes of the programme. We are now finalising a prospectus for the programme and will use this to speak to partners and potential funders.

Two photo exhibitions have also been supported by the programme, bring the Mersey Forest and the need for adaptation to projected climate change to new audiences.

## FUNDING

*Developing new funding bids to provide money and support for project delivery*

- **Cory Environmental Trust** has awarded a £50k grant for the Colliers Moss North Community Access Project. Work will start in November and complete in spring 2016.
- **Biffa Award** have granted formal approval for £35k to develop the Rotunda Community Garden, including a kitchen garden and ‘secret woodland’ garden. Work is now under way and will be completed next spring.
- A bid has been submitted to **Liverpool City Region LEP** for production of Liverpool City Region’s Green Infrastructure Prospectus.
- The outcome of a £13k bid to **Natural England** to develop and deliver green infrastructure in Bold Forest Park should be known soon.
- While Liverpool City Region’s proposal to the **Local Sustainable Transport Fund** for 2015/16 was unsuccessful, a request to carry underspend has been lodged with DfT. This incorporates c. £75,000 for Green Infrastructure along route ways.
- The team has worked with Stobart Group to submit a £5.5m bid for the **Regional Growth Fund (Round 6)**. This would support local sourcing of timber for biomass and other uses, encouraging productive management of woodlands, including currently undermanaged sites across Northern England. Final decisions are expected in early 2015.
- A decision is pending on an application to the **Reaching Communities Fund** for ‘Nature4Health’ in Sefton & Liverpool. Meanwhile **Garfield Weston Foundation** has requested more information on our bid to develop the Natural Health Service.
- The England-wide ‘FACE’ consortium was successful in winning a **Forestry Commission** tender to provide over 40 forestry enterprises across the country with advice and support to help grow their business in advance of new program funding which will be available from next year. The work is currently underway with an initial target of 8 businesses per Forestry Commission area.
- Work is ongoing on a bid to **BIG Assist**, supporting the development of a marketing and fundraising strategy.
- A bid to **Smurfitt Kappa** Foundation has been submitted for Forest Education and Play.
- The outcome of a bid to **Lloyds Bank** for the Glazebury Natural Play Area is imminent.
- **Horizon 2020**, the EU trans-national programme supporting research and innovation, provides opportunities to support our work, including health initiatives and research into new techniques for forestry practice. Results of two bids are awaited.

- Bids to Carnegie Trust, SIB Investment And Contract Readiness Fund and SIB Community Assets Grant were unsuccessful. Competition for funding is very stiff.

### **GIFT-T!**

*Transnational work developing green infrastructure approaches funded by EU Interreg.*

Most of the outputs by the team have now been completed including the refreshed Forest Plan and Delivery Plan for 2014-2019. The final conference will take place in Brussels in May 2015. 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, which is now complete.

### **GLAZEBURY NATURAL PLAY AREA**

*Creating a new natural play area*

This new play space is being created and managed in partnership with residents of Glazebury, with the land leased from Bents Home and Garden by Culcheth and Glazebury Parish Council. The play area has natural features such as climbing logs, wildflowers, fruit trees, a willow tunnel and den building areas to encourage children to engage in natural play and reconnect with nature.

Over the next couple of weeks the construction of the main footpath onto site will start, followed after Christmas by the creation of a growing area. Funding has come from Cory Environmental Trust in Britain Landfill Communities Fund, and Big Tree Plant, with additional support from United Utilities and Eric Wright Construction who have agreed to fund the installation of the path.

### **ILCHESTER PARK FOR ALL**

*Improving the park as a green "hub" to complement Setting the Scene for Growth funded by Landfill Communities Fund*

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. A programme of summer activities designed to help children learn how to play safely in their outdoor space and try new activities culminated in a successful celebration event 'Ilchester Festival' which was held on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> August and saw local people delivering engagement activities within the improving park space.

### **LANDOWNER SUPPORT**

*Providing advice, guidance and support to landowners who wish to deliver aspects of The Mersey Forest Plan*

The [St. Helens Landscape 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.

**Green Streets** – 68 trees have been planted in streets in Ellesmere Port using Section 106 funding, 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 help adaptation to climate change. All these benefits will increase as the trees continue to grow.

Following the publication of the revised **Mersey Forest Plan**, the team have commenced a series of meetings with planners from each of our partner authorities. So far the team has met policy and development management planners from Warrington, Knowsley, and Cheshire West and Chester Council and St.Helens. The meetings have been well attended, raising awareness of The Plan (as well as the Mersey Forest) and providing the opportunity to discuss ways to improve joint working on planning matters.

One of the outcomes is the preparation of a Discussion Note which will be circulated to partner planning teams to agree a protocol for The Mersey Forest becoming involved in selected planning applications subject to the agreement of the partner authority. Potentially this could enable the expertise within the team to help to enhance the quality of woodland planting secured through the planning process.

### LOCAL SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT FUND

*Large scale tree planting along key routes to promote active travel to employment funded through the Department for Transport.*

The team are working hard ahead of planting in all the LSTF areas next planting season: 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](http://www.greenroutestojobs.blogspot.co.uk)

### NATURAL HEALTH SERVICE

*Developing this in line with its Business Plan, working closely with health commissioners*

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 a pilot has been independently assessed by Liverpool John Moores University on 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 complete with findings being collated.

Within the Forest School study, physical activity was monitored using accelerometers over a seven day period with four schools in Runcorn and Widnes. Initial results show increased physical activity on Forest School days compared to normal school days. Qualitative data shows interesting differences between boys and girls regarding Forest School activity preferences, improved mental wellbeing and more frequent use of the natural environment with family members.

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

The team are working to create a new website for the Natural Health Service, which will soon appear at [www.naturalhealthservice.org.uk](http://www.naturalhealthservice.org.uk).

### **NORTH WEST FOREST FORUM SUPPORT**

*Bringing together parties interested in developing North West England's forest sector funded by Forestry Commission.*

Although the response to the call for project ideas for RGF Round 6 was disappointing, Stobart Group's enthusiasm meant that a bid was submitted for the September deadline. If the bid is successful it could help to boost activity within the sector, particularly helping to bring under-productive woodlands into better management and persuading landowners that woodlands can be a good source of income if properly managed.

### **PLANNING AND FORESTRY NETWORK**

*A network promoting the use of the planning system to increase the quantity and quality of tree and woodland planting and management - funded by the Forestry Commission*

The team is keeping the Forestry and Planning Hub updated.

<http://www.forestryandplanning.org.uk/>

### **PURE HUBS**

*Developing the woodlands and businesses of south St.Helens as a place to visit and enjoy, bringing local jobs and prosperity funded through EU Interreg IVB*

The team has been working jointly with Groundwork Merseyside and St.Helens Council to deliver community participation and business support in and around Bold Forest Park, St.Helens to develop the Forest Park as a destination for visitors and a hub for businesses.

As part of a community programme co-ordinated by the team, an event for over a hundred young people was held at Sutton Manor Woodland to encourage positive use of the woodlands in the area. This was led by Helena Housing and involved the Forestry Commission, St.Helens' Rangers, Groundwork and the police and fire services. Green volunteering opportunities through Groundwork have been promoted from Greenbase in Thatto Heath and support was provided to Clockface pub at a community fun day.

There was a big promotional event St.Helens town centre at the end of September to promote the businesses and encourage use of Bold Forest Park by residents. Indications show that over 1,500 people were reached at this event and the overall 2,000 participant target for the project has now been exceeded.

Work with schools has included a Forest School Taster Day for teachers run at Clockface Country Park and outdoor first-aid training. Schools have also been offered Forest School taster days at Clockface to encourage them to use the forest park and for the first time, Forest School Leader Training OCN Level 3 will use BPF as a venue for training in November.

Work has been undertaken on improving the Bold Forest Park website ([www.boldforestpark.com](http://www.boldforestpark.com)) and a new map outlining the woodlands which make up Bold Forest Park and businesses associated with green leisure activities has been produced.

### RESEARCH

*Continuing action-led research to improve the way in which projects are delivered*

- Development of the GI Valuation Toolkit and supporting a PhD candidate at the University of Liverpool.
- The green infrastructure mapping method paper submitted to the Ecosystem Services journal Special Issue has been received back for major revisions a second time. Whilst this can still be considered a positive result, the team is considering its options in terms of resubmission. 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.
- A chapter entitled 'Planning Green Infrastructure at a Strategic Level: experience from The Mersey Forest' has been submitted to editors for a forthcoming book called 'Handbook on Green Infrastructure: Planning, design and implementation' to be published by Edward Elgar, and edited by Danielle Sinnett, Sarah Burgess and Nick Smith from the University of West England. This is being funded through ForeStClim2.
- 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, which is now close to completion.

- We are working on a redesign of the outdated Green Infrastructure North West website ([www.ginw.co.uk](http://www.ginw.co.uk)).

### SALTSCAPE

*Landscape-scale programme of activity engaging communities in the landscape of the Weaver Valley*

A 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 and around Northwich, Winsford, Frodsham and Middlewich. The Mersey Forest is working alongside a range of partners including Groundwork Cheshire; Canal & River Trust; Cheshire Wildlife Trust; Cheshire West & Chester Council; The Weaver Valley Partnership and Weaverham Trust to showcase and conserve Cheshire's rich salt-mining history.

The team will be supporting landowners in managing ancient woodland as part of this project.

### SETTING THE SCENE FOR GROWTH

*Large scale urban tree planting around the Wirral Waters development in Birkenhead funded Department for Business, Innovation and Skills*

Over 900 trees have now been planted over 10km 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 who are benefiting from our work to green their area. Their stories will all be captured in the “‘Trees.Work’ - a Portrait of Birkenhead Business” exhibition at the Williamson Art Gallery.

### SUPPORTING GROUPS AND NETWORKS

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

- **Friends of Anderton and Marbury** in Northwich, Cheshire 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**, Weaverham, Cheshire are to install new signage and noticeboards promoting volunteering opportunities with the group.



- **Friends of Church Wood**, Whitegate in Cheshire are hoping to replace fencing within the wood over the winter.
- **Friends of Woolton Woods**, Liverpool are negotiating options 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.

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, Mersey Forest Team provide the secretariat support for the group. The DEFRA minister Lord de Mauley, will visit Nature Connected on 23<sup>rd</sup> October.

It has been a busy summer for events across the Mersey Forest, with the team a wide range of events across the forest including;

- Green Safari day
- Bold Forest Park comes to Town
- Netherley Community Day
- Plant Killer! Single Launch (maybe the most unusual event!) - <http://www.beat-vision.com/events/event.php?eid=1163>

### **WOOD ALLOTMENTS**

*Developing community led woodland management to produce firewood*

The project has been awarded a grant by the Ashden Trust to develop the programme following a successful pilot in Northwich Woodlands. It will also be used to develop a handbook to guide landowners through the process of setting up a wood allotment.

The first wood allotment in The Mersey Forest was at Carey Park, part of Northwich Woodlands, and was set up in partnership with Cheshire West and Chester Council rangers. The success of this pilot has led to another wood allotment being set up at Spud Wood, Lymm, Warrington.

An event at Carey Park will be held on 5 December to showcase the wood allotment concept and wood fuel nationally.

The wood allotments website ([www.woodallotments.com](http://www.woodallotments.com)) has been refreshed to reflect the evolution of the project.

## WOODLAND MANAGEMENT AND PLANTING

### *Working with landowners*

The English Woodland Grant Scheme has now closed, apart from Woodland Planning Grant and Plant Health Woodland Improvement Grants.

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). This is likely to be named “Countryside Stewardship”. 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.

An interim Woodland Creation grant will open in early 2015 for planting yet in 2015-16. The qualifying criteria, for example the size and location for planting, is yet to be decided.