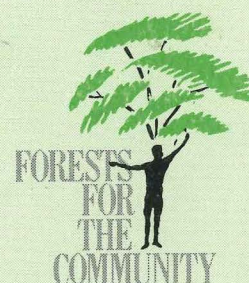


THE MERSEY FOREST

FOREST PLAN

AUGUST 1994

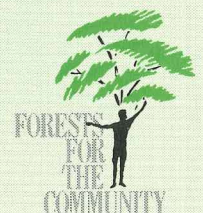


THE MERSEY FOREST

FOREST PLAN

AUGUST 1994

**Cheshire County Council
Ellesmere Port & Neston Borough Council
Halton Borough Council
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Liverpool City Council
Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
St. Helens Metropolitan Borough Council
Vale Royal Borough Council
Warrington Borough Council
Countryside Commission
Forestry Commission**



FOREWORD

FOREWORD

Like all good ideas, The Mersey Forest is simple in concept. By creating a new, extensively wooded landscape in and around our towns and cities, we can create opportunities for public enjoyment, nature conservation and education. Equally important, we can provide one of the building blocks for the future economic success of the North West – a better, more attractive environment.

The Mersey Forest is an achievable goal and its success will come about through the commitment and partnership of the public, private and voluntary sectors of our community. It will be a sound investment for ourselves and future generations.

John Burns
Director, The Mersey Forest



John Burns, Director



The Mersey Forest Team: Ian Dale, Lisa Farrell, John Burns, Nicki Owen, Cathy Hopley, Geoff McGowan and Marian Pearce

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Abbreviations in this plan

ACE:	Action for Care of the Environment
BC:	Borough Council
BTCV:	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
CAP:	Common Agricultural Policy
CC:	City Council or County Council
EC:	European Community
KR:	Kommunalverband Ruhrgebiet
MAFF:	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
MBC:	Metropolitan Borough Council
NRA:	National Rivers Authority
NWRA:	North West Regional Association
NUVIL:	New Uses for Vacant Industrial Land
RPG:	Regional Planning Guidelines
SSSI:	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SWOT:	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TPT:	Trans-Pennine Trail
WGS:	Woodland Grant Scheme

Land area conversion

1 hectare	=	2.471 acres
1 acre	=	0.405 hectares
640 acres	=	1 square mile

You will find something more in
woods than in books.
Trees and stones will teach you that
which you can never learn from masters

Saint Bernard (1091-1153)

The Mersey Forest, one of 12 community forests promoted by the Countryside Commission and the Forestry Commission, is an imaginative concept supported by a partnership which includes nine local authorities in Merseyside and Cheshire. The framework that will guide the development of the Forest is *The Mersey Forest Plan*, based on *The Mersey Forest Consultation Plan*, which was distributed for public consultation in November 1993. The response to it was extremely encouraging and it has been modified to take account of the comments received. The Plan is an advisory, not a statutory, plan and it seeks to bring about changes to the character and landscape of this part of Merseyside and Cheshire to make the community forest concept a reality. It makes proposals for implementation and management and seeks to persuade key decision-makers in the public, private and voluntary sectors that the Mersey Forest is an exciting and positive concept worth their support.

The Plan has been prepared by the Mersey Forest Team, which was set up in 1991 with financial support from the Countryside Commission and the partner authorities, comprising Cheshire County Council, Ellesmere Port & Neston BC, Halton BC, Knowsley MBC, Liverpool City Council, Sefton MBC, St. Helens MBC, Vale Royal BC and Warrington BC. *The Mersey Forest Plan* has the support of these authorities, together with the Countryside Commission and the Forestry Commission, referred to as the partners. Preparation of the Plan has been guided by a Steering Group composed primarily of local authority elected members and by a Working Group of officers and representatives of other organisations. Ad-hoc study groups have also been set up to advise on individual topics (see acknowledgements at the end of the Plan).

Now that *The Mersey Forest Plan* has been approved, the local authorities will aim to incorporate the relevant recommendations into their own local plans, unitary development plans and structure and regional plans.

In particular, it is important that the Plan's recommendations are taken into account in the preparation of regional planning strategies and advice for the North West; for example, those being coordinated by the North West Regional Association (NWRA) of local authorities, the Regional Economic Strategy and Regional Planning Guidance (RPG).

Owing to the Forest Plan's advisory status, the main points are presented as recommendations rather than policies. These are indicated in bold italic within the text.

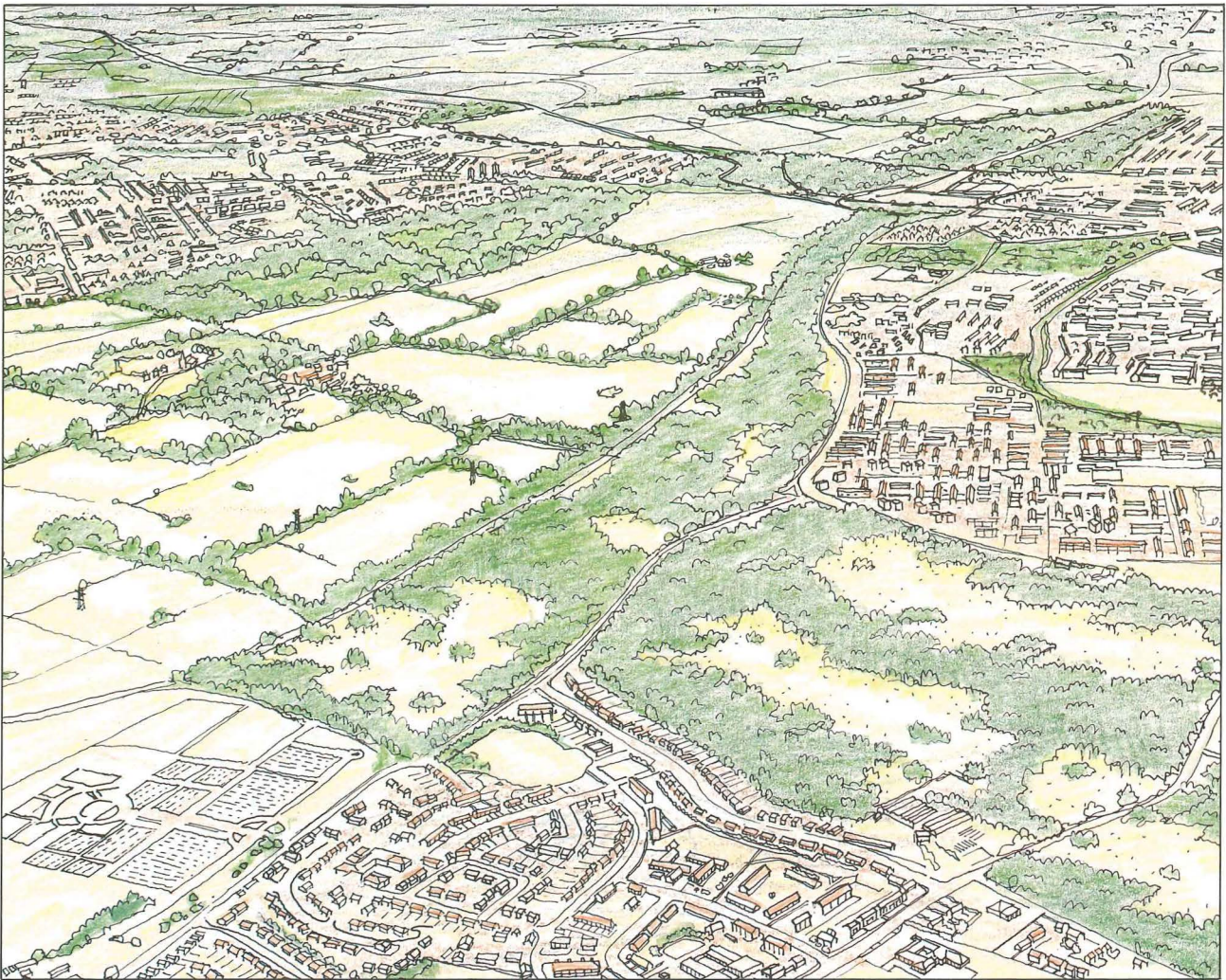
The Plan provides a framework within which it will be possible to harness the national objectives of community forests and apply them to the Mersey Forest. The Plan is divided into the following five parts:

- **National Context** explains the community forest concept and sets the background to the development of the national programme for the creation of 12 forests.
- **Local Context** sets out the case for the Mersey Forest and examines the land use and planning context. It goes on to describe an analysis of the existing landscape based on a recently completed study.
- **Forest-wide Vision** describes the Forest as a whole and examines the mechanisms that will create the fabric of the Forest.
- **Forest Strategies** outlines the woodland cover strategies for each local authority district.
- **Implementation** outlines the potential mechanisms for changing land use within the Forest and makes recommendations for improving effectiveness. It goes on to describe the resources available, consider the options for its development and set targets and objectives.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'Plan' implies that action is required and that some changes from the status quo are necessary and desirable. The partners hope that those who read this document are convinced that The Mersey Forest is an important and worthwhile goal and that the changes that are needed to bring it about – be they policy, organisational or other changes – are both desirable and achievable. Delivery of the Forest will depend on a positive response from individuals and their commitment to its success.

The Mersey Forest can bring important and wide-ranging benefits to the area, but its aims will only be realised if the stakeholders in the Forest – farmers and landowners, local authorities, private companies, voluntary organisations and local communities – work in partnership to establish, manage and enjoy their community forest.

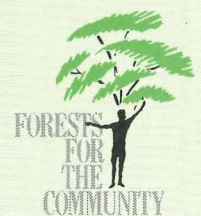


The Mersey Forest: a well-wooded setting for our towns and cities

THE MERSEY FOREST

NATIONAL CONTEXT

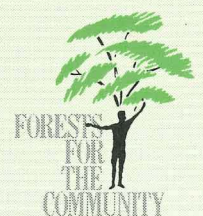
1. 'Forests for the Community'



THE MERSEY FOREST

NATIONAL CONTEXT

1. 'Forests for the Community'



1. 'FORESTS FOR THE COMMUNITY'

Background

1.1 To many people the word 'forest' conjures up an image of dense, closely grown trees stretching as far as the eye can see. Eight-hundred years ago, in mediaeval times, it meant something quite different. Then, the great forests of England were not only trees, but a magnificent mix of woods, heaths, farmland, wetlands, ponds and streams. Here also were settlements – hamlets, villages and small towns – where people lived and worked.

1.2 Today, the concept of community forests is breathing new life into this ancient meaning of the word. This echo from our past is now set to become a signpost to a better future.

1.3 Community forests will cover large areas, spreading around the edges of towns and cities. These forests will not be continuous plantings of trees. Instead, they will be a rich mosaic of wooded landscapes and land uses including farmland, villages and leisure enterprises, nature areas and public open space. They will create well-wooded landscapes for wildlife, work and education, with new opportunities for a range of recreational facilities, all on the doorstep of hundreds of thousands of people.

Origin of the programme

1.4 The roots of the community forest concept lie in a national need to diversify the use of our rural land, particularly through the encouragement of multipurpose forestry which could:

- produce a national supply of timber,
- offer an alternative to agricultural use of land,
- contribute to rural employment,
- create attractive sites for public enjoyment,
- enhance the natural beauty of the countryside,
- create wildlife habitats.

1.5 There is an increasing acknowledgement of the need for more tree planting, especially close to town and cities. The particular value that is gained from planting that fulfils more than one role (multipurpose forestry) is also an important element of the community forest concept. Just over 7% of England is covered by woodland. Of the countries in the European Union, only Ireland has a lower percentage of woodland cover.

1.6 In the light of these needs, the Countryside Commission and the Forestry Commission undertook a thorough review of the role of forestry



All sections of the community will be involved in creating The Mersey Forest

1. 'FORESTS FOR THE COMMUNITY'

in the countryside, building on the Government's 1985 policy for broadleaved trees, which expressed the objective of increasing woodland in areas of scarcity, such as the urban fringe. This review culminated in 1987 with the publication of *Forestry in the Countryside*, a comprehensive policy statement giving the views of the Countryside Commission, and proposing multipurpose forestry close to towns and cities.

1.7 Following a feasibility study in 1988, both Commissions were satisfied that multipurpose forestry on the edge of large towns and cities had a key role to play in developing a high-quality environment for homes, employment, recreation and education. Thus, the 'Forests for the Community' programme was born and, in July 1989, the two Commissions formally launched this initiative and unveiled a programme of 12 community forests in England.

Guiding principles

1.8 The guiding principles for the 'Forests for the Community' programme are founded in the need to diversify the countryside for conservation, forestry, environmentally friendly agriculture, sport, recreation and the arts. This has been crystallised into a single aim:

To develop multipurpose forests which will create better environments for people to use, cherish and enjoy.

1.9 Within community forest areas, new and existing woods, copses, hedges and individual trees will provide the framework for the wide range of economic, social and environmental improvements that will take place. Agriculture will remain as the dominant land use, but environmentally sensitive management will allow landscape, wildlife, recreation and heritage benefits to be gained. These will be achieved through the implementation of a set of clear objectives to which each community forest would accord local priorities. These objectives aim to:

- improve the landscape, including reclamation of derelict land, to create a visually pleasing and varied countryside;
- increase opportunities for access, sport and recreation and for artistic and cultural events;
- protect the best and most versatile agricultural land from irreversible development, ensure that farming manages to re-create attractive landscape and wildlife areas and that opportunities for farm diversification are increased;
- protect areas of high-quality landscape, and areas of historical or archaeological interest;
- regenerate the environment within green belt, or equivalently protected areas, and help to ensure that it is permanently green and open;
- protect sites of nature conservation value and create new opportunities for conservation;



Farming will continue to play a vital role within The Mersey Forest

- provide new opportunities for educational use of the area and ensure that community forests can be used for the environmental education needs of the surrounding schools;
- establish supplies of local timber and encourage development of timber-based industries, employment opportunities and woodland products;
- improve the economic well-being of towns and cities through the creation of more appealing locations for industry and commerce;
- improve the environment near housing and local industry, enhancing the value of properties and businesses;
- encourage a high level of local community commitment to the concept and community involvement in the implementation;
- seek private-sector support to implement the community forests and to invest in the area.

Key questions: whose land, who pays, and how long will it take?

1.10 Creating community forests is not dependent upon large-scale changes in land ownership. The main approach will be to encourage farmers, landowners and businesses to consider the opportunities which the community forests might present, while at the same time recognising the essential role that productive and profitable farming will continue to have for the landscape, wildlife and recreation within the community forest areas.

1.11 Finance for the development of community forests will come from a number of sources. Grants from the Forestry Authority, the Countryside Commission, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), the Department of the Environment and other bodies will help with planting, management, restoration of derelict land and provision of facilities for sport and recreation.

1.12 Further money will come from local government and industry; and private investment will be attracted from companies who see a market potential such as those for wood products or in the leisure sector. Resources from the voluntary sector will have an equally valuable role

in the future of the community forests. Sound business partnerships will be a key approach for those responsible for planning, developing and managing a community forest.

1.13 Community forests will take perhaps 30 years to develop, but the improvements will begin to be felt as soon as planting gathers pace. We will not reap all the advantages in one lifetime, but significant benefits will flow from the early years. Community forests will be a legacy for the future, to be used, cherished and enjoyed by our children and our children's children.

The 'Forests for the Community' programme

1.14 In July 1989, the first three community forest areas were identified: Thames Chase to the east of London, the Forest of Mercia in south Staffordshire and the Great North Forest in south Tyne and Wear and north-east Durham. The planning of a second tranche of community forest areas was announced by Government Ministers in February 1991. These nine further community forests are Cleveland Community Forest, South Yorkshire Forest, Mersey Forest, Red Rose Forest in Greater Manchester, the Greenwood in north Nottinghamshire, Marston Vale to the south of Bedford, Watling Chase in south Hertfordshire/north London, the Great Western Community Forest around Swindon and the Bristol/Avon Community Forest. In August 1993, the first three community forests received Government approval to proceed with the implementation of their forest plans.

1.15 The 12 community forests range in size from over 9000 to 92,000 ha, giving a total area for the whole programme of more than 470,000 ha. This is approximately 3.6% of all land in England, and is equivalent to about half the combined size of all the National Parks. The benefits of community forests will be right on the doorstep for the over 18 million people who live within, or close to, community forests. Existing tree cover within the 12 areas averages 6.9%, and it is proposed to increase this average to about 30% over about 30 years. This implies a significant increase in tree planting, contributing to the Government's national target of increasing woodland cover in the lowlands.

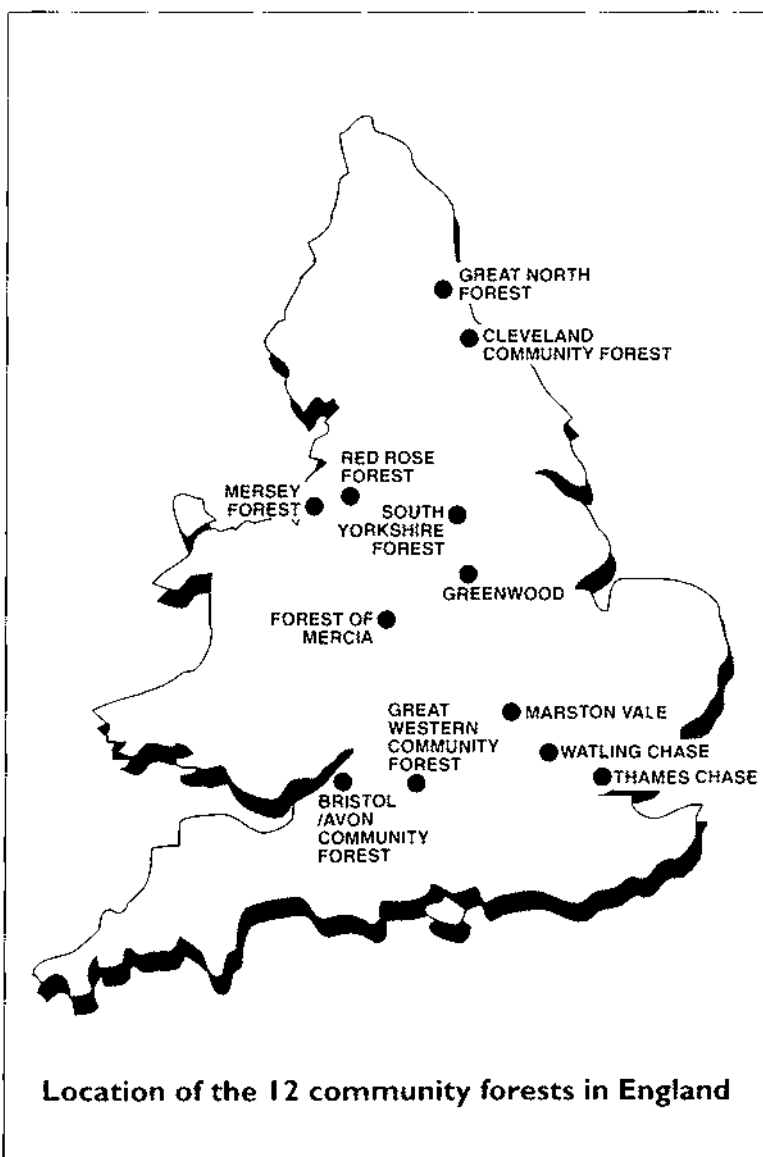
1.16 In each of the 12 community forests, the two Commissions, in partnership with the local authorities, have appointed project teams to prepare forest plans. These are non-statutory documents which describe the proposals for developing each community forest over the next 30 or more years. The 'Forests for the Community' programme is a bold vision. This forest plan shows how the vision will become reality.

1.17 In all, some 60 Metropolitan, District and County Councils are directly involved throughout England and, with the two Commissions, are key partners. Since the launch of the 'Forests for the Community' programme in 1989, many other national and local organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors have become involved and are now supporting the partnership. Creation of successful partnerships will be a crucial factor in turning the vision into reality and many firm

foundation stones have already been laid. For example, representative bodies of agricultural and landowner interests came together in 1992 to produce a 'Statement of Understanding'.

Current policy framework

1.18 As the community forests within the 'Forests for the Community' programme develop, so too does the policy framework which embraces them. The Countryside Commission has revised and updated its policy, giving greater weight to community forests, as now stated in the publication *England's Trees and Woods* (1993). The Forestry Commission publication *Forestry Policy for Great Britain* (1991) sets out a composite summary of Government forestry policy. This gives support and encouragement to the community forest initiative. The Government is continually reviewing the incentives and mechanisms needed to support and deliver forestry policy.



FARMERS, LANDOWNERS AND COMMUNITY FORESTS:

STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING

The Countryside Commission's and Forestry Commission's programme of 12 community forests in England will create important new opportunities for farmers and landowners to provide an attractive and alternative long-term use of some agricultural land. Vital elements in the community forest concept will be the retention of agricultural landscapes and the creation of productive forests.

To ensure that community forests provide the best possible opportunities for landowners and farmers whilst safeguarding their interests:

- a. Participation by farmers and landowners in community forests is, and will remain, entirely voluntary.
- b. There will be no compulsory purchase of land for community forest purposes.
- c. There will be no support for the planting of trees on tenanted land without the willing agreement of both landlord and tenant.
- d. The creation of a community forest does not alter the present legal position with regard to access. There will be no obligation on farmers, or landowners, to provide additional access and the public will not have any right of entry onto private land which does not already exist or is not willingly entered into by the farmer and landlord.

The community forest programme will be guided nationally by the Countryside Commission and the Forestry Commission, with advice from the Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Farmer's and landowner's representatives will be invited to sit on the Officers' Steering Group, or its equivalent, for each community forest and on other working parties which are relevant to their interests.

Community Forest project teams will keep in contact with the local farming community. Farmers and landowners within each area will be involved and consulted at the appropriate stages as each community forest proposal is developed.

Community forest project teams will facilitate the provision of advice to farmers and landowners who are interested in the increased opportunities for farm diversification. Project teams will also promote the preparation of whole farm plans to maximise landscape, wildlife and other benefits for those farmers who are keen to play an important role in these community forest areas. The teams will help owners to manage existing access (including public rights of way), taking account of the effects of access on farming, and advise on any proposal owners may have for providing new access. The statutory rights of landowners and occupiers will be respected and community forest project teams will adopt appropriate measures to ensure that the general public are made aware of these rights. The teams will also be seeking to avoid undesirable interactions between new woodlands and adjoining agricultural land.

In addition to grants for tree planting and woodland management from the Forestry Commission under its Woodland Grant Scheme, and annual payments from MAFF under its Farm Woodland Premium Scheme, Countryside Commission grants for landscape conservation, informal recreation and access will be targeted towards community forest areas. Special consideration will be given to assessing the need for, and level of, further financial incentives from the Countryside Commission. Grant systems will encourage multi-purpose woodland planting and management schemes.

The Country Landowners Association, Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, the National Farmers' Union of England and Wales, The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, Countryside Commission, Forestry Commission, and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have jointly endorsed this statement and will maintain regular contact with each other at national level. The Countryside Commission, Forestry Commission, and MAFF will continue to work with these, and other organisations, to help farmers and landowners to benefit from community forests.



Forestry Commission



COUNTRYSIDE
COMMISSION



Representing Farmers and Growers



COUNTRY
LANDOWNERS
ASSOCIATION



THE ROYAL INSTITUTION
OF CHARTERED SURVEYORS



FWAG

1. 'FORESTS FOR THE COMMUNITY'

1.19 Agricultural policy in recent times has focused on increasing food production. A reform process of the Common Agricultural Policy was instigated by the European Union in 1992. This reflects a major shift in policy from the production-orientated farm-support mechanisms of the past to direct support for farmers, and to the linkage of environmental concerns with agricultural policy and their supporting mechanisms. The statement *Our Farming Future* (MAFF 1991) sets out the Government's broad thinking on this reform and this is developed in more detail in the consultation paper *Agriculture and England's Environment* (MAFF 1993). With their multipurpose objectives, community forests are ideally placed to fit with changes in agricultural policy as it develops.

1.20 The growth of public interest in the environment was recognised by Government in the White Paper *This Common Inheritance* (Her Majesty's Government 1990) and specific reference is made in the paper to supporting community forests. In 1993 the House of Commons Environment Committee endorsed the 'Forests for the Community' programme as 'a splendid initiative that is going to benefit the quality of life for a huge number of people living in and around major conurbations'. The Select Committee urged Government to lend its firm and long-term support to community forests, with positive response, since Government pledged 'to continue to support the implementation of these initiatives in the community forest project areas . . . where it is satisfied that proper plans have been made'.

1.21 Internationally, during the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the essential nature of forestry for the well-being of the planet was acknowledged and marked by the first ever global agreement on forest principles. The need to make future development sustainable was clearly recognised. In response, the Government has now produced a UK strategy for sustainable development. Within this, sustainable forestry has a definite place; *Sustainable Forestry: The UK Programme* (Her Majesty's Government 1994) sets out and endorses the valuable role that community forests will play.

1.22 Policies relating to the environment have undergone many changes in recent years. The community forests are now held within an embracing and supportive policy framework and are ideally poised to put policy into action, turning their bold vision into reality.

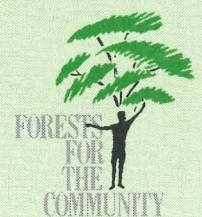


*The Mersey Forest will increase opportunities for recreation:
Croxteth Hall*

THE MERSEY FOREST

LOCAL CONTEXT

2. Case for the Mersey Forest
3. The Mersey Forest area today
4. Planning context



2. CASE FOR THE MERSEY FOREST

Background

2.1 The Mersey Forest project includes the Merseyside Boroughs of Knowsley, St. Helens and Sefton, and the City of Liverpool, together with Cheshire County Council and the Cheshire Boroughs of Ellesmere Port, Vale Royal, Halton and Warrington. Their administrative areas cover a total area of 121,500 ha. In consultation with the Countryside Commission, the Forestry Commission and the partner authorities, a boundary for the Mersey Forest has been agreed, giving a project area of over 90,000 ha. (See map of the Boundary of The Mersey Forest).

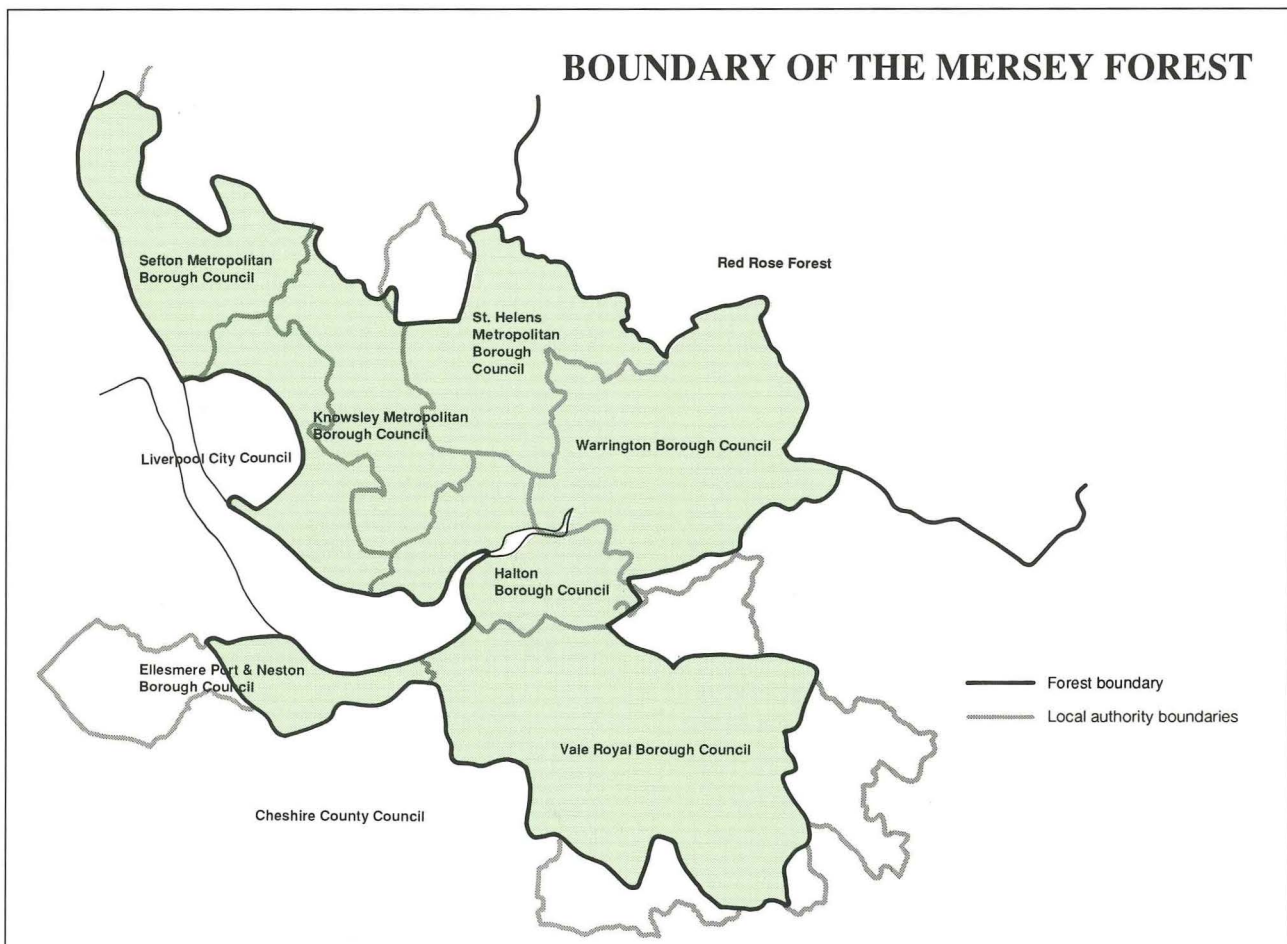
2.2 The area has a clear functional identity, having at its core the Mersey Estuary and the large-scale industrial conurbation which has grown up around it. The industrial areas of north Cheshire have both economic and industrial links to the economic base of the Merseyside conurbation. During the 1960s, many Liverpool residents were rehoused in the new towns of Runcorn and Warrington and in the expanded towns of Winsford and Ellesmere Port. North Cheshire provides some

25,000 jobs and homes for those living and working on Merseyside. Much of north Cheshire's industrial base and its service industries are closely linked with Merseyside customers or suppliers via the extensive motorway network.

2.3 The industrial history and declining economic base has led to the region's poor environmental quality and image. This detracts from both the quality of peoples lives and the economic rejuvenation of the area. These factors and the benefits offered by the Mersey Forest are discussed below.

Regional economy

2.4 The Merseyside conurbation has some of the most serious urban and economic problems in Western Europe. Using a composite measure of urban problems including unemployment, net population decline and travel demand, a recent analysis (Cheshire, Carbonara & Hay 1986) ranked the Liverpool Functional Urban Region (essentially east Merseyside) as 114th out of 117 European cities. Only Seville, Cordoba and Malaga have more serious urban problems.



2.5 Within the UK, analysis by PA Cambridge Economic Consultants (1991) and by Tony Champion and Anne Green broadly confirm these findings. The '*index of urban problems*' presented by Champion & Green (1989) shows that east Merseyside is amongst the least prosperous areas in Britain. Although the results are presented for functional regions rather than local authority areas, it is clear that urban problems within Halton, Ellesmere Port and St. Helens are of similar intensity.

2.6 Research by Cheshire County Council (1992) confirms this point. The whole of Halton, and Ellesmere Port and part of Vale Royal (like the whole of Merseyside) is identified as an assisted area by the Department of Trade and Industry. In these areas of Cheshire there is high reliance on older industries, high unemployment and a concentration of derelict land.

2.7 Given the intensity of its urban problems, much of the Mersey Forest area has benefited, to varying degrees, from a number of government and European Community (EC) initiatives since the Second World War. These included 'development' and 'special development area' status, the new towns of Runcorn and Warrington, the urban programme, motorway-building programmes, the Merseyside Development Corporation, the Merseyside Integrated Development Operation and City Challenge. Most recently the granting of Objective 1 Status to Merseyside will considerably increase the funding available from the EC.

2.8 Some of these programmes have been more successful than others. The work of the Warrington New Town Development Corporation (now wound up) has been a particularly striking success story, with Warrington capitalising on the high accessibility provided by the new motorways. The Development Corporation committed large-scale resources to environmental improvement and the creation and marketing of attractively wooded business parks. As Champion & Green's research (1989) shows, partly as a result, Warrington's urban problems are no worse than the national average. Today, the town projects an image of confidence and resilience.

Image problem

2.9 Merseyside's image is widely recognised as a severe impediment to attracting new investment. According to a recent report considered by the Merseyside Coordinating Committee, 'The development of a coordinated marketing and promotion strategy is fundamental to building confidence in the area and redressing the adverse image that is seen by those living outside the area'.

2.10 Whilst the image problem is known to be less serious in Cheshire, it is unlikely that districts such as Halton and Ellesmere Port escape the Merseyside connection, and it is certainly true that Merseyside's own problems have a depressing effect on the buoyancy of neighbouring areas.

2.11 Research carried out by consultants for the English Tourist Board in 1988 confirms the importance of the image problem in shaping investor's decisions. The most striking feature of the research survey was the way in which the Mersey region was seen in a negative light by respondents (potential investors in the North West), whereas other parts of the North West were seen more positively.

2.12 The image held by external investors is a slippery concept, but it must be composed essentially of two basic components: (i) what is heard, seen and read about an area (largely through media reports) and (ii) what is seen by visitors with their own eyes. It is in relation to the second category – direct experience – that the quality of the environment plays such a crucial role. Woodland cover in The Mersey Forest area extends to only 4%, which is low even for England.

Dereliction and environmental quality

2.13 With a few notable exceptions, such as Warrington New Town and more recently Liverpool's Albert Dock, regional initiatives in the Mersey region have had little positive impact on the quality of the environment. Indeed, the effect of those policies has sometimes been negative – open land has been lost to large-scale industrial complexes, and new motorways have not always taken landscaping and screening needs into account.

2.14 The landscape assessment in Chapter 3 presents a detailed analysis of landscape quality in the region. The distribution and quantity of derelict land across the Forest area provides a further index of environmental quality. It is likely that the Forest area includes more than 2000 ha of derelict land (see Table 3.1), and more than 3700 ha of derelict and disturbed land (see paragraph 3.15).

2. CASE FOR THE MERSEY FOREST

2.15 The nature of dereliction varies from place to place, reflecting industrial history and the relative strength of the property market. In Liverpool, dereliction is largely a result of industrial and port decline and a lack of demand for land. Over two-thirds of St. Helens derelict land consists of spoil heaps, excavation and pits – the legacy of coal mining, glass and other industries. A great deal of this dereliction is incapable of hard development. Of the derelict sites larger than 5 ha, fewer than a third are suitable for redevelopment with buildings.

2.16 Cheshire's dereliction reflects its widely varied industrial base. Previous industries and operations which have made land derelict include salt mining and brine pumping, chemical manufacture and disposal of waste, petrochemicals, sand and stone quarrying, derelict railways and abandoned military installations. Mining subsidence is a particular problem in Vale Royal, where 72 ha of derelict land reflects early salt mining and brine pumping activity. With the risk from unstable underground voids, much of this land is unsuitable for development.

Benefits

2.17 The Mersey Forest provides the opportunity to remove much of this dereliction at low cost, and to build a new green image for the region. Its

value as an image-boosting device is immediate: properly marketed, the Forest project will allow the Mersey region to promote itself as an area once blighted by two centuries of pollution, yet poised at the point of environmental recovery. Given the importance of image as a constraint on investment intentions, the benefits of this to the region's revitalisation are incalculable.

2.18 Recreational benefits in themselves contribute towards regional revitalisation. Increasingly, people and companies are moving to greener environments. If the Mersey region wants to compete for new investment and retain and attract younger and better-qualified people it must be able to offer them a high quality of life, with new housing in an attractive green setting and opportunities nearby for informal recreation.

2.19 Other parts of the country are not saddled to the same extent with the legacy of the nineteenth-century industrial revolution and they are able to offer more of the rural and small-town living which became popular in the 1970s and 1980s. The Mersey Forest provides the region with the opportunity to create a new environment of equal quality, yet with all the benefits of access to urban services and facilities.



Derelict or disturbed land represents a major opportunity for The Mersey Forest: Clockface colliery, St. Helens

2.20 It is difficult to put a precise financial value on the benefits of The Mersey Forest as a tool for revitalising the region, attracting investment and building a positive image, but it will be in the order of tens of millions of pounds. The Forest will generate other benefits – which can be valued particularly in relation to the recreational benefits of the Forest for the 1.5 million people who already live in the Forest area.

2.21 In 1992 the Forestry Commission carried out a cost-benefit study for the first three community forests: Forest of Mercia, Thames Chase and the Great North Forest (Whiteman & Sinclair). The study used a methodology agreed with Her Majesty's Treasury and compared costs of establishing the community forests with benefits that would accrue. The study showed that, purely in terms of the recreation value received by those who visit and enjoy the countryside and woodland within the community forests, large net benefits would be produced.

2.22 The Forestry Commission is carrying out a similar cost-benefit analysis for The Mersey Forest. This is also based on current investment appraisal guidelines from the Treasury.

2.23 There are many other benefits which accrue from The Mersey Forest, but to which it is difficult to attach a monetary value.

- **Employment:** research indicates that more than 100 new, long-term jobs could be created in forest planting, management and processing.
- **Education, social and community:** many tens of thousands of schoolchildren are likely to benefit from the Forest through the provision of facilities in life sciences and physical education.
- **Local and global atmospheric benefits:** forestry locks up carbon and offsets other carbon dioxide emissions, helping to reduce global warming. Forests also have more local benefits in filtering out air pollutants, especially dust, reducing noise and acting as windbreaks. The shelter they provide will also improve the local climate of open spaces and has been shown to reduce the cost of heating buildings.

- **Quality of life and health:** a high quality environment improves recovery rates in hospital and has a bearing on the wider health of the population. There will be positive benefits in mental health through amenity value, reduction in noise pollution and increased community participation. The opportunities for physical recreation will have a positive benefit on cardiovascular health and muscular-skeletal health. Increased opportunities for recreation and sport will raise the general fitness of people living in the area and improve their quality of life.
- **Tourism:** the improved environment and recreation facilities will increase the potential for tourism in the area, bringing new investment, jobs and revenue into the local economy.
- **Wildlife:** the creation of a new lowland forest will be of significant benefit to the wildlife of the area.

These benefits are described in more detail in Chapters 5–14. Together, they will make a major contribution to improving the environment and the quality of life in The Mersey Forest area with consequent effects on its image and economic revitalisation.

Comparisons with the Ruhr

2.24 The scope and need for environmental change in the Forest area can be compared with achievements in the Ruhr in Western Germany since the War, particularly when the area covering both the Mersey and the Red Rose Forests is considered.

2.25 The Ruhr was part of Germany's traditional industrial heartland. Its 5.2 million inhabitants had been heavily dependent on the coal and steel industries for 150 years. Pollution, mining and uncontrolled industrial expansion in the nineteenth century took a heavy toll on the quality of the environment. In the 1950s, the region's basic industries went into decline, when cheap oil exports damaged markets for coal, and the steel industry encountered falling world sales.

2.26 As in the UK, the German authorities tackled these problems by improving housing and transport infrastructure and attracting new industries. But in the Ruhr, the local authorities also launched a determined and coordinated programme for improving environmental quality, spearheaded by a regionally based organisation which had originally been established in the 1920s: the Kommunalverband Ruhrgebiet (KR).

2.27 The KR set out to tackle the problems of gas emissions, slag heaps, land subsidence and intrusive development with a major afforestation programme. A survey in the 1950s showed that the Ruhr's forests accounted for less than 0.008 ha per head of population, only a fifth of the average for Germany as a whole.

2.28 Over the last 30 years, through a programme which has included land purchase, some 29 million trees have been planted and more than 5200 ha of new green space has been created. The preservation and development of the Ruhr's forests have been the main focus for the project. Apart from their recreational value, the forests provide ecological balance, acting as 'reservoirs' for nature conservation and helping to improve air quality.

2.29 Today, some 17% of the Ruhr is forested, creating a new green setting for industry, housing and recreation. Verbandsgrünfläschen – interconnected networks of green space – cover 262,700 ha of the Ruhr's 443,200 ha. Extensive networks of recreational routes for cyclists, walkers and horse-riders have also been created.

2.30 In many ways, The Mersey Forest area, although more diverse, is comparable to the Ruhr, with its legacy of mining, heavy industry, dereliction and low tree-cover. The success of the KR in changing the environmental quality and image of the Ruhr demonstrates the impact and value of a coordinated and concerted programme of environmental improvement. The Mersey Forest, acting as a focus for local, regional and national initiatives, can provide the framework for a similar concerted programme of action.

Six central themes

2.31 In 1992, The Mersey Forest Project Team produced its first interim report, *Preparing the Ground*. It set out the central themes and concepts in the Forest project and received widespread support from business, local authorities, government agencies and the voluntary sector following a period of consultation.

2.32 The concept was set out in the following terms:

The Plan for The Mersey Forest is a simple yet alluring concept: to create vast new forest zones on the edge of the Merseyside conurbation and around the nearby built-up areas in mid and north-west Cheshire.

The new Forest will cater for recreation and leisure whilst creating and protecting habitats for wildlife and nature conservation. It will be an invaluable educational and environmental resource and a productive landscape, generating a financial return on the initial costs of establishment and management. By transforming the appearance of derelict and neglected land and bleak agricultural landscapes, it will help to improve the image and secure the revitalisation of The Mersey Forest area as a whole.

2.33 The Forest will be created by pursuing six central themes:

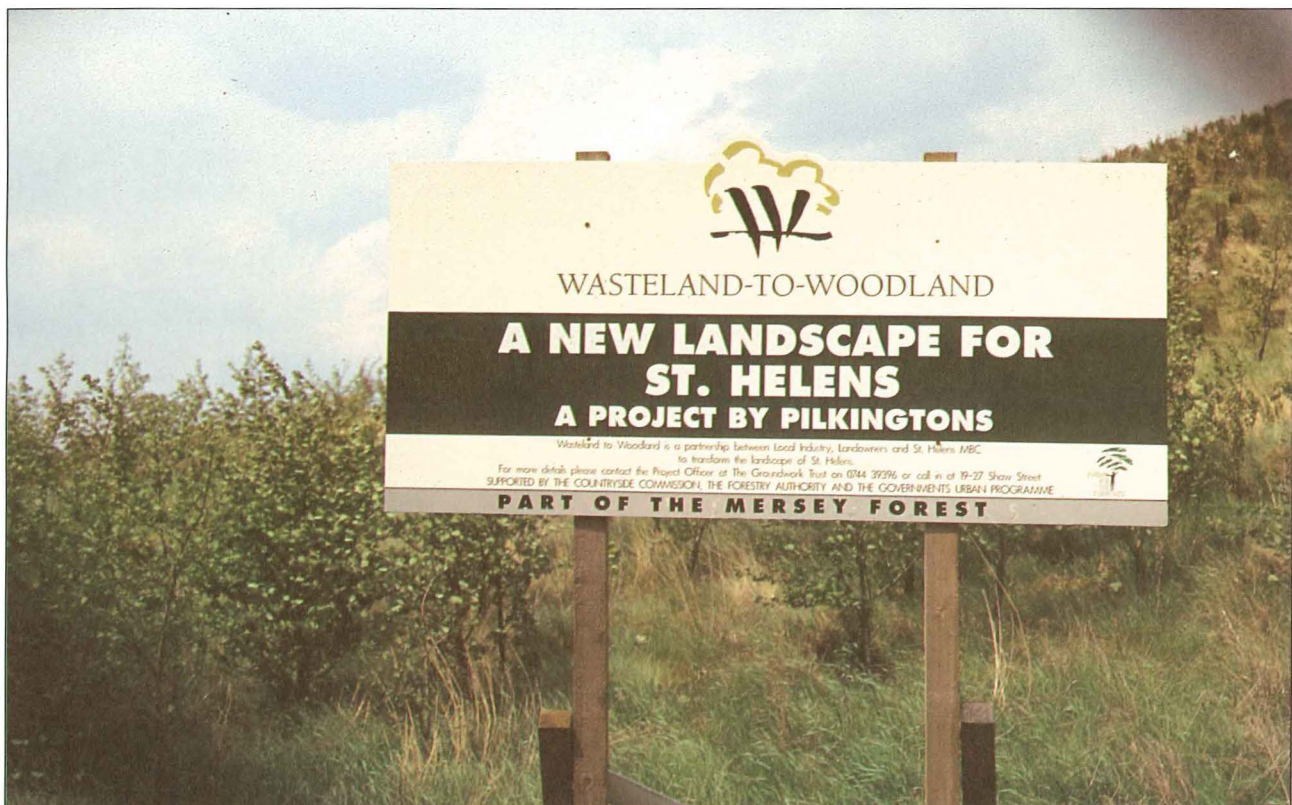
- **Converting wasteland to woodland:** There are substantial areas of neglected and derelict land for which forestry is the only realistic productive use. These are concentrated in the Mersey Valley, south of St. Helens, around Northwich, and on the fringes of Liverpool. Several agencies in The Mersey Forest project area are already involved in tackling this

2. CASE FOR THE MERSEY FOREST

problem, through reclaiming land themselves and by persuading private landowners to establish new woodland on neglected sites. There may also be opportunities for new woodland planting on little-used areas of amenity grassland, especially on the urban fringe.

- **Creating networks of wooded greenways:** Not all the open land in the area will be planted with trees: instead, the Forest will take shape as new blocks of woodland of varying size in the countryside and around the urban fringes. These new woodlands can be related to one another for recreational purposes by creating wooded 'greenways' following the lines of canals, rivers, footpaths and disused railway lines, providing easy access from the built-up areas to the new Forest districts for cyclists, walkers and horse-riders.
- **Greening key transport routes:** Concentrating on land alongside main transport routes, particularly motorways, will create an early impression of forest cover and help to screen industry from roads, and roads from housing. It will improve the image of The Mersey Forest area in the eyes of potential investors and visitors.

- **Returning farmland to forestry:** For many years, farming has been seen as the mainstay of rural land use, particularly in the green belt. But the economic outlook for farmers is deteriorating. Even on better quality land, some farmers are leaving the business, whilst agricultural land prices are depressed. Ways need to be found of turning over suitable blocks of farmland to recreational and productive woodland on short or long rotation, either by encouraging existing owners or by seeking new patterns of ownership and management. There may also be opportunities for woodland-belt creation within working farms, especially where these are linked to new recreational enterprise.
- **Weaving woodland into new development:** Through their development plans and planning policies, local authorities will determine the location of new development in the project area. They can also negotiate with developers and landowners to provide new woodland areas before a planning application is approved. The Mersey Forest Project Team will encourage planning authorities to use their powers to secure new areas of managed woodland so that future major developments can be set within a matrix of woodland.



Wasteland to woodland in St. Helens

2. CASE FOR THE MERSEY FOREST



The M62 into Liverpool is a key transport route in The Mersey Forest area

- **Capitalising on the existing woodland assets:**
The new Forest will be given a head start by improving on the existing assets. Much needs to be done to protect and encourage better management of existing woodlands. Similarly, there are clear advantages in extending and connecting existing tracts of woodland with newly planted areas – especially where the existing woodlands are already heavily used.



Existing woodland is a resource that will be enhanced

3. THE MERSEY FOREST AREA TODAY

Physical landscape and human influence

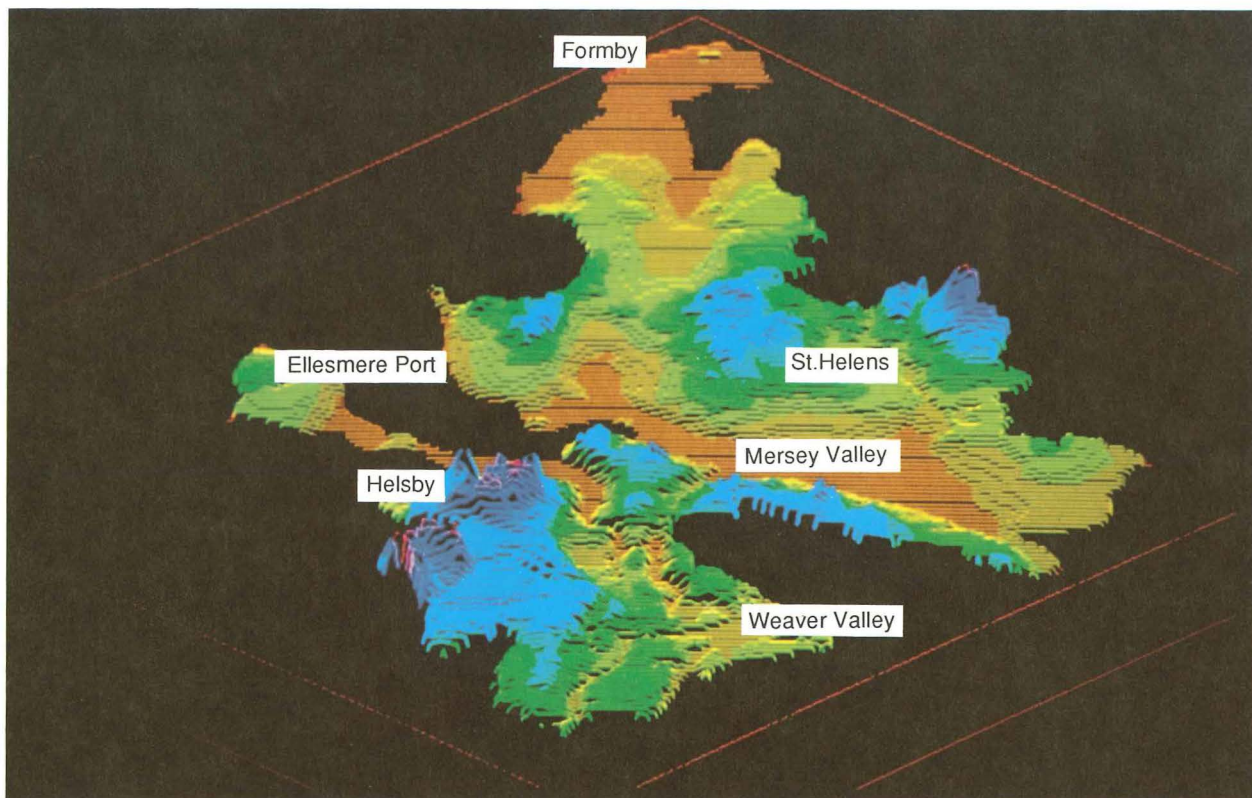
3.1 The geology of The Mersey Forest area has given rise to a gently rolling landform inland and a low-lying plain on the coastal margin. Much of the landform is formed of surface (drift) deposits from glacial and post-glacial periods of recent geological history. The rock underlying the Forest area consists of clays, sandstone and coal-bearing strata of Carboniferous, Permian and Triassic ages. A harder underlying red sandstone appears in the Delamere area and other small outcrops due to faulting, which has lifted it near the surface.

3.2 The surface deposits are responsible for the different soils of the area; for example the glacial deposits on much of the Cheshire Plain have produced heavy clay soils, (Furness 1978) while the wind-blown sands, Shirdley Hill, (Beard 1987) on the northern edge of the Mersey Valley, produced heathland soils. The soil types are also a major component of the agricultural land classification by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF). The Shirdley Hill sands are easy to work, and they produce grade 2 soils, while the heavier clay is mostly grade 3.

3.3 The rolling landform has a distinct structure, which has given rise to the different landscape regions (see Appendix B)

3.4 Historically, much of the area was heathland and mossland, and this, combined with the Mersey Estuary, restricted travel and settlement. A large part of the land north of the Mersey was within the Forest of West Derby (James 1981). Names such as Simonswood and Burtonwood have their origins from this time although the forest itself disappeared quite early in the history of British forests. Over half of The Mersey Forest area south of the Mersey was within the Forest of Mare and Mondrum, a small remnant of which remains as Delamere Forest. This was finally disafforested in 1812 so that it could be planted with oaks for the Royal Navy, which failed on the poor unimproved soil and were replaced by Corsican pine (Simpson 1967). Warrington was the lowest bridging point on the Mersey, and the most significant settlement north of the river was Prescott, which lay on a communication route following the low ridgelines eastwards from the coast.

COMPUTER GENERATED RELIEF IMAGE OF THE MERSEY FOREST AREA



Contours are at 10m intervals; brown 0-20m, green 30-100m, blue 100-150m, red 170m and over

3.5 The industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and parallel improvements in farming techniques wrought a dramatic change in the area. Improved agricultural techniques for ploughing, drainage, land reclamation and fertilising led to the heathland, mossland and marshlands being brought into agricultural production and enclosed. This modern enclosure can be seen in straight regular field boundaries and the layout of farms. An equitable climate and flat topography has also contributed to the development of high quality farmland north of the Mersey producing arable and horticultural crops. South of the Mersey, the heavier clay land is mostly given over to dairying, but with arable crops on the lighter soils.

3.6 The coalfield around St. Helens provided the power and raw materials for industrial development including chemicals, glass, and brickmaking. The brine fields in the Weaver Valley at Northwich and Winsford provided the raw materials for chemical manufacture and salt production. The development of the canal network linked the coal and brine fields and focused the development of a very large chemical industry on Runcorn and Widnes. Warrington also prospered as a manufacturing town and trading centre and Ellesmere Port developed at the end of the Shropshire Union Canal. During this period, Liverpool developed as a major port of national significance.

3.7 Canal trade declined as an extensive network of railways was constructed, linking the material sources, industries, ports and centres of population. The towns expanded rapidly and Liverpool became a major conurbation, being the second largest city in Britain during the nineteenth century. The construction of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1894 reduced trade through Liverpool and led to further development on the southern side of the Mersey Estuary.

3.8 The area now within The Mersey Forest played a key role in both the First and Second World Wars; industrial and population expansion continued up to the end of the 1960s. Since then there has been a decline in the extractive industries and a steady erosion of the manufacturing base. The population of Merseyside is also declining. Slum clearance, principally in Liverpool, led to the development of overspill towns such as Kirkby and Halewood.

3.9 This was followed by the New Town developments at Runcorn and Warrington and other overspill areas, such as Winsford and Ellesmere Port. New industrial development has taken the form of industrial estates and, more recently, technology parks and business/retail estates. There is seen to be an over-provision of small industrial sites in some parts of the Forest area, but a lack of high quality and large development sites. Infrastructure development shifted from railways to roads and the North West now has a comprehensive motorway system with six motorways within the Forest boundary.

3.10 The massive increase in industry and population and subsequent retrenchment has left a legacy of pollution, dereliction, damaged landscapes and abandoned or underused infrastructure. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Water Act 1989 provided the tools to implement changes. The River Mersey, once grossly polluted by sewage and chemical waste, is improving as a result of the decline in polluting industry and the efforts of the National Rivers Authority (NRA), and North West Water and of the Mersey Basin Campaign, a regional initiative whose objectives complement those of The Mersey Forest. Air pollution, which was once a major problem in the Mersey Valley, has improved through the Clean Air Act, smokeless zones (covering most of the Forest) and again the decline of polluting industry, although the effects of atmospheric pollution on tree health is still a current issue. Derelict and contaminated sites make up approximately 4% of the Forest area and are being tackled by the reclamation and redevelopment programmes of the Department of the Environment and local authorities. Redundant infrastructure is also being redeveloped, such as waterways for recreational use and railways for paths and cycleways.

Existing land use

Background

3.11 The Mersey Forest area has a complex range of land uses that stem from its physical landscape and human influence. The extent of different uses has been identified by a land cover survey undertaken as part of the landscape assessment (Mersey Forest Team & Land Use Consultants 1993). Aerial photographs taken between 1985 and 1987 were studied and the different land uses as they appeared from the photographs mapped onto 1:25,000 base sheets. The percentage cover for six land cover types is presented in Figure 3.1.

3.12 The categories of land cover are not correlated directly with the area of land available for tree planting. The built-up area is not available, but a small part of the industrial land and approximately half the derelict land can be planted. Conversely, a significant part of the parkland, green space and semi-natural vegetation is not available because it is of high landscape or conservation value in its existing state. It has been estimated that 43% of The Mersey Forest area is 'open land' available for tree planting.

Built-up area

3.13 Between 40% and 50% of the Forest area has 'urban' land uses and roughly half of this amount (22.9%) has been built up. This may seem to be a high proportion for a forest, but exclusion of the built-up area would have meant the loss of a large area of plantable land in key locations. This is because of the scattered nature of the urban area across the Forest, the convoluted urban boundary and large areas of open space within the urban edge.

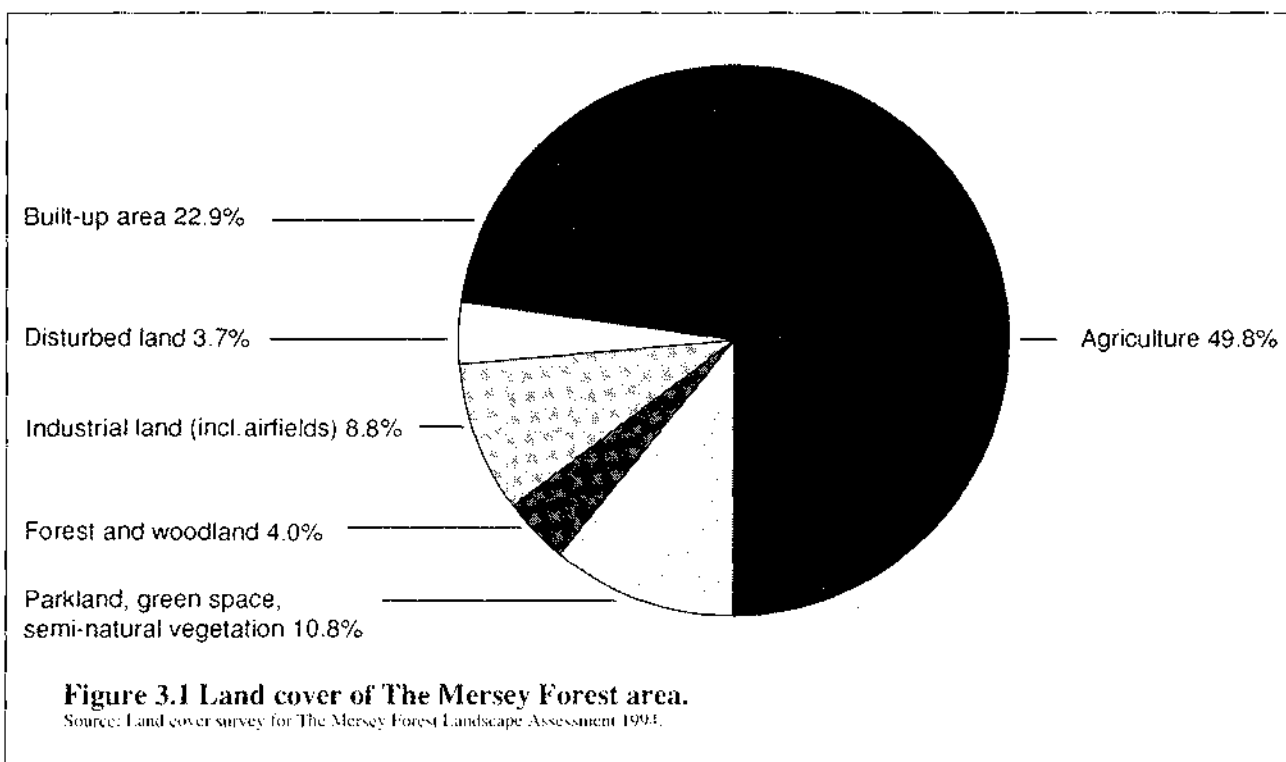
3.14 The built-up area is not available for woodland planting and has been removed from the calculations of proposed woodland cover. However, urban forestry, such as street trees, trees on development sites, greenways and strategic green space, has an important role to play in integrating the Forest into the urban core.

Disturbed land

3.15 A 1988 survey identified that 2.5% of the Forest area was derelict (see Table 3.1). This figure increased to 3.7% in the landscape assessment survey (Mersey Forest Team & Land Use Consultants 1993) by the inclusion of unrestored and active landfill sites, other disturbed or neglected land that did not meet the criteria of the 1988 survey and land undergoing restoration.

District	Area (ha)
Merseyside	
Liverpool	493
Knowsley	118
Sefton	137
St. Helens	369
Cheshire	
Ellesmere Port & Neston	170
Halton	108
Vale Royal	630
Warrington	258
	Total 2283

Source: Local authority survey 1988.



3. THE MERSEY FOREST AREA TODAY

3.16 The types of derelict site across the Forest area vary enormously from coal tips, brick workings and glass-waste tips around St. Helens; lime-waste lagoons and salt works' dereliction around Northwich and Winsford; chemical-waste tips and derelict industrial sites around Widnes; derelict industrial sites, dockland and housing land in Liverpool; and landfill sites in the Mersey Valley, especially around Warrington.

3.17 All have their particular problems for restoration and tree growth; for example, the coal tips are particularly acidic, while the lime-waste lagoons are strongly alkaline. On many sites, species choice will be restricted to 'pioneer' trees suited to the particular ground conditions. Recent research has shown that properly restored landfill sites are capable of growing good quality trees, species choice only being limited by the nature of the land cover material (Mofatt & Bending 1992).

3.18 Ownership of such sites is also varied. Some of the large colliery tips remain in the ownership of British Coal. The landfill sites are owned or leased by the operating companies and the industrial sites and chemical-waste tips are owned by a range of companies. Some have been, or are being, acquired by local authorities for restoration, such as 95 ha at Northwich. Others are being restored under a partnership arrangement between the private owners and the local authority, such as the Wasteland to Woodland project in St. Helens. Recent sites will have restoration conditions under planning permission, but these do not always reflect recent policy changes towards woodland as a means for restoration of disturbed land. Some 50% of the disturbed land across The Mersey Forest is likely to be suitable for community forest use.

Industrial land

3.19 This makes up a considerable proportion of the Forest area, it includes three airfield sites – Liverpool Airport, the northern airfield and Woodvale airfield – and unoccupied land on industrial estates, but not expansion land that is currently farmed. The larger industrial sites include Knowsley Industrial Estate, Fiddler's Ferry Power Station, Rocksavage and Weston, Stanlow, the M53 corridor through Ellesmere Port, the Moss-Bank to West Bank Dock area at Widnes, Winnington and Rudheath areas of Northwich, the Ravenhead area and Haydock Industrial Estate at St. Helens, Halewood to Garston Dock in Liverpool and the Burtonwood Depot and Bank Quay areas of Warrington.

3.20 Up to a quarter of the land occupied by industry is not actually developed; for example, expansion land within a site boundary, unused land on industrial estates, space around car parks and infrastructure, and existing landscaped areas. Thus, there is considerable scope for tree planting in locations where it will have immediate impact on the image of the area. If 5% of the industrial landholding was planted, it would contribute 5% of the target planting area.

3.21 The land is variable in quality from undeveloped 'green field' to derelict and contaminated sites. Most of it will have been disturbed in some way, but not so much that significant remedial measures will be required to achieve reasonable growth of trees and a range of species.

Forest and woodland

3.22 Woodland cover in The Mersey Forest area extends to only 4%, which is low even for England. There are three large areas of managed woodland at Knowsley Park, Formby and Delamere, and a smaller area at Birchwood. Together, these make up virtually half the woodland of the area. The remaining woodlands tend to be small and scattered. Delamere Forest and Formby Woodlands are principally coniferous and well used for recreation.



Delamere Forest attracts visitors from throughout the region

Knowsley Park is mainly mixed woodland, which is not available for recreation; other woodlands are mainly broadleaved. Over 162 ha of woodland in Warrington and Runcorn is owned by the Woodland Trust. Some, such as Birchwood, other New Town woodlands and woods in local authority ownership, are available for recreation. Those in private ownership are mostly not available for public recreation, though many on the urban fringe are heavily trespassed. Just under half the existing woodland area is not open to public access.

3.23 Over 80% of the woodland is either mature or over-mature. This fact, combined with the lack of management (40% are neglected) and high incidence of vandalism on the urban fringe, means that the quality of the woodland resource is rapidly declining. Most of the broadleaved woodlands are poorly stocked and contain low quality trees of little commercial value. The low timber value and lack of available finance deters management and rehabilitation, even though most sites are capable of growing high value timber. As such, the woodlands other than at Formby and Delamere, are poor examples of the benefits of The Mersey Forest.

3.24 The existing woodland stock is very important because it will be the only mature woodland cover that will exist for a long time. It is vital that its decline is halted by proper management and regeneration, although felling decisions should be carefully considered and designed, in order to preserve the woodland appearance.

Parkland, green space and semi-natural vegetation

3.25 This category includes several types of land use, such as golf courses, parks and public open space, commons, heath areas, marshland, estuary foreshores, sand dunes and other locally important wildlife sites. Nearly 11% of the Forest area has a use other than hard urban development or agriculture. Much of this land will form an essential part of the open space within the Forest because it is of existing high value for wildlife or recreation and makes an important contribution to the landscape of the area.

3.26 Lowland heaths, marshland, estuary foreshore, sand dunes, wild-flower meadows and mosslands make up the majority of nationally and

internationally important sites for nature conservation in the Forest area. Many of these are small scattered remnants of larger areas and they should be not be damaged further by inappropriate tree planting.

3.27 On the other hand, golf courses, parks and public open space, whilst containing important open space for recreation and landscape, also offer a considerable opportunity for woodland creation. Such land is mainly in public ownership and of variable quality, from restored reclamation and landfill sites to 'green field' public parks and undeveloped land adjacent to housing.

3.28 It is considered that some 20% of all the land in this land-use category will be suitable and available for tree planting.

Agriculture

3.29 Half of the land within The Mersey Forest is farmed and, of that farmland, 80% is within the green belt. The type of farming varies greatly across the Forest, from horticulture and arable to dairying. Only beef and sheep farming is poorly represented, although this does occur as an element of mixed farms and as winter grazing (see Table 3.2).

3.30 The type of farming activity is closely related to land quality, which is described by the MAFF Agricultural Land Classification System, grading land from 1 (very good) to 5 (very poor). Figure 3.2 shows the proportion of each grade in The Mersey Forest area.

3.31 The Forest area contains a high proportion of grade 1 and grade 2 land owing to a combination of easily cultivated soils, flat ground and an equable climate. Grade 1 land occurs on drained farmland and basin peats on the Lancashire Plain and at Risley Moss, also on Shirdley Hill sand in the Hale area. Grade 2 land occurs on Shirdley Hill sand and some boulder clay areas. These are mostly north of the Mersey on the Lancashire Plain, the M57 corridor in Knowsley and on farmland to the south of the M62. There is also a significant area of grade 2 land south of Warrington between Grappenhall and Appleton, and small scattered areas around Great Budworth, Comberbach, Little Leigh, Kingsley and in the Delamere area.

3.32 The highest proportion of farmland is grade 3 and is mainly on boulder clay soils, but also the improved glacial sand and gravel soils of Delamere. North of the Mersey this category is confined to the land around St. Helens, a strip of land running through Newton-le-Willows to Culcheth and along the Ditton Brook. South of the Mersey it covers the majority of the Cheshire Plain and Delamere areas and westward to Ellesmere Port. Grade 4 and grade 5 land occupies 6.1% of the agricultural area and occurs on the Sefton Coast, undrained basin peats, poorly drained alluvial soils along rivers and streams, and unimproved land at Delamere.

3.33 The distribution of farm types is related to the land classification, but even within one area dominated by a particular type there are exceptions. The grade 1 land is used principally for horticultural crops and field-scale vegetables. The grade 2 land is used for field-scale vegetables, arable, protein crops and potatoes. Thus, north of the Mersey most of the land is cultivated for these crops, with a low proportion of animal husbandry.

Table 3.2 Farms in The Mersey Forest area.

	No. of farms as % of total	Area of registered holdings as % of total	
Ownership			
Wholly rented	54		39
Wholly owned	23		25
> 50% owned	14	Owned	18
		Rented	6
> 50% rented	9	Owned	3
		Rented	9
		Total owned	46
		Total rented	54
Type of farm by principal activity			
Dairying	19		
Mixed and livestock	6		
Pig and poultry	3		
Cropping	12		
Horticulture	10		
Part time (all types)	50		
Size of farm by registered area (ha) under crops and grass			
<10	30		
10-50	44		
50-100	19		
>100	7		
Of the total registered farm area 92% is under crops and grass			

From information supplied by MAFF from the 1991 Farm Census.

Data are averages of five samples of parish clusters (5-7 per cluster) from across the Forest area and representative of the five agricultural landscape regions.

Within the Forest boundary there were 1276 holdings registered with MAFF in a total of 50,522 ha.

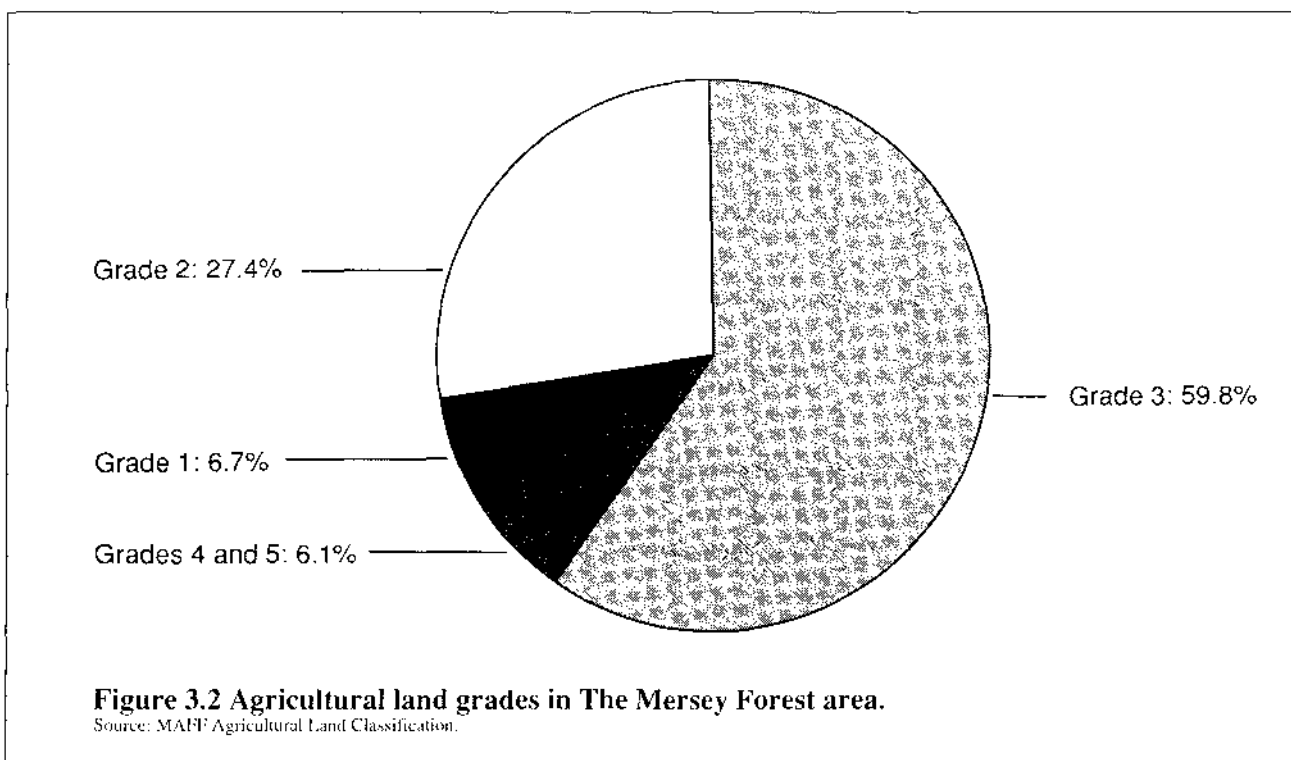
3.34 South of the Mersey, on principally grade 3 soils, farming changes. There is a high proportion of dairying which increases towards the southern boundary of the Forest. In the northern part of the Cheshire Plain and Delamere, farming is very mixed although dairying remains the largest principle farm activity.

3.35 Farms are smaller than the national average, with 75% less than 50 ha and only 7% more than 100 ha. Many small farms occur on the Lancashire Plain, where 50% have less than 10 ha of crops and grass. The greatest number of large farms is found in the north-west Mersey Valley, where 13.2% are more than 100 ha.

3.36 Farm ownership is dominated by the rented sector, with 54% of farms wholly rented, 23% in mixed ownership and rental and 23% wholly owned. These figures disguise a more even split

between the actual area of land rented (54%) and owned (46%). Again the nature of ownership varies across the Forest area: 65% of land in the north Mersey Valley is rented while only 43% in the Cheshire Plain is rented. MAFF records show that approximately 50% of the registered farm holdings are worked part time, although this does not necessarily reflect the actual situation. Certainly, many are not providing a whole family's income and many are 'hobby farms'.

3.37 Some of the grade 1 and grade 2 land occurs on the urban edge, where farms suffer from vandalism and trespass. The economic loss caused by damage is described as a field penalty. Where field penalties are high, the land will not reach an economic performance suggested by the grade 1 and grade 2 classification. There are examples of such land growing hay crops or being used for horse grazing.



3.38 Farming is going through a transitional period caused by the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and changes in the international trade for farm products. Farm incomes have varied greatly over the last few years, but the overall trend has been decline and many farmers face great financial uncertainty.

3.39 Farms in The Mersey Forest area are already responding to the change in market conditions. The small and mixed arable farms are under most pressure because their overheads are spread over a small land area and some of these farms are already beginning to go out of business. The signs of change are already apparent. The rate of planning applications to Knowsley Council for farm diversification is four times the national average.



Horticulture on the urban fringe at Melling

3.40 Some of the agricultural land is not available for planting either for landscape reasons, such as the open valley floor at Norton Marsh (Chapter 15, policy W9) or for a combination of landscape and conservation reasons, such as the mossland around Rixton and Risley (Chapter 15, policy W19). The Forest contains a high proportion of grades 1 and 2 land where high levels of woodland cover are not appropriate or achievable, except close to the urban fringe. These areas are included within the Forest in order to achieve a continuity of landscape improvement and access between the more densely planted areas.

3.41 For the above reasons it is considered that 10% of grade 1 land, 30% of grade 2 land, 95% of grade 3 land and 25% of grades 4 and 5 land could be suitable for community forest planting.

Recreation

3.42 Within the boundary of The Mersey Forest are opportunities for a great range of formal and informal sport and recreation, with locations and facilities of local, regional and national significance. *The Mersey Forest Consultation Plan* (Mersey Forest Team 1993) proposes sport and recreation in its broadest sense as being integral to its purposes and growth, giving special emphasis to countryside sport and associated recreation.

3.43 There is real enthusiasm for sport in the area and the existing communities form one of the richest and most successful sources of sporting endeavour in the UK. Most existing facilities for organised sport are based in established urban areas and many suffer from problems such as outmoded accommodation, difficult access, poor supporting facilities, incompatibility with their surroundings, crime and vandalism.

3.44 Countryside sports are poorly developed and sites are few and scattered. There is a particular shortage of facilities for water-based activities, mountain biking and motorised sports because of a lack of suitable sites. Details of countryside sports are presented in the North West Council for Sport and Recreation report *Into Wild Country* (1992).

3.45 The Forestry Commission's cost-benefit study for The Mersey Forest highlights recreation as a major benefit. A high demand for woodland recreation in the area and its value has been demonstrated by research presented by Benson & Willis (1992). Recreation in Delamere Forest is valued at £428 per ha per year (£428,000 annually for the whole forest) with people using the forest at 224 visits per ha per year (224,000 annual visits for the whole forest).

3.46 The existing footpath network is typical of similar areas of Britain, being variable, but generally fragmented, and lacking circular routes. There are few cycle routes, but the Trans-Pennine Trail, currently under construction, will form an important 'backbone' for any future development. Bridleways are few and scattered. The canal and navigable river system also forms an important recreational routeway both for boating and as a footpath route along the towpaths. There are important recreational woodlands at Formby, Croxteth, Delamere and Birchwood, but, except for local residents, access to these is principally by car.

3. THE MERSEY FOREST AREA TODAY

3.47 The demand for walking, cycling and horse-riding is high and will continue to grow in the future; 20% of the British population takes part regularly in walking, around half the population owns a bike and 3.3 million people ride a horse regularly in Britain. Roads in the North West are extremely busy and congested and distances across the Forest are considerable. There is therefore a clear need for the provision of a strategic network of footpaths, cycleways and routes for horse-riding.

3.48 There are a number of sites and places to visit for passive recreation scattered across the Forest area, such as country parks, houses, museums and sites of industrial archaeology. The area has considerable tourist potential, but this is as yet poorly developed, perhaps largely because of the image problem.

Wildlife and nature conservation

3.49 The Mersey Forest area, despite the effects of urban growth and agricultural intensification, contains some diverse and valuable wildlife habitats. Their value varies across the area and a gradation of biological richness and diversity exists from internationally important estuaries and coastal ecosystems to individual trees, hedgerows and ponds that are significant in a local context.

3.50 There are 21 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Those of international importance include the saltmarsh and mudflats of the Mersey Estuary, the Sefton coastlands and a network of mosses and meres. These are complemented by a number of nationally important SSSIs of ancient woodland, peatlands, wetlands and ponds and species-rich grassland. There are two National Nature Reserves on the Sefton Coast and five Local Nature Reserves. A non-statutory three-tier system of Sites of Biological Interest, numbering over 120,



The demand for informal recreation is increasing

3. THE MERSEY FOREST AREA TODAY

covers the remaining sites of ecological importance. The principal wildlife sites are shown in the map of 'Sites of archaeological and nature conservation interest in The Mersey Forest area.'

3.51 Of particular importance are a number of habitats which support nationally or regionally important threatened species. These include the pine woodlands on the Sefton Coast that support red squirrels, and adjacent extensive dunes for natterjack toads, sand lizards and dune helleborines. The glacially derived meres and mosses, such as Risley, are important for species of dragonfly.

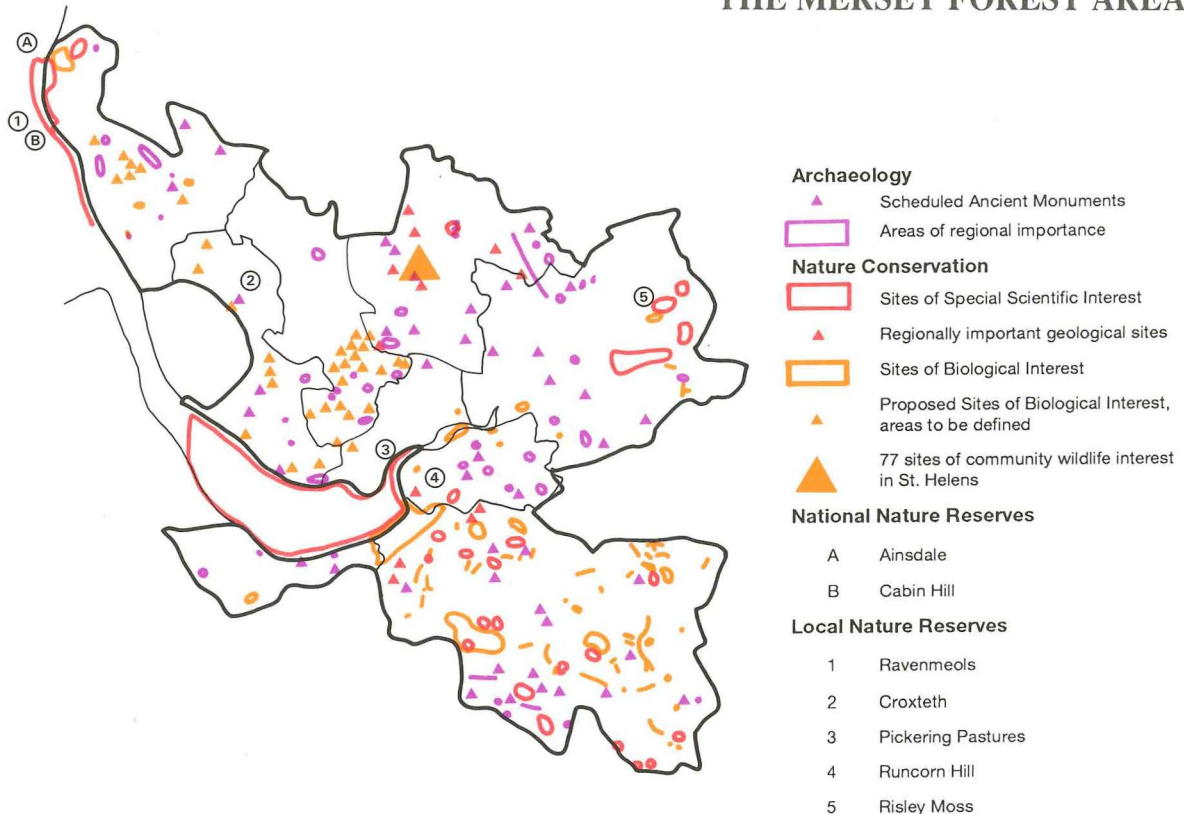
3.52 The saltmarsh and mudflats of the Mersey and Alt Estuaries are the wintering haunts of wildfowl and waders in tens of thousands. Specifically, the Mersey Estuary is internationally important for pintail, shelduck, widgeon and teal and is a proposed RAMSAR site.

3.53 River corridors contain some of the greatest concentrations of wildlife habitats, such as ancient woodlands along the River Weaver. There are also small pockets of lowland heathland on the sandier soils, forming a mosaic of vegetation, which includes acid grassland, gorse scrub and secondary birch-oak woodland.



Coastline at Formby

SITES OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND NATURE CONSERVATION INTEREST IN THE MERSEY FOREST AREA



3. THE MERSEY FOREST AREA TODAY

3.54 The area's industrial past has made significant contributions to its natural resources, the coal and salt industries, and dredging deposit grounds, producing their own special wildlife value. Examples include the Bold Moss colliery site in St. Helens, the Witton Limebeds near Northwich, and Woolston Eyes dredging grounds at Warrington.

Archaeology

3.55 The human influences described earlier in this chapter (see paragraphs 3.5 to 3.10) have led to an area rich in archaeological remains and more recent industrial heritage. Evidence of human settlement dates to around 8000 BC. Clearance of the forests began with the arrival of the first farmer in the Neolithic period (4500–2000 BC). The Bronze Age (2000–700 BC) saw the introduction of the first metalwork, represented by discoveries of tools, weapons and hoards, along with examples of round burial mounds on the glacial sands and alluvial river terraces around the River Mersey. The Iron Age (700 BC to AD 43) is reflected by hill forts, such as at Eddisbury, and defended farmsteads.

3.56 The arrival of the Romans in the North West between AD 75 and 80 brought great changes in administration, industry, commerce and transport. There is growing evidence of Roman settlement on the banks of the River Weaver, probably due to the local salt industry. At Wilderspool, where the Roman King Street crossed the Mersey, a major industrial centre covered perhaps 10 ha.

3.57 Saxon evidence is hard to find, but there was a string of burhs, or defended sites, along the River Mersey to protect the Kingdom of Mercia against Norse invaders.

3.58 Mediaeval times saw greater woodland clearance, the draining of marshes and more areas brought under the plough, including the royal hunting forests. Dozens of moated manor houses were built, ranging from splendid halls to the vacant earthwork platforms that dot the landscape.

3.59 By the early eighteenth century, the role of the Irish Sea trade led to the growth of Liverpool. The Mersey Forest area became the focus of a major industrial region based on coal from the St. Helens area and salt from the Weaver Valley. There are many important remains from the industrial past and a number of sites have been preserved and exhibited.

3.60 Scheduled ancient monuments and other important sites are shown in the map of 'Sites of archaeological and nature conservation interest in The Mersey Forest area'.



The Mersey Forest area has a rich industrial heritage: the Lion Salt Works at Northwich

Landscape assessment

3.61 Landscapes in the Forest area are for the most part a by-product of use of the land by farming or conversion to urban and industrial uses. There is little natural landscape and only a few areas where attractive landscapes have resulted from conscious attempts to create a new landscape by design – principally in the remnants of parkland landscapes created by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century aristocratic landowners and the newly wooded landscapes created by the Warrington and Runcorn Development Corporations.

3.62 Historically, landscapes evolved slowly, agricultural changes were limited by the available tools and sources of power; buildings, barriers and walls used natural local materials and traditions. In the nineteenth century, industrial development and mining activities led to rapid growth in the towns. Development was unplanned, landscape quality deteriorated under the impact of factories, mines, railways and other intrusions. The twentieth century has added its own toll in the form of power lines, motorways, housing and industrial developments. Under pressure to increase output, farmers have simplified the rural landscape by removing ponds and hedgerows, whilst other traditional landscape features, including woodlands, have languished.

3.63 The Mersey Forest aims to redress the balance, producing an attractive landscape which reflects current aesthetic values and allows for future change. The process of repairing, protecting and creating landscapes must be based on an understanding of landscape evolution and of the quality of landscapes which currently exist. For this reason it was necessary to carry out an assessment of the existing landscape and develop a strategy for landscape change. In the simplest terms, the purpose of the landscape assessment is to answer the question: Where should woodlands be established and where not? It aims to identify landscapes which are valuable and intact; those which are less valuable, but still intact; and those which are not intact – usually because they have been despoiled or otherwise severely degraded.

3.64 The chosen method of assessment combined objective and subjective analysis from desk study and field survey. It followed the methodology which is commonly known as the Warwickshire approach (Countryside Commission 1991) and was divided into three main steps.

- Firstly, the area was subdivided into seven landscape regions (see Appendix B), by examining information on topography, geology, historical associations and land use, and looking for broad patterns or correlations. These correlations reflect the fact that geology influences both soil and topography, whilst topography influences local climate. Soils, climate and topography in turn influence land use and local history.
- Within the broad 'regions' there will, of course, be landscapes of different character. There may, for example, be estuary marshland or wooded parkland. The second step was therefore a classification of landscape types such as wooded landscapes, medium- or large-scale farmland or large-scale industry.
- Finally, 14 landscape types were used to subdivide the landscape regions to produce a pattern of landscape units. (A particular landscape type will differ between the different landscape regions, because the regional characteristics, such as geology, will affect its appearance and character.)

3.65 Landscape units are the basic building blocks of landscape with a recognisable character. They are used as the basis for evaluating landscape quality, developing the landscape strategy outlined in Chapter 14 and contributing to the policy decisions on future landscape development presented as local planting strategies in Chapter 15.

3.66 The assessment was originally carried out over an area larger than The Mersey Forest and was used as an input to the decision about the boundary of the Forest. Much of the Forest boundary runs up to the boundaries of the partner authorities, but in some places, notably the Cheshire Plain and Lancashire Plain, it has been re-defined to exclude landscapes where developing the Forest would be inappropriate.

3.67 See Appendix B for details and map of the landscape assessment.

4. PLANNING CONTEXT

National and regional guidance

4.1 Government policies on different aspects of planning are set out in Planning Policy Guidance notes by the Department of the Environment and these are taken into account by local authorities when preparing their development plans: those most relevant to The Mersey Forest are *Green Belts* (1988), *The Countryside and the Rural Economy* (1992), *Development Plans and Regional Planning Guidance* (1992) and *Sport and Recreation* (Department of the Environment & Welsh Office (1991). Regional Policy Guidance Notes also provide important background to planning within The Mersey Forest.

Statutory development plans

4.2 The existing statutory development plans for The Mersey Forest area consist of the County Structure Plans for Cheshire and Merseyside, a number of local plans for specific areas or local authority areas as a whole and a range of subject local plans covering the green belt, minerals, waste disposal or areas such as the Mersey Marshes.

4.3 Recent changes to the legislation concerning development plans have introduced a requirement for all non-metropolitan district councils to prepare authority-wide local plans. In the Cheshire part of the Forest area this requirement affects the four Boroughs of Halton, Warrington, Ellesmere Port and Vale Royal, who are either preparing or reviewing borough-wide local plans. The *Cheshire 2001 Replacement Structure Plan* (Cheshire County Council 1992) has recently been approved.

4.4 The Forest area also covers the Merseyside Metropolitan Authorities of Liverpool, Sefton, Knowsley and St. Helens. These Councils are in the process of preparing unitary development plans, which when complete will supersede the *Merseyside Structure Plan* (1980). These will provide both strategic and local development guidance for their areas.

4.5 When the process of producing district-wide local plans and unitary development plans is complete, there will be nine statutory plans which relate to the Forest. They will contain a wide

range of relevant policies and also policies supporting The Mersey Forest. The degree to which The Mersey Forest is incorporated into the plans depends on the timing of plan production – several were written and placed on deposit stage before The Mersey Forest concept had been developed. Such plans will encompass further policies towards The Mersey Forest at their next statutory review date.

Role of the Forest Plan

4.6 Planning decisions within The Mersey Forest will be taken within the policies set out in the appropriate local authority development plan. Within this context, *The Mersey Forest Plan* has four roles.

- It may be referred to in the determination of applications for planning permission.
- It will strengthen and support positive protective policies where these relate to the countryside of the Forest area.
- It will act as a guide to the local interpretation of planning policies.
- It will provide a means of achieving policy aims through direct programmes of action and implementation.

4.7 In the medium to long term, parts of *The Mersey Forest Plan* may become accepted as supplementary planning guidance or incorporated into local developments plans.

Green belt

4.8 The new development plans will define a boundary for the green belt. The role of green belts is set out in Government guidance which severely restricts any built development. A high proportion of The Mersey Forest will be designated green belt and attention will focus on the continuation and enhancement of appropriate open uses, particularly agriculture, forestry and countryside recreation. The Mersey Forest will offer positive alternative uses for land within the green belt, consistent with that policy and in support of its function of containing the spread of urban growth.

Areas of particular landscape value

4.9 A number of areas within the Forest have been identified within development plans as being of particular landscape value by virtue of their combination of landform and landscape pattern. The Forest will respect these designations and pay special regard to the implementation of the Forest in these areas.

Other strategies and plans

4.10 Other non-statutory plans and strategies prepared by the partner authorities and relevant to the creation of the Forest include six strategies covering archaeology (1991), historic buildings and conservation areas, nature conservation (1992), woodlands (1992), landscape (1992) and derelict land (1992), prepared by Cheshire County Council; Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council's *Countryside Recreation Strategy* (1992) and Warrington Borough Council's environmental strategy (currently being prepared). These plans will play a vital role in guiding local implementation programmes that will create different elements of the Forest.

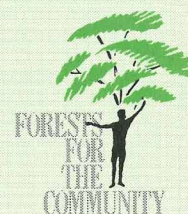
4.11 In addition, the *Red Rose Forest Plan* (Red Rose Forest Team 1994) will have an immediate bearing upon The Mersey Forest and, indeed, will present opportunities for cooperation between the two Forests. *The Mersey Estuary Management Plan* (in preparation) will also have implications for The Mersey Forest.

4.12 Statutory and non-statutory documents relevant to The Mersey Forest are listed in Appendix A.

THE MERSEY FOREST

FOREST-WIDE VISION

5. Community participation
6. Access, sport, recreation and tourism
7. Transport corridors
8. Wildlife and nature conservation
9. Archaeology
10. Education
11. The arts
12. Mature woodland
13. Woodland products and industries
14. Design



Introduction

In Chapter 2 some of the reasons why The Mersey Forest area is in need of environmental improvement and the benefits that the Forest will bring were described. The six central themes that formed the initial approach to creating the Forest were introduced (see paragraph 2.33) and it is these six themes combined with the landscape strategy described in Appendix B which form the backbone of the Plan for physically achieving the Forest vision.

The structure of The Mersey Forest will be achieved by increasing woodland cover on suitable land within the Forest area to an average of 30%. The woodlands will be neither of regular size nor evenly spread across the landscape. Instead, largely because of its size, The Mersey Forest will be a mosaic of woodlands of different sizes and densities linked by a network of green routeways and transport corridors. In between, there will continue to be large areas of farmland, much of it playing an active role in The Mersey Forest, through the management of new and existing woodland, through diversifying into new areas, such as the creation of wildlife habitats, or through the provision of opportunities for people to enjoy informal countryside recreation.

In addition, there will be areas set aside and managed for their nature conservation value and areas of open space – all combining to form The Mersey Forest on the fringes of and extending into the urban areas. The woodland will form the backdrop for the wide range of activities that will take place within and around them.

The map included at the back of this Plan illustrates the overall vision for the Forest and shows that cross-boundary links, projects and policies are essential components of The Mersey Forest concept. The Mersey Forest is the largest of the 12 community forests in England and it is essential that, in order to achieve these cross-boundary links and projects, the Forest becomes a true partnership between local authorities, landowners and communities. The comparatively low existing tree cover means that targets for achieving the Forest must be ambitious, but, given the necessary commitment, achievable if time-scales are not to be over long.

The Mersey Forest Plan is not a detailed land-use plan and therefore does not offer prescriptions for specific units of land, but does outline general proposals and guidance for the creation of the Forest across the whole area. The vision for woodland cover, developed from the landscape assessment, is described in terms of three preferred levels of woodland cover, 10–20%, 20–30% and 30% plus, which are applied to the development of the Forest in each of eight local areas, broken down for convenience by local authority. These ‘local’ planting strategies appear in Chapter 15 in the part on Forest Strategies. This part deals with the development of the links between the network of woodlands and of the uses and activities that will take place within the Forest.

5. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

5.1 The concept of community woodlands depends upon the active participation of people from all backgrounds and with a wide variety of interests. Communities that take responsibility for the management and, where possible, the ownership of their woodlands and play an active role in regulating abuses such as fly tipping and vandalism are participating in local democracy in a positive way; the models that exist already within the Forest, such as at Burtonwood and Childwall, will be supported and encouraged.

5.2 The term community implies all those who live or work in an area and includes organisations such as local authorities, town councils, parishes, businesses, clubs, societies, schools and community groups, farmers and landowners and the millions of individuals who live within reach of The Mersey Forest area.

5.3 The success of a community forest will depend not on the number of trees that have been planted and are growing successfully, but on the contribution the forest has made to the quality of life of the community. Community participation can take place at many levels along a gradation from consultation to community action. Three stages along this gradation are identified as useful examples: plans are prepared by (i) the community, with assistance from professional staff; (ii) staff jointly with the community; and (iii) staff, but with consultation as necessary.

The level of participation will vary with individual forest sites.

R1 It is a fundamental objective of The Mersey Forest that all should be encouraged to participate in the planning, development and enjoyment of their Forest and, through their commitment to it, play a part in its long-term stewardship and ownership.



Community participation is fundamental to the success of the Forest: a family day at Risley Moss

5. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

5.4 In practice, it is likely that, although people will be aware of the Forest in its widest sense, they will mostly be personally involved at a more local level. This could be through taking part in events and activities such as tree planting, wildlife projects or arts events or on a more formal basis in the design and development of local woodlands.

5.5 The latter can take place in a number of ways. For example, there are activities in which the local community is able to take the lead in preparing plans for a site, supported by an experienced facilitator, as, for example, has been the case at Bold Moss in St. Helens, or those in which residents are invited to give their views on an outline design drawn up beforehand, as seen recently at Bruche Park in Warrington. These and other schemes, such as that initiated by the Oughtrington Community Association, have been aimed at ascertaining people's opinions and desires and securing their practical involvement.

5.6 One very rewarding way of engaging the community is through contact with schoolchildren and their parents, relatives and teachers. A great deal of work is being done through local authority and other organisations to help schools and other educational establishments improve the environmental value of their grounds and thereby

recruit the future custodians of the Forest. Informal education (for all ages) and youth work are also important sectors with which the Forest partners should establish links.

R2 The partners will establish links with young people and local groups and will continue to develop their work in this area.

5.7 Much of the future success of the Forest is likely to depend upon networks of volunteers and special-interest groups. Many of these networks and groups already exist and will play an increasingly important role as the Forest develops. Women's Institutes, parish councils, Rotary Clubs and voluntary bodies, arts organisations and sports clubs will all provide a focal point for activity within the Forest, and the partners will seek to reinforce this by nominating individuals from each area as Mersey Forest contacts, who will act as the first point of contact for those seeking to become involved in the Forest. Other organisations, such as Countryside Management Services, the Groundwork Trust, Mersey Valley Partnership, Woodland Trust, Local Wildlife Trusts and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, will continue to provide the support, coordination and practical training that is vital to successful voluntary work.



Celebrating The Mersey Forest: a Northwich Awareness Day

R3 A community development officer within The Mersey Forest Project Team will encourage and support the development of locally based groups and networks between groups. The officer will also support existing organisations and partner authorities in developing the participation of the community in the future of the Forest.

5.8 The community development post is funded by the private sector and grant aid from the Countryside Commission. Local authority countryside teams will continue to play a significant role in organising events and supporting voluntary bodies such as the Risley Moss Action Group. Parish councils play an important role in securing local participation, often in joint work with the major partner authorities.

5.9 Local businesses will also play an important role. Directors, managers and employees alike are part of the community, and local and national companies and business organisations have already expressed interest in and given practical and financial help to the Forest. Their continued support will be needed to secure the creation and management of new woodland, and the participation of staff in tree planting and other events will help to ensure sustained involvement in the Forest.

5.10 Community forests have community involvement, participation and action at their heart. The Mersey Forest will provide an agreed framework for action for the vast range of businesses, community and conservation groups within the Forest area and a focus for positive community environmental action.

6. ACCESS, SPORT, RECREATION AND TOURISM

6.1 A key objective of The Mersey Forest is to increase the opportunity for access, sport and recreation and to create attractive sites for public enjoyment. Sport and recreation in the Forest will include not only activities which primarily rely on the natural environment. Any sport and recreational activity will be embraced that complements the environmental improvement of the area, encourages its wider use and contributes towards the economic and environmental sustainability of the Forest as a recreational and community resource.

Access

6.2 The existing network of public rights of way varies enormously in quality and density. In particular, there are few routes suitable for cycling and the bridleway network is very fragmented. A number of key routes have been developed in recent years and these include the Liverpool Loop Line, Trans-Pennine Trail, Sefton Coastal Footpath, Sankey Way, Mersey Way and Sandstone Trail. The canal and navigable river system forms an important recreational routeway for walking and boating, but again the routes are fragmented and variable in quality.

R4 The partner authorities support the Countryside Commission policy that the entire

statutory rights-of-way network should be legally defined, properly maintained and effectively promoted by the year 2000.

6.3 Recent work by Groundwork in St. Helens and the Mersey Valley Partnership recognises this and points the way to future improvements. The Parish Paths Partnership is also an important mechanism for improving public rights of way.

6.4 Whilst there is an upward trend in the popularity of cycling for leisure, perceived and actual dangers on the roads prevent many of those who own a cycle from using it. Consequently, the provision of any safe cycling facility is very popular. Horse-riders too need dedicated off-road routes as the danger to horses on roads has increased with the volume and speed of traffic.

6.5 At present, at least 70% of trips to the countryside are made by car. Inner-city residents, few of whom have access to a car, are poorly represented. A system of well-planned and maintained recreational routes would enable all people, especially those who do not own cars, to have access to the Forest and would help to alleviate the increasing demand for countryside recreation, taking some pressure off heavily overused parts of the National Parks. Part of the network could serve as an important 'green' transport facility, enabling



New facilities for recreation are proposed: horse-riding in Delamere Forest

trips to the shops, schools and work to be made safely by bicycle. Connections into the urban areas encouraging the use of the public transport system would also be important aspects of the greenway system. As recreation sites and woodlands are developed within the Forest, these can be linked to the recreational routeways.

6.6 A potential strategic network of recreational routes can be identified – using existing routes, disused railways, canal towpaths and similar routes. Several local authorities in the area are already cooperating to help create the Trans-Pennine Trail, a long-distance recreational route through the Forest area from Ainsdale to Warrington and connecting with other proposals that will take the Trail over the Pennines to Hull.

R5 The partner authorities will aim to establish and manage a strategic network of routes based on the Trans-Pennine Trail and other existing routes. These are shown on the map of ‘Strategic routes in The Mersey Forest area’. In urban areas and degraded landscapes, the network will form wooded greenways extending narrow fingers of forest into the urban centres.

6.7 The recommended network would be aimed primarily at cyclists, walkers and, where possible, horse-riders, with segregated use where this is feasible. Adequate provision for the management and maintenance of this network will be essential.

6.8 The following routes will be targeted for priority implementation:

- completion of the Trans-Pennine Trail (TPT),
- Sefton Coast route and links through the Rimrose Valley to the Leeds–Liverpool Canal and TPT,
- St. Helens network of routes,
- a link between St. Helens and the TPT at Widnes,
- Sankey Valley from St. Helens to Warrington,
- Weaver Way from Winsford to Frodsham,
- a route from Helsby through Delamere to the Whitegate Way.

6.9 The partners will set up a Strategic Route Action Group consisting of the relevant authorities and agencies, to identify key links in the network, target sites for action, investigate methods of implementation and work with the TPT Steering Group, and the Parish Paths Partnership initiative. Strategic routes into Red Rose Forest will be incorporated.

6.10 There may be scope for incorporating bridleways within some parts of the strategic network, but there are real problems of safety and conflicting needs between horse-riders and young cyclists, in particular. These can often be alleviated through design and management.

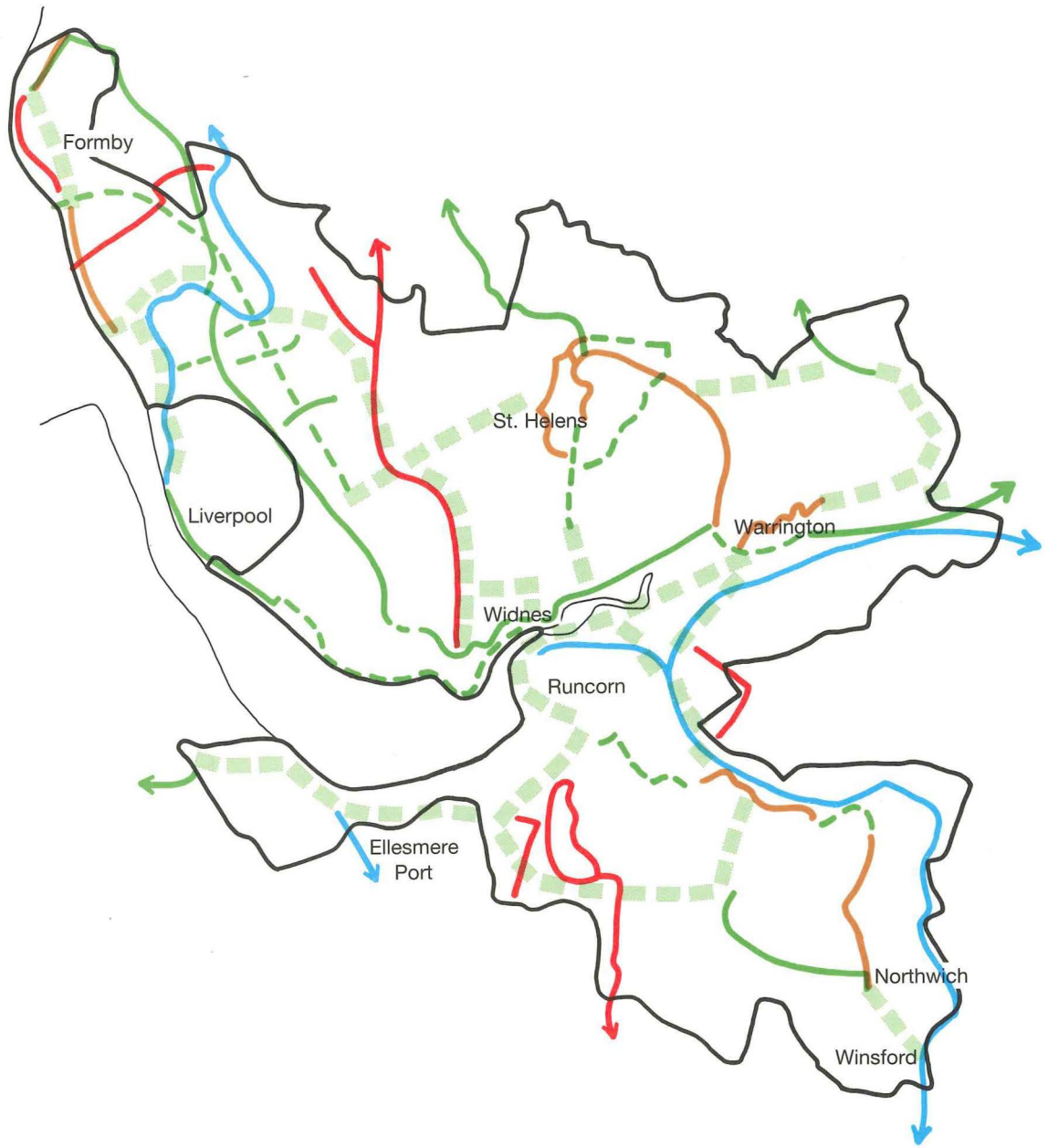
R6 The partner authorities will seek to achieve a separate network of routes established for horse-riders. Where substantial new woodland areas are being created with assistance from public funds, they should, where appropriate, include provision for access by horse-riders, including the provision of toll bridleways.

6.11 Access to private land will often be required to secure the network of recreational routes and to increase the provision of circular and long-distance routes for walkers and other users. In general, the partners will seek to establish permissive rights of way with the agreement of landowners where improvements in the existing network are desirable.

6.12 Access to the recreational routeway network will be promoted through gateway sites. These will be sympathetic to non-car users and should be developed in conjunction with existing and future public transport facilities, as well as encouraging those who arrive by car to explore more fully what the area has to offer. They will be main entry points to the Forest recreation network for car users and significant Forest sites in themselves. These will provide car parking, support infrastructure, such as Ranger bases, information points, toilets and forest-based activities, and some will also contain commercial ventures. Existing sites that will become gateway sites include the Rimrose Valley, Gatewarth in Warrington, Northwich and Winsford Community Woodlands, Stadt Moers Country Park, Delamere Forest, Walton Hall and Croxteth Hall.

R7 Gateway sites will be identified and developed during the early phases of the Forest by the partner authorities and in conjunction with the private sector.

STRATEGIC ROUTES IN THE MERSEY FOREST AREA



- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--------------------------------|
|  | Existing recreational routes |  | Existing major footpath routes |
|  | Existing proposals for recreational routes |  | Canals |
|  | Footpaths to be upgraded to recreational routes |  | Forest boundary |
|  | Routes to be investigated | | |

6. ACCESS, SPORT, RECREATION AND TOURISM

6.13 Gateway sites will also be large areas of woodland and open land with general public access and appropriate provision for recreational activities. The development of open land and farmland for access and recreation will be encouraged. Full use will be made of the Community Woodland Supplement of the Forestry Authority's Woodland Grant Scheme to obtain access to new woodlands and the provision of recreation facilities, where appropriate.

R8 The partners will seek to achieve the provision of well-designed and managed public access as part of large-scale woodland creation projects, especially when these projects receive assistance from public funds or where they are required as a condition of planning permission.

6.14 It is an important objective of community forests that all sectors of the community should have access to woodland areas and that woodlands should be as safe as possible commensurate with the way in which they will be used.

R9 In designing access to and within woodlands, special consideration should be given to the needs of people with disabilities and impaired mobility. Public safety should continue to be an issue which receives priority.

Sport and recreation

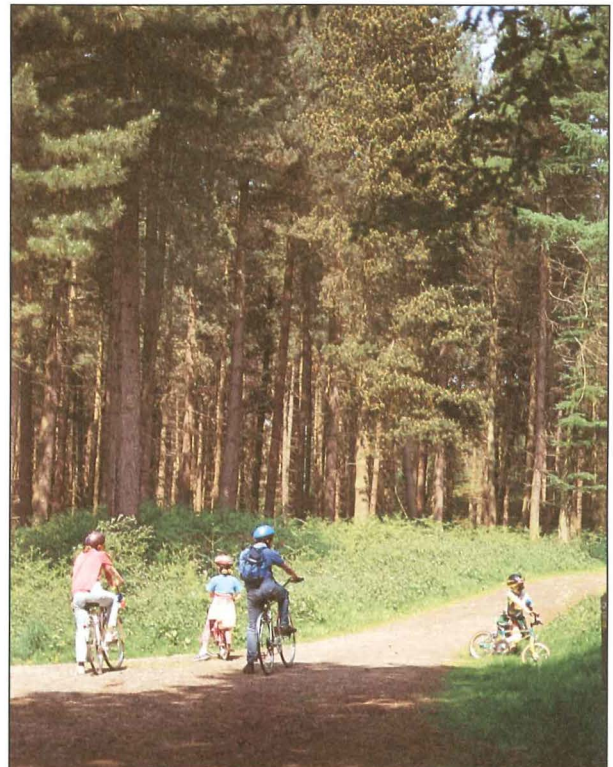
R10 The development of sport and recreation in The Mersey Forest will follow the four principles set out in the North West Council for Sport and Recreation (1992) report Into Wild Country, the need to

- ***plan coherently, via effective consultation, so that the potential for sport is optimised, and conflict between interests is minimised;***
- ***enhance access in the Forest as much as possible, so that opportunities for participation are maximised;***
- ***conserve the environment, so that available resources are not decreased;***
- ***apply the principle of sports equity – ie ensure that opportunities are made available to all on an equal basis, including women, people with a disability and black and ethnic minorities.***

6.15 The Forest will provide sites for sport and recreation and act as a backdrop and setting within which activities can take place. Woodlands will allow people to get away from the hustle and bustle of modern urban living. They can absorb large numbers of people and provide visual separation for different activities and users. Noisy sports can be enclosed and separated from other uses.

6.16 Elsewhere in Europe, it is normal for towns and cities to plan their large-scale sporting activities in a forest park environment. Correctly planned, this makes facilities accessible over a large area, allows efficient support infrastructure and avoids conflict with existing communities due to traffic, crowds, noise and security. It also gives facilities an excellent environment.

6.17 On the urban fringe, opportunities for recreation will be incorporated into a woodland setting. The partners will be working closely with the private and voluntary sectors to identify need and demand in order to maximise development options.



Cycling is growing in popularity

R11 Recreation development will be encouraged within well-wooded areas by:

- ***planting around existing sports sites to integrate them into the Forest network and improve landscape setting;***
- ***strategic promotion of the natural woodland setting for countryside recreation, such as orienteering, mountain biking, horse-riding and rambling. This will be achieved in close liaison with governing bodies of sport through structured marketing and targeted management. It will incorporate existing and new areas of woodland;***
- ***the development of new sites for a wider range of recreation, such as pitch sports, archery, children's play areas, fitness trails and farm-based recreation.***

6.18 Noisy and erosive sports, such as motor sports, jet skiing and trail riding, cause special difficulties. In some cases there is already an established policy to ban these uses from sites in the Forest area. However, a total ban would be mistaken since it would lead to trespass and uncontrolled use. Instead, sites should be developed for these uses, often they will be adjacent to existing sources of noise, such as motorways or industry; they will be developed within a woodland setting.

R12 Partner authorities will seek to identify sites within the Forest area which are suitable for noisy and erosive sports.

6.19 The shortage of sites for water-based activities was highlighted in Chapter 3 as a particular problem. This will be tackled partly by the improvement of existing watercourses and water bodies and partly by the creation of new areas of water.

R13 Opportunities for creating new water bodies, where appropriate, will be investigated by the partner authorities in association with other organisations.

6.20 The development of recreation in the Forest is subject to control through the planning system and will also be guided by statutory development plan policy.

6.21 The development of recreation in the Forest will also include the provision of interpretation facilities and information about activities, and each partner authority will have at least one Forest centre for this purpose. They will be located within existing facilities or as part of new developments. Newsletters, press releases and brochures distributed through existing outlets will also supplement fixed provision and keep people up to date.

6.22 The Forest offers the opportunity to develop sport and recreation across nine local authority areas in a planned and coherent strategy.

R14 The partners in conjunction with the Sports Council will prepare and implement a strategy for the development of sport and recreation within The Mersey Forest.

Tourism

6.23 The development of sports and recreation facilities in conjunction with the wider Forest and recreational routeways will enhance tourist opportunities within the Forest area. The change of image brought about by the Forest will also enhance the attractiveness of existing facilities. Over three million tourist visits were made to Cheshire and Merseyside in 1991, bringing in £300 million to the local economy. An additional 62 million leisure day visits are made to the North West, with associated spending of £536 million. Increased tourism will bring in more money, boosting employment, allowing diversification of the economy and supporting facilities enjoyed by local people. It is important that any additional infrastructure and facilities for tourism be developed in harmony with the local environment and are sensitively planned and managed.

6. ACCESS, SPORT, RECREATION AND TOURISM

6.24 Overnight accommodation associated with sites on the recreational routeway network could include hostels, cabins, caravan and camping sites and camping barns. It is possible that a holiday complex along the lines of Center Parcs could be developed, subject to planning policies. Tourism may also improve the viability of large recreational developments, such as dry-ski centres, safari parks, equestrian centres and hotels. Decisions about built facilities will be made by the partner authorities through the existing planning system.

R15 The partner authorities recognise the importance of tourism in the development of The Mersey Forest and will support suitable initiatives to expand tourism.



The Mersey Forest will enhance opportunities for tourism: Croxteth Hall

7. TRANSPORT CORRIDORS

7.1 The Mersey Forest comprises 109 km of motorway and 206 km of major trunk and 'A' class roads outside the built-up area; a further 26 km of motorway and major roads is proposed for the near future.

7.2 Transport corridors were identified as one of the central themes in *Preparing the Ground* (Mersey Forest Project Team 1992). Concentrating on land alongside main transport routes (particularly motorways) will create an early impression of forest cover and help to screen industry from roads, and roads from housing. It will improve the image of the Forest area in the eyes of visitors and potential investors.

7.3 The regional economic strategy being prepared for the North West Regional Association identifies transport corridors amongst five regional priorities for environmental improvement. It states that improvements should be concentrated 'in the most visible areas – transport gateways, river canal corridors, road/rail corridors, town and city centres and major visitor centres'.

7.4 There is scope for woodland planting along most major transport corridors, but the best opportunity occurs in motorway corridors, because they are highly visible, are large areas of land (cuttings, embankments and roundabouts) and are under one ownership. Some sections of motorway are already well planted (eg the M62/M6 intersection); elsewhere, planting is inadequate (eg M53 in Ellesmere Port).

7.5 It would not be desirable to carry woodland planting up to the edge of the road in every location. This would create an oppressive 'tunnel' effect and would lose the opportunity of longer views. Instead it is proposed that two alternative impressions of the Forest are created along transport corridors, especially motorways: 'in the Forest' (where planting is carried to the edge of the road and encloses the route) and 'looking at the Forest' (where woodland and open space alternate, permitting views out from the road).

7.6 Each of the two approaches can be used, depending on the quality of existing views from the roads, existing planting and land availability. In the map of 'Transport corridors in The Mersey Forest area' are set out the main sections of motorway where it would be desirable to create the impression of being in the Forest. These are as follows:

- M58 and M57 junction at Switch Island,
- M57 from the A580 northwards to the Knowsley Borough boundary,
- M57 from the M62 junction northwards to Littlewood,
- M62 west of the junction with the M57,
- M6 from the northern Liverpool to Manchester railway line northwards to the St. Helens Borough boundary,



An 'in the Forest' motorway section: M57 in Knowsley

- M62 and M6 interchange, between junctions 9 and 11 on the M62 and between junction 22 and the southern Liverpool to Manchester railway line on the M6,
- M6 and M56 interchange,
- M56 from Clifton to the A56 junction,
- M53 through Ellesmere Port.

R16 The partners will support and encourage an intensive programme of planting along sections of motorways to achieve the 'in the Forest' landscape. These sections are identified in Chapter 15.

7.7 This programme will require the cooperation of the Department of Transport to identify sites and funding sources and develop a programme of work. An example of such cooperation has been completed recently at Ellesmere Port, along the M53.

R17 The partners will encourage the creation of 'looking at the Forest' landscape sections of roadside planting alongside motorways and other routes. These routes are indicated in Chapter 15.

7.8 In addition, they will identify planting sites on public and private land adjacent to motorways and highways and in association with other infrastructure developments, and investigate mechanisms for achieving planting. Particular

opportunities will arise alongside new road-building projects, including the M62 'link' roads at St. Helens and Widnes, the A5300 link road at Knowsley, the A58 link road, the A565 trunk road in Sefton and the A550 link road in Ellesmere Port. The widening of the M6 will also present significant opportunities.

7.9 There is some 220 km of main railway line and regional routes in The Mersey Forest area. Because of the management policies practised in recent years, many stretches of railway line now run through cuttings or embankments, where natural woodland often makes an important contribution to the local environment in terms of views from the train and views on to the railway. With correct design of planting to avoid trackside maintenance problems, this process needs to be continued; the Railside Revival Project in Sefton is an illustration of what can be achieved.

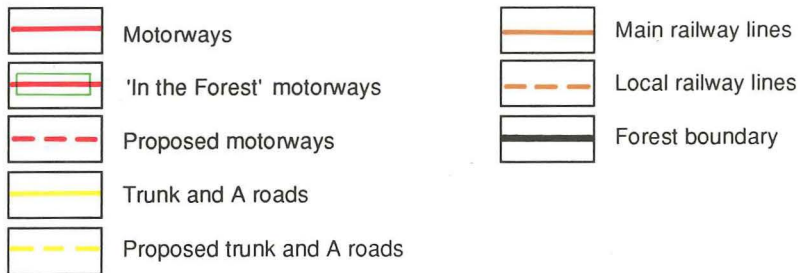
R18 The partners will support and encourage appropriate tree planting and the protection of existing trees along railways where this does not conflict with rail safety.



'Looking at the Forest'

7. TRANSPORT CORRIDORS

TRANSPORT CORRIDORS IN THE MERSEY FOREST AREA



8. WILDLIFE AND NATURE CONSERVATION

8.1 New woodlands and environmentally sensitive farming will diversify the wildlife value of the Forest area by significantly increasing what is, at the moment, a scarce habitat and by providing green corridors through which plants and animals can spread. However, it is important that this should not be done at the expense of important existing wildlife sites.

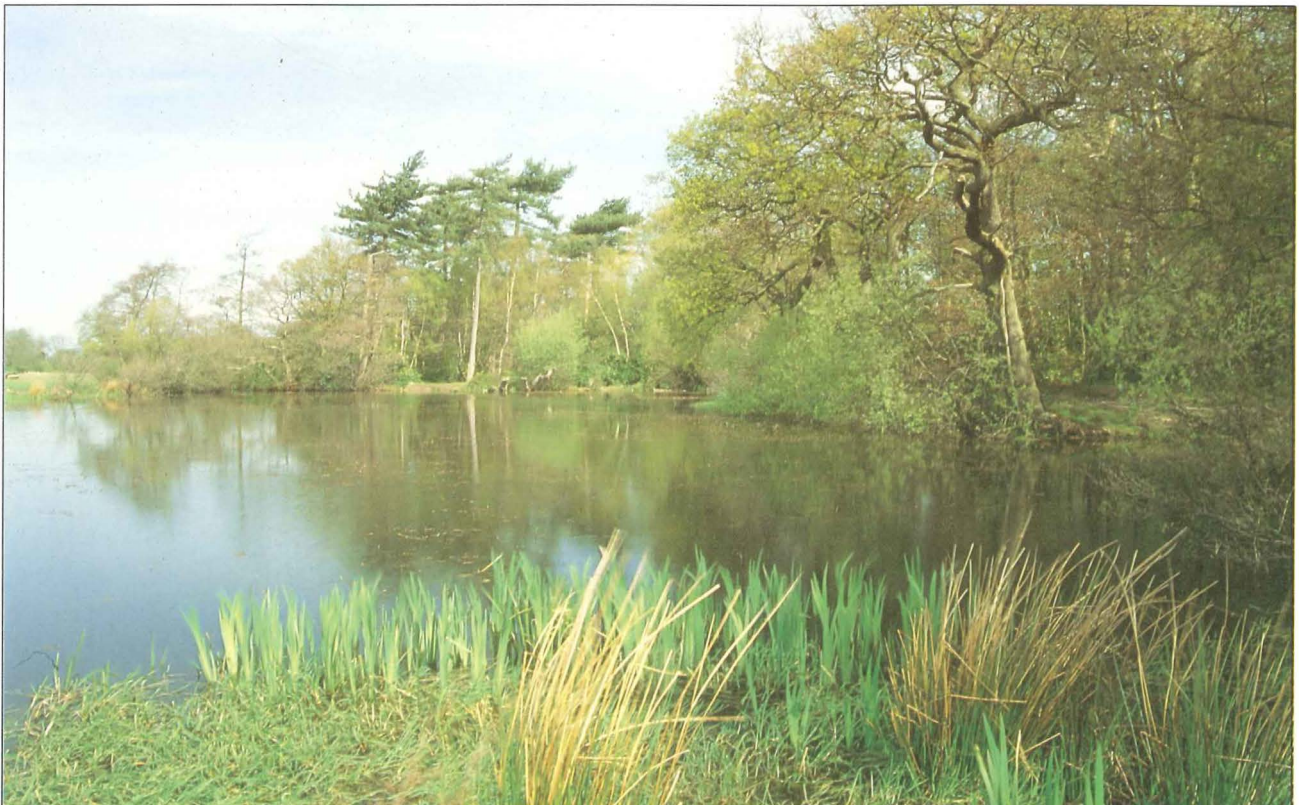
8.2 Across the whole Forest there are few extensive areas of great value for nature conservation; this is partly because much of the area is heavily urbanised and the quality of the soils has encouraged intensive agriculture. The main exceptions to these generalisations are the Mersey Estuary and the Sefton Coastlands and dune systems and a number of mosses and meres, which are of international importance. There are a number of other SSSIs of national importance, including areas of ancient woodland, peatland, wetland and species-rich grassland (see map of 'Sites of archaeological and nature conservation interest in The Mersey Forest area' in Chapter 3).

R19 The Mersey Estuary and Sefton Coast dune systems and areas of mossland and meres are not suitable for forest planting. Areas of peatland, wetland and species-rich grassland should not be planted. Areas of ancient woodland should be carefully assessed and managed to promote the ecological value of each woodland.

8.3 Many of the sites which are suitable for forest planting will have some element of nature conservation value – although amenity grassland such as playing fields and arable land often has a surprisingly low value. On the other hand, sites which were formerly used for industrial purposes and have since been abandoned often have a high value for nature conservation. Examples include the Bold Moss Colliery site in St. Helens, and Witton Limebeds near Northwich.

8.4 The Mersey Forest offers the opportunity to protect and manage features of wildlife importance, such as ponds, hedges and small areas of rough grassland which can be incorporated into woodland sites. There is scope within the Forestry Authority Woodland Grant Scheme for open space. Some sites will have large open areas or, indeed, may not be planted at all, such as wildflower meadows. In this aspect, recreation and conservation have a close interrelationship – wildlife enhances recreation, and spaces for recreation offer opportunities for wildlife.

8.5 Not only can existing wildlife value be included and protected within woodlands, but new woodlands and farmed landscapes also offer the opportunity for the creation of other new wildlife habitats on unplanted land. Even woodlands grown



Rivacre Valley, Ellesmere Port

8. WILDLIFE AND NATURE CONSERVATION

principally for timber can make an important contribution to conservation by sensitive management, development of rides and woodland edges and protection of valuable sites within the woodland.

R20 On the existing sites of local value for nature conservation, the aim should be to protect and enhance the features of interest. An initial assessment of ecological (biological and/or geological) interests will be carried out on all sites to assess and protect existing features. The guidelines set out by English Nature (1991) in Nature Conservation and the New Lowland Forests and by the Forestry Commission in Forest Nature Conservation Guidelines (1990) and Forests and Water Guidelines (1991) will be carefully observed. The Mersey Forest will seek to develop a mosaic of habitat types by encouraging creation of non-woodland habitats on appropriate sites.

8.6 Nature conservation objectives should be integrated into all aspects of woodland planning, including the conservation of geological and geomorphological features, but they may be one

of several objectives for a site and it is important to strike the right balance. On some difficult reclamation sites, it will not be possible to use native species, and productive species suitable for the site must be chosen. Similarly, large areas of productive woodland must be designed primarily with a view to timber production rather than nature conservation – although careful survey should indicate features that should be protected. In all cases, it is important that existing nature conservation strategies are taken into account, for example, the *Nature Conservation Strategy for Cheshire* (Cheshire County Council 1992).

8.7 The partners will promote the development of wildlife within the Forest by providing advice and support on the best means of developing features attractive to wildlife in newly planted woodlands.

8.8 The Weaver Valley and derelict industrial landscape to the north of Northwich support significant concentrations of wildlife for Cheshire. Woodland planting in these areas requires particular sensitivity, respecting existing nature conservation interests.



Special measures are needed to protect the red squirrel

8.9 The proposals for developing hedges, hedgerow trees, greenways, planting along transport corridors and areas of significantly increased woodland cover will provide a continuous network of wooded habitats. These will act as wildlife corridors, bringing species into previously barren zones, such as arable land or urban areas. This will be of great benefit to wildlife and wildlife diversity, except for species threatened by displacement, such as the red squirrel.

8.10 Red squirrels are being displaced by an expanding population of grey squirrels which were introduced to Great Britain from North America about 100 years ago. The woodlands of Ainsdale, Formby and West Lancashire contain some of the last remaining strongholds of red squirrels in England. The red squirrel is now included in English Nature's species recovery programme, and action is being led by N.P.I. Red Alert North West, a public and private-sector initiative.

R21 Special measures will be taken to protect the red squirrel population in Sefton and adjoining areas, in accordance with the strategy of N.P.I. Red Alert North West.

9. ARCHAEOLOGY

9.1 The Mersey Forest area has a long history of settlement and a rich heritage of archaeological remains. In particular, there is growing interest in the area's industrial archaeology, as an educational and cultural resource in its own right and, increasingly, as a focus for tourism and recreation. The region displays much of Britain's early industrial heritage, reflected by a large number of railways, bridges, docks and industrial sites – both used and abandoned. Archaeological remains are often a vulnerable part of the landscape and it is vital that they are not damaged or obscured by forestry schemes (see map of 'Sites of archaeological and nature conservation interest in The Mersey Forest area' in Chapter 3).

R22 All planting sites should be assessed for their archaeological value by notifying the curator of the appropriate Sites and Monuments Record. (The Cheshire County record is held by Cheshire County Council and on Merseyside by the National Museums and Galleries. Notification is obligatory under the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme.)

9.2 On sites identified as of significant archaeological value, remains should be protected from inappropriate planting and safeguarded for the future. In planning applications, this will require adherence to the guidance set out by the Department of the Environment in *Archaeology and Planning* (1990).

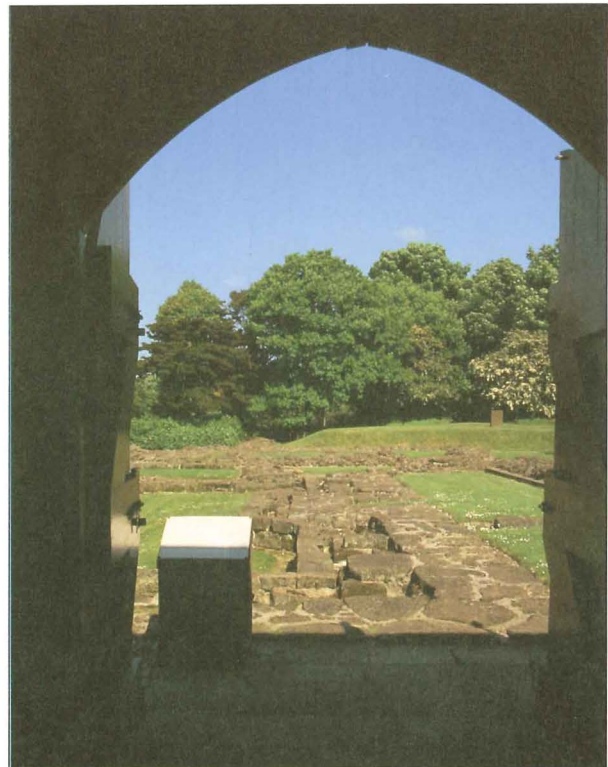
9.3 Where protected areas or specific archaeological remains are within a woodland site, every opportunity should be taken to incorporate them within the overall design, in a way consistent with the policy of 'preservation *in situ*' as set out in *Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990) and the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979.

9.4 It would be easy to dismiss the value of more recent industrial archaeology. Often, old structures need to be removed on grounds of safety as part of land-reclamation schemes. Yet these remains are as much a part of the Forest area's social and cultural history as remnants from more distant ages. In future, they are likely to be increasingly valued as a resource for education and tourism.

R23 Wherever possible, remains of industrial archaeology will be incorporated as features within schemes, provided that they can be made safe and managed at reasonable cost.

9.5 The opportunity to discover and explore a site's archaeological past can contribute greatly to the enjoyment of a recreational visit and enriches people's appreciation of their countryside. Provision for appropriate preservation and interpretation of archaeological remains will therefore be promoted by the Forest partners.

9.6 In areas designated as either historic or heritage landscapes in statutory development plans, special consideration should be given to the suitability and design of tree planting. The archaeological features in ancient or semi-natural ancient woodlands, such as hedge banks, should be protected during management and felling operations.



Norton Priory

10.1 There is increasing emphasis in our schools and colleges on environmental education, both to meet the needs of the National Curriculum and as a result of increasing awareness and interest. The Mersey Forest will offer a rich and varied resource for environmental education.

R24 The partners will work closely with educationists to develop a wide range of suitable facilities and opportunities within the Forest.

10.2 These facilities should cater for the needs of all types of educational establishment. For example, residential study centres, such as that at Fox Howl in Delamere, will be needed to complement visits to nature reserves, country parks and local woodlands. But The Mersey Forest will do more than offer schools a resource for environmental education. There are opportunities to link the Forest to the economic, social, and ecological history of the area and to sow the seeds for wider community involvement in the adults of the future.

10.3 School grounds, whilst on a different scale, also offer exciting opportunities to create stimulating environments, including mini-

woodlands, and the introduction of local management offers scope for new creative approaches.

R25 The partner authorities will continue to encourage the development and management of school grounds as attractive environments for learning and play.

10.4 Many schools have undertaken projects to plant trees and carry out other improvements in their own grounds and surrounding areas. Cheshire County Council has run a school-sites environment programme for a number of years and recently (1993) produced a *Schools Grounds Design Guide*. Woodlands offer more than an outdoor classroom. They offer space, a spontaneous experience, freedom, a place to explore and a place to get lost in safety. For many in The Mersey Forest area, the opportunities for this sort of experience are very limited and it is important that access to and information about the Forest is available to individuals and groups of all ages, not just the young.



Some educational initiatives should include the wider community: pond dipping at Risley Moss

10.5 In addition, The Mersey Forest will offer practical study opportunities to those in higher and adult education, and links with several institutions have already been established. For each of the past 2 years, a 2-day seminar for the public on The Mersey Forest has been held in conjunction with the University of Liverpool's Centre for Continuing Education. The ideas behind community forestry must gradually be integrated into practical courses in countryside management, sport and recreation and the arts, as well as woodland skills.

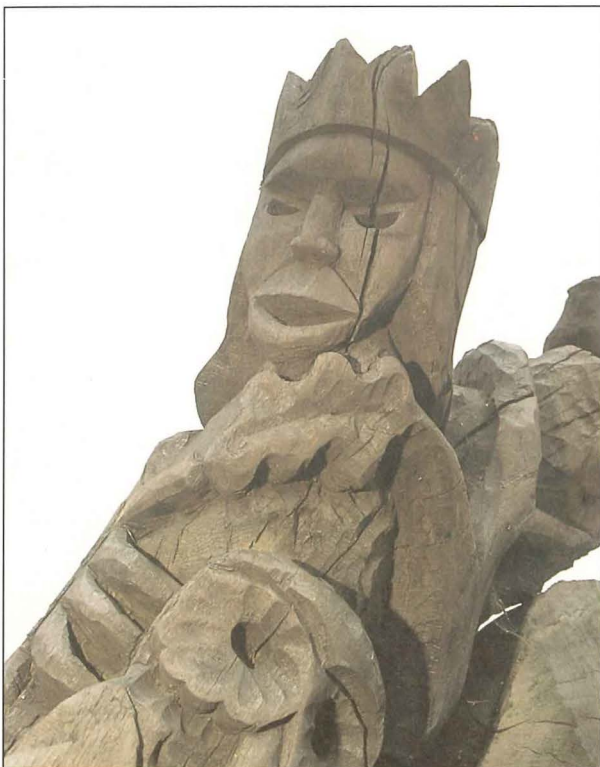
10.6 It is also important that facilities are available for the wider community to learn about community forestry and its many facets, and provision must be made for this in the design of interpretation and visitor facilities and in general promotions.

11.1 Art can be the tool, vehicle and inspiration for community involvement. It can motivate people to care for and understand their environment. Art creates interest and atmosphere, can reflect an area's cultural individuality and can attract people into a region. It can capture the imagination in a way that plantations of young trees fail to do and can make an important contribution to changing the image of the Forest area.

11.2 There is already a strong arts and crafts tradition in The Mersey Forest area. National institutions, such as the Tate and Walker Galleries in Liverpool, as well as other regional and local institutions, are represented and offer opportunities for 'outreach' programmes as the Forest is established.

R26 The partners will work closely with the North West Arts Board, community arts organisations and schools to integrate the arts into all aspects of the development and use of the Forest.

11.3 There is, of course, a wide range of arts projects that can be incorporated into the Forest environment – music, drama, dance, painting, sculpture, creative writing and craft-based activities – and it is hoped that all will make a contribution to the development of the Forest. They also offer opportunities to interpret and enjoy the Forest in new ways, to celebrate the special environment of the Forest and create employment.



Part of a community archway at Furey Wood, Northwich

11.4 The Forest will act as a venue for the performing arts, either in natural outdoor spaces or in buildings suitable for the purpose. In addition, artists and craftspeople have a contribution to make to the fabric of the Forest in terms of both environmental art and design of furniture, signposts and waymarking used within the Forest, much of the raw materials for which will come from within the Forest.

11.5 There is also a role for artists in helping visitors to appreciate the spirit of a place through passive interpretation (exhibition spaces, guide leaflets) and in a more active way through theatre pieces or woodcraft workshops. There are many fine examples of how art can be used to interpret forest areas in, for example, the Forest of Dean or the Grizedale Forest projects.

11.6 At the centre of an approach to arts in the Forest must be the participation and communication that comes through community arts projects. Projects based on local neighbourhoods and groups which develop interpretive projects and create permanent or temporary pieces of art will help to secure long-term relationships between individuals, communities and the Forest. It is important that sufficient commitment is made to all of these projects to allow them to be of a high standard and that they considerably enhance the Forest area.

R27 The partner authorities will give consideration to the application of a 'per cent for art' principle, where this is appropriate.



A scene from 'Branching Out', a Mersey Forest arts project in 1993

12. MATURE WOODLAND

12.1 The mature woodland cover within the Forest area is an important, but scarce, resource that is in decline. It is very important that this situation is reversed at the start of the Forest's development in order that these woods can play their full role alongside the new woodlands. The historic lack of management is due to a variety of factors, including few appropriate timber markets and a poor economic return, a lack of forestry expertise and little interest in the commercial management of woodlands on farms.

R28 The partners will support the management and regeneration of mature woodlands by developing mechanisms for the:

- *dissemination of advice and information;*
- *investigation of new timber-marketing opportunities, assistance to owners in accessing markets and other revenue-producing initiatives;*
- *promotion of the management grants available as part of the Forestry Authority's Woodland Grant Scheme.*

12.2 The high cost of bringing some neglected woodlands under management is a major disincentive. The present grant structure supports the continued management of woodlands, but may

be insufficient to promote the restoration of neglected woods, particularly those overgrown with rhododendron scrub. Mechanisms for funding the restoration of neglected woodlands will be investigated.

R29 Access into existing woodlands will be encouraged, where appropriate, and supported through the use of grants from the Countryside Commission, Forestry Authority and other bodies.

12.3 The existing population of mature trees in the urban areas within the Forest also makes an important contribution to the Forest.

R30 The urban tree stock will be managed and protected, where appropriate, when affected by development proposals. The loss of individual mature trees through development will normally be discouraged.

12.4 Ancient and semi-natural ancient woodlands are an irreplaceable resource that merits early action by identification, targeting and special management practices. It is not just the trees that are important, but the whole ecosystem containing many plants and animals that are the last remnants of former extensive natural forests. They are an important reserve of woodland species which may over time recolonise new woodlands or act as a resource for seed.



Existing mature woodland forms an important part of the Forest: Owley Wood, Vale Royal

Regeneration should generally avoid the introduction of new genetic material, and, where appropriate, techniques such as natural regeneration or growing stock from seeds collected on site will be required. Every opportunity should be taken to extend the area of these woodlands using the same techniques.

R31 Ancient and semi-natural ancient woodlands should be managed to protect and perpetuate the particular ecological value of each woodland.

12.5 Existing woodlands are an important wildlife resource which should be carefully assessed before management works are carried out. Practices set out in the Forestry Commission's *Forest Nature Conservation Guidelines* (1990) and English Nature's *Nature Conservation and the New Lowland Forests* (1991) should be followed. Complete clear felling will not be favoured as an option for woodland regeneration since this will remove the woodland from the landscape and cause a complete change in wildlife habitat.

13. WOODLAND PRODUCTS AND INDUSTRIES

13.1 Landowners who plant trees as part of The Mersey Forest will do so for a variety of reasons. It is likely that future income from the trees will feature somewhere in their list of design parameters, but it will not always be dominant. For farmers, financial return will often be a high priority, but for local authorities and corporate landowners it will probably be less so and other considerations will take priority. However, almost certainly, some income from the woodlands will be needed, if only to help essential management and maintenance costs, and opportunities to raise this must be available.

R32 Woodlands within The Mersey Forest should be designed and managed to produce high quality timber, other management objectives and site conditions permitting.

13.2 At present, timber production in the Forest area is very low, most existing woodlands contain only poor quality timber and there are few local markets. Outlets for softwood and some hardwood timber do exist outside the area and good quality hardwood can almost always find a market. However, these markets are not always easily accessible and new and existing timber growers will need advice and support in finding outlets for their products.

R33 The partners will seek to provide support for growers to access existing timber markets and will investigate new mechanisms for marketing timber.

13.3 It is essential that more effort, amongst national and local organisations, is put into expanding the market for timber, through encouraging use both in product design and of local timber in the manufacture of existing products.

13.4 Hooke Park, in Dorset, run by the Parnham Trust provided an example of how a low-value timber, in this case small roundwood thinnings, can be transformed into high-value products through good design and the use of modern technology.

13.5 Other products, apart from timber, are available from well-managed woodlands, and they can also provide the basis for income-generating activities. The New Uses for Vacant Industrial Land (NUVIL) project in Knowsley is finding demand for its fast-rotation coppice (willow) and is developing markets for wood chips as a mulch and for other purposes. Much of the charcoal sold in this country is imported, and there are potentially markets for western red cedar and other species as foliage. If possible, facilities for workshops for wood turners, cabinet makers and other timber-based craft businesses will be included within some Forest sites.

13.6 Landlife has had good success in producing and marketing seed of wild flowers, many of them woodland species, and has a pilot bluebell project to achieve a sustainable source of native bulbs in the long term.

R34 Traditional and innovative products and business opportunities will be investigated by the partners and, where appropriate, their development will be encouraged.



The ability to access timber markets is extremely important

13. WOODLAND PRODUCTS AND INDUSTRIES

13.7 Finally, there is growing support for the development of energy forestry (biomass) where fast-growing willow and poplar are grown and cropped on a short rotation for use as chips in solid-fuel boilers. The system offers environmental benefits because there is no net addition to carbon in the atmosphere and is being encouraged by the Energy Technology Support Unit, of the Department of Trade and Industry.

R35 The partners will closely monitor the development of biomass-based energy systems and, where appropriate, encourage their adoption by energy users and potential growers alike.



Traditional skills will be encouraged: Pole lathe turning

14. DESIGN

14.1 The Mersey Forest sets out to achieve all its objectives within the context of a positive and fundamental change in the landscape of the area. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that the Forest is designed to the highest possible standards.

14.2 Woodland design is very different from other forms of design in that the final product will not emerge for many years, during which it will go through a long period of management and change. For this reason, design and management are bound together. The designer must therefore understand the process of growth and change, how it can be controlled and how it will be controlled – the design can be tailored to suit the anticipated level of management (concurrent with other design parameters). The cost of management will be a key factor.

R36 Design proposals for The Mersey Forest should demonstrate an understanding of long-term management costs.

14.3 Many other factors will influence the design and all should be carefully assessed. These factors or parameters will include the capability of the site to support tree growth and other activities; existing use, history, wildlife and archaeology; the landscape, land use and planning context of the site; objectives for the site, especially community views where appropriate; finance available for the scheme; and its later establishment and management.

14.4 A careful analysis of the design parameters using a structured approach such as the SWOT technique (analysing parameters as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) will both benefit the process of design and enable a reassessment of the objectives for the site. It may well be that some objectives cannot be achieved on a site or are simply inappropriate or that the analysis reveals some previously unknown factors, such as existing use, wildlife or archaeological value.

14.5 Design is not confined to the actual woodland, but will include open spaces, recreational infrastructures, sports developments, car parks, formal areas, and wildlife areas – in fact, everything that community forests are about.

R37 The design of all aspects of The Mersey Forest should be carried out to a high standard and in accordance with the Forestry Commission's Community Woodland Design Guidelines (1991) and other guidance issued by the partner authorities.

14.6 Developing a local identity is very important to the creation of the Forest and to the people living in it. Replicating a bland species mix across the whole Forest will blanket the historic landscape and produce a boring uninteresting landscape. Design must take account of the landform, soil type, existing landscape features, etc, even when the landscape assessment has indicated that a new landscape structure is required. It must reflect and enhance the landscape base. The use of locally generated seed in woodland planting is a further aspect of design.

14.7 The clearly recognisable existing landscapes are the Sefton Coast, Knowsley Park, Lancashire Fenland, Cheshire Plain, Mossland, Delamere Forest, and Weaver Valley, but new landscapes can be built on other bases: St. Helens Coalfield, Mersey Estuary, Mersey Riverside, Mersey Valley farmland, Cheshire Plain rim, etc. Designers should look for the inherent features in despoiled landscapes and enhance them. Species choice will be determined by such factors as topography, rivers, depth of water table, soil type, the nature of the urban area and local climate. It will also inform people about that landscape. For example, pine is associated with dry land, ridges, sandstone and sand dunes: so, if pine is the dominant species at Delamere, Sefton Coast, Cheshire rim (sandstone outcrops) Ince Blundell, ridge tops at Prescott, Childwall and Allerton, people will make the connection and the areas will create their own identity. Similarly, willow, alder and poplar are associated with wet areas: edge of fenland, river banks, low-lying agricultural land. Birch and pine have a particular association with mossland. Oak is associated with clay soils and the Cheshire Plain. Such associations have developed historically and are closely linked to suitable species choice for the site.

14.8 A parallel can be drawn with position, shape and size of woodlands. The woodlands in the Weaver Valley occur principally on the steep slopes of the valley sides and are therefore long narrow woods. In the Bold Heath area, the designed landscape contains many long sinuous shelter-belt type woodlands. Historic parkland woods at Croxteth, Ince Blundell and Knowsley have a particular character relating to their size, shape and frequency in the landscape.

14.9 These factors can be used to place woodlands in the landscapes that enhance or create the landscape structure. The Mersey Valley between Runcorn Bridge and Warrington has already been changed by the development of industrial sites and landfill. The river now runs between low hills created by the landfill and these can be integrated into the landscape by extensive broadleaved woodland planting. This will ultimately produce a new, yet coherent and attractive, landscape for the river.

14.10 There is scope to create a large area of pine woodland on the open agricultural landscape to the north of the Mersey that has lost so much of its historic structure. Such a woodland would perform several different roles in the landscape by emphasising the higher ground, providing a positive edge to the Mersey Valley and complementing the Sefton Coast woodlands and Delamere Forest.

14.11 The local planting strategies in Chapter 15 contain policies that will develop local identity, but this should also be considered during the detailed design of each site with reference to the landscape strategy.

Landscape strategy

14.12 The landscape assessment was described in Chapter 3 (paragraphs 3.61 to 3.66). The landscape strategy indicates the scale, form and direction of desirable landscape change in the Forest area. It sets out a framework for the creation of new landscapes (where this is appropriate) and for the protection of valued landscapes.

14.13 The strategy (see Appendix B for details) uses the 54 landscape units as its building blocks. For each landscape unit a decision is taken about the broad direction of desirable change, by referring to three basic options:

- **maintaining the landscape character,**
- **restoring the landscape character,**
- **creating new landscapes.**



Local identity is an important element of design: Bluebell Woods, Knowsley

14. DESIGN

14.14 These decisions are based on the existing character, quality and condition of the landscape unit. Obviously, a severely degraded landscape unit with little landscape value and extensive dereliction will require the creation of new landscapes. On the other hand, an intact landscape of high quality should have its character maintained, with little change. Of course, some landscape units have a more complex character than others.

14.15 By combining the basic categories, three further options can be created:

- **create and restore.**
- **maintain and restore.**
- **maintain and create.**

14.16 Often, adjacent units fall into the same option and by grouping them together the landscape strategy emerges. The strategy is explained in greater detail in Appendix B.

THE MERSEY FOREST

FOREST STRATEGIES

15. Forest districts

Sefton

Liverpool

Knowsley

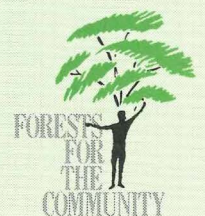
St. Helens

Halton

Warrington

Vale Royal

Ellesmere Port & Neston



Introduction

The Forest has been divided into eight local authority districts, only for presentation purposes. Each district should be seen as part of the whole Forest. Cross-boundary links, projects and policies are an essential component of The Mersey Forest concept.

Each local planting strategy is described in terms of three target levels of woodland cover, guiding principles for the development of the Forest in each district and geographically located policies and opportunities.

The target levels of proposed woodland cover are indicated on the area plans, but not discussed individually in the text. The exact percentage of woodland cover achieved within any percentage band will depend on a number of local factors, including existing land use, and landscape quality, more detailed proposals for implementation, land ownership and opportunities for tree planting.

The proposed woodland cover is:

- 10–20%: agriculturally dominated areas, principally in the ‘maintain’ and ‘restore’ landscape categories, but some are in the ‘create’ category where this is appropriate. In the mostly flat landscapes they will appear to have good woodland cover and will be noticeably more wooded than similar areas outside the Forest boundary.
- 20–30%: these are mostly urban fringe agricultural areas in the ‘create’ landscape category, urban fringe areas with a high level of non-woodland uses, such as golf courses, and also agricultural landscape where a higher level of woodland planting is appropriate in the ‘maintain and create’ landscape category. Woodlands will coalesce in the landscape to create the feel of a forest. The term ‘well wooded’ applies to this level of cover.
- 30% plus: these are principally urban-fringe areas with a high level of derelict or despoiled land and existing woodland areas where additional woodland cover is appropriate. Except for existing woodlands, these areas are all within the ‘create’ or ‘maintain and create’ landscape categories. They will give the feel of being in the heart of a forest area, although there will still be plenty of open land for other activities.

Each local planting strategy also contains other information relevant to the location of trees and woodlands. Transport routes targeted for tree planting, heritage landscapes, areas of high landscape value, Knowsley’s landscape opportunity areas and the Sefton Coast planning zone are all shown.

Areas where planting is considered to be inappropriate for landscape and ecological reasons are also shown and referred to by a numbered policy.

The statements of guiding principles indicate general policies for the implementation of the Forest within each district. They are the broad aims for the location and treatment of the existing and new woodland resource. These are developed in the more detailed policies and opportunities which correspond to numbered locations on the plans.

Background and analysis

Sefton contains three regions: the coast, Lancashire Plain and Liver conurbation. These include a variety of landscapes, but all are low lying and relatively flat. The coastal region consists of wide beaches backed by an extensive sand dune system, running into a thin strip of poor quality agricultural land and then into the fenland of the Lancashire Plain. Urban development has taken place on the edge of the dunes at Formby and Hightown and there are other non-agricultural uses, such as a firing range, airfield and golf courses. The planting of pine trees at the turn of the century to stabilise the dune system has produced a characteristic landscape of dune and pine woodlands around Formby. Agriculture on the poor soils has urban-fringe uses such as horse grazing, and poor quality fences have given rise to a neglected appearance.

The Lancashire Plain region lies inland from the coastal region and sweeps round the edge of the Liver conurbation. It is divided into two parts: the fenland area east of Hightown and running up the Alt; and a slightly raised area of boulder clay and Shirdley Hill sands stretching from Ince Blundell round through Lunt, Sefton, Maghull and Lydiate. The fenland landscape is very distinctive, flat, wide-open regular fields, ditches instead of hedges, scattered farmsteads and a few regular-shaped woodlands. The higher ground is a mixture of large-scale agriculture (which is losing its historic structure through agricultural intensification and urban influences), wooded parkland at Crosby and Ince Blundell and the town of Maghull, which lies on a communications route stretching from Liverpool to Ormskirk and up into Lancashire. Extensive tipping to the west of Maghull has altered the landscape where the fenland running up the Alt meets the higher land.

The Liver conurbation has spread out across the coastal and Lancashire Plain regions, but it is not a solid urban area. There are fingers of open space and neglected/derelict land stretching from the edge into the urban area, such as Rimrose Valley and Netherton, Aintree sidings.

These open spaces (and the urban fringe itself) offer tremendous scope for the creation of the Forest and for improving the quality of adjacent urban areas. But at the moment they have a detrimental effect on the appearance of the

conurbation because they are either neglected, derelict or lack management resources.

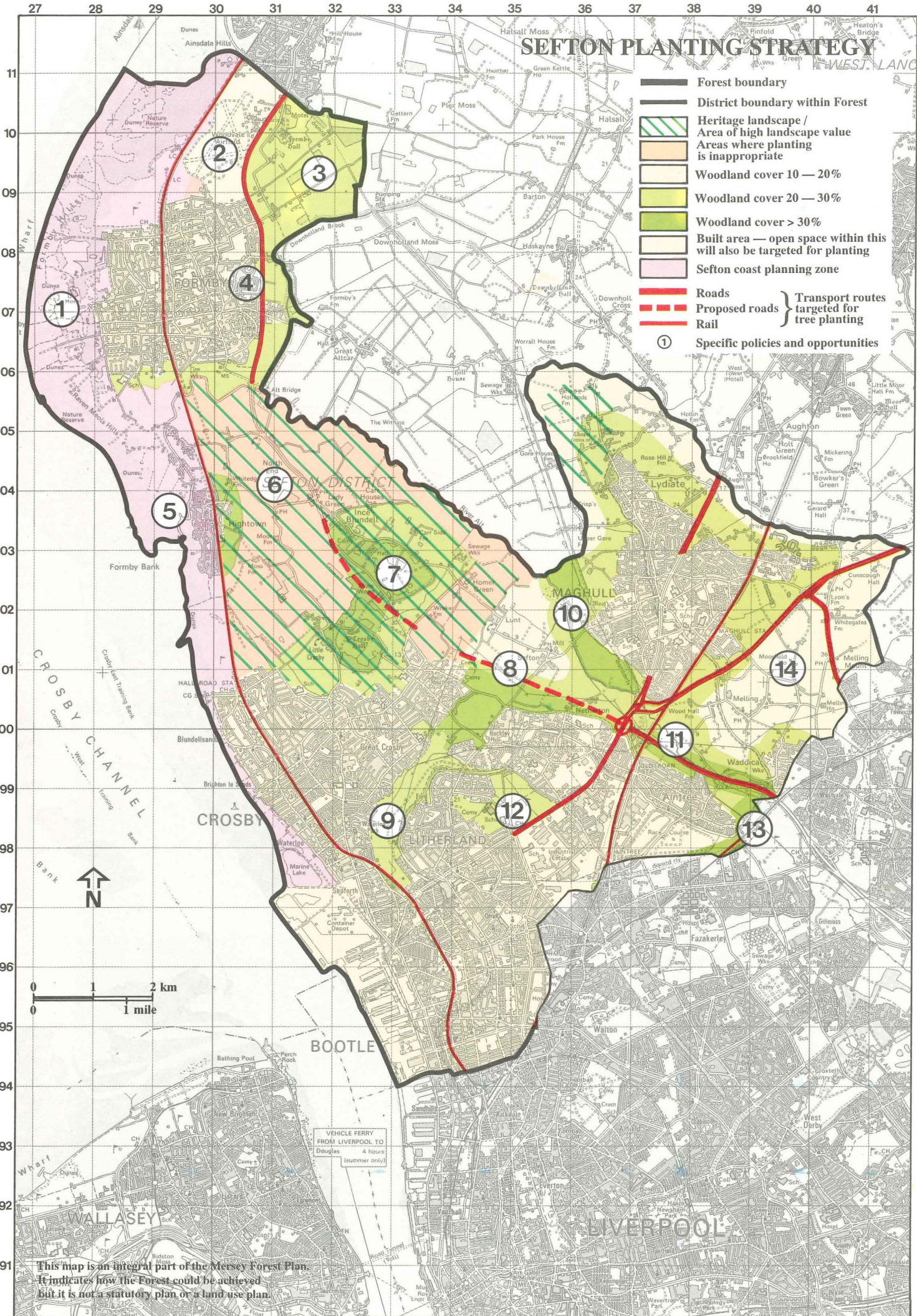
They have many unsightly uses, agriculture tends to be low quality giving rise to poor, weedy pasture; there are gappy fences of barbed wire and corrugated iron. The incidence of grade 1 and grade 2 land gives rise to cabbages next to houses; vandalism and trespass also reduce the visual quality and put strains on management. As important as these other factors is the unsatisfactory change from urban to rural structure. Where houses end, large-scale open agriculture begins, or there are large empty gaps within the urban area. This change in scale and proportion in the landscape is sometimes harsh and ugly. Woodland bridges the gap between the two landscapes, being structurally similar to urban areas, yet part of a rural landscape.

There are a number of Heritage Landscapes and Conservation Areas; the coastline is a special planning zone and most open land is within the green belt. The main area of wildlife interest is the coastal sand dune system and there is a resident population of red squirrels within the woodlands of Formby and Crosby. Measures to protect and extend the range of the red squirrels will include areas of land left unplanted, use of pine species and the use of small-seeded broadleaved trees.



Fenland, east of Hightown

SEFTON PLANTING STRATEGY



- Forest boundary
- District boundary within Forest
- Heritage landscape / Area of high landscape value
- Areas where planting is inappropriate
- Woodland cover 10 — 20%
- Woodland cover 20 — 30%
- Woodland cover > 30%
- Built area — open space within this will also be targeted for planting
- Sefton coast planning zone
- Roads
- Proposed roads
- Rail
- Transport routes targeted for tree planting
- Specific policies and opportunities

This map is an integral part of the Mersey Forest Plan. It indicates how the Forest could be achieved but it is not a statutory plan or a land use plan.

Guiding principles

- Support the management, regeneration and, where appropriate, extension of existing woodlands at Formby, Ince Blundell and Little Crosby.
- Create a well-wooded landscape on the urban periphery and on the large areas of open space extending into the urban area.
- Enhance the surrounding agricultural landscape which has lost a great deal of its original structure; but the fenland areas are not appropriate for new planting.

Policies and opportunities

Numbers refer to the 'Sefton planting strategy' map.

S1 Follow the *Sefton Coast Management Plan* (Sefton MBC 1989) for the dune system and the woodlands around Formby. Conserve and protect the open dune system, manage and replace the ageing pine woodlands in a phased programme. Seek new sites for planting around the fringes of Formby. Principal tree species: pine.

S2 The presence of the aerodrome at Woodvale precludes significant tree planting. There is scope for improvement of the agricultural landscape to the north of the airfield. Extension of lowland heath areas should be encouraged where possible.

S3 The area around Formby Hall has the appearance of neglected urban-fringe farmland. Restore and manage existing hedges and woodlands, carry out new planting to create a wooded landscape: possible species are pine, willow and alder. Protect the heritage landscape at Formby Hall.

S4 Maximise opportunities for tree planting along the A565 from the Alt Bridge roundabout to Southport.

S5 Plant trees planting around the fringes of Hightown, especially on the landward edge. Principal species: pine. Protect the existing open dune system.

S6 It is inappropriate to carry out large-scale tree planting within the fenland areas east of Hightown and along the River Alt. Manage

existing woodlands. Support small-scale tree planting (in accordance with NRA guidelines) adjacent to the Alt to identify its line in the landscape. Do not carry out further tree planting along the existing A565. Biomass cropping would be acceptable in this area.

S7 Protect the conservation area landscape around Crosby and Ince Blundell. Support management and phased replacement of existing woodlands. Carry out new planting where compatible with the heritage landscape and as replacement for woodland felled for the new link road.

S8 Seek extensive tree planting as part of the landscaping for the new A565 to Switch Island link road. Create woodland between the new link road and the urban edge.

S9 Support extensive woodland planting in the Rimrose Valley as part of Sefton Borough Council's development plans.

S10 Plant trees on the Sefton Meadows landfill sites to create large areas of woodland between Maghull and the conurbation. They will also demarcate the edge of the fenland area running up the Alt Valley.

S11 Look for opportunities for tree planting along the M58 and M57 corridors. Create an 'in the Forest' landscape around Switch Island.

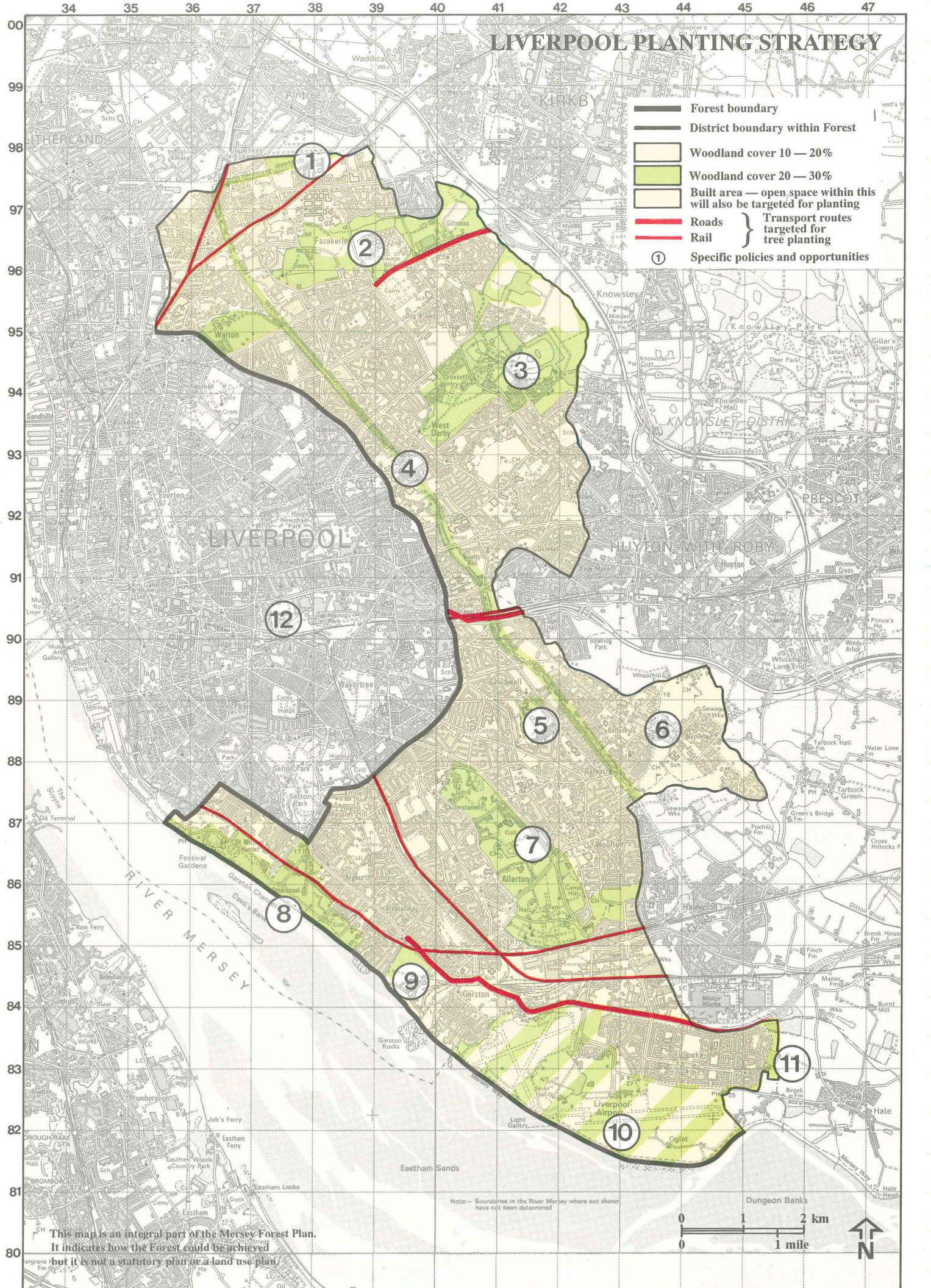
S12 Create a woodland structure for the large area of open space at Netherton and provide a woodland link to the Rimrose Valley and open space along the canal.

S13 Work with Liverpool City Council and Knowsley MBC to create a well-wooded forest area running back into the urban fringe from the M57 along the canal and railway corridor at Aintree.

S14 Support the creation of small and medium-scale woodlands and hedgerow restoration in the large-scale agricultural landscape surrounding Maghull and Melling. Special care in design will be required around the conservation area at Sefton and the proposed conservation area at Lunt.

LIVERPOOL PLANTING STRATEGY

- Forest boundary
- District boundary within Forest
- Woodland cover 10 — 20%
- Woodland cover 20 — 30%
- Built area — open space within this will also be targeted for planting
- Roads } Transport routes targeted for tree planting
- Rail }
- Specific policies and opportunities



Note: Boundaries in the River Mersey where not shown have not been determined

This map is an integral part of the Mersey Forest Plan.
It indicates how the Forest could be achieved
but it is not a statutory plan or a land use plan

Background and analysis

Liverpool differs from the other seven districts because it is urbanised with few large areas of open land and little agriculture. Topography is only of limited significance in Liverpool's urban landscape and the influence of the long estuary shoreline does not spread far into the city. Urban development has taken over the underlying natural landscape of the Lancashire Plain in the north and Mersey Valley in the south. The most notable features remaining are Mossley Hill (which is well wooded), the wooded Allerton to Childwall ridge (viewed from the M62 approach to the city) and the open land associated with Fazakerley Brook. Many of the trees on the Calderstones/Woolton/Mossley Hill Ridges are the same age (175 years). These over-mature trees are coming to the end of their lives and will need renewal.

Although Liverpool contains areas of attractive landscape (eg Otterspool and Allerton/Calderstones/Woolton green wedge) and many highway trees, landscape quality in the urban areas, particularly on the edge of the city, is often poor. There is a lack of landscape structure and some areas are characterised by large housing estates and scattered treeless open spaces. This lack of structure can be described as tears in the urban fabric. Where mature tree cover exists, as at Croxteth Country Park and Calderstones Park, the quality is good.

A key role for the Forest is to repair the tears, providing a unified landscape and thereby a significant improvement in the image of the city and the quality of the environment for its residents.

There are some significant areas of open land and derelict land which can be used to bring the Forest into the city. The coast south of the city centre is, for the most part, open, including Festival Gardens, Otterspool Park, the northern airfield, Speke Hall and Liverpool Airport. Opportunities for planting on the airfield sites will be influenced by future decisions about development. Fazakerley Brook runs through a large area of open land for which Liverpool City Council has approved proposals for a woodland framework. Croxteth Country Park is already substantially wooded, but there is scope for further planting. The loop line is very important both as a recreational route and as a major woodland linking a chain of open-space sites across the city from Gateacre to Aintree.

Other areas of opportunity for creating the Forest may arise in the future. Liverpool's population and economic activity has been falling since the 1960s, leading to less pressure for development and an increase in vacant land.

The area of the city within the outer ring road (Queens Drive) has been excluded from The Mersey Forest because it is highly developed. Queens Drive, like other dual carriageways leading into the city, would benefit from the reintroduction of avenue planting where these features have been lost.

The main areas of open land are Victorian parks whose landscapes are of historic value. However, the continuing restructuring of the inner city may well generate new areas of open land which would benefit from woodland-scale tree planting and offer the opportunity to extend the Forest into the heart of the city.

Guiding principles

- Extend The Mersey Forest into the city from the urban edge by planting on all appropriate and available sites.
- Provide a woodland framework for the redevelopment of derelict and neglected land.
- Use corridors of open land along the Mersey Coast, within Fazakerley, Croxteth and along the loop line, to create 'green fingers' bringing the Forest into the heart of the city.
- Protect, manage and, where appropriate, extend the existing woodland on the main sandstone ridge in south Liverpool.

Policies and opportunities

Numbers refer to the 'Liverpool planting strategy' map.

L1 Create a woodland corridor along Fazakerley sidings linking to woodland in Sefton and Knowsley, to provide a new setting for development and informal open space.

L2 Support Liverpool City's plans for Fazakerley Ecology Park as a major area of wooded open space and woodland setting for new development.

L3 Support the management of existing woodlands at Croxteth Country Park, including Mull Wood Local Nature Reserve, and the creation of new woodlands as appropriate to the landscape and the development of this significant resource.

15. FOREST DISTRICT: Liverpool

L4 Support the completion of the Loop Line Nature Park as a major recreational route and green corridor linking the urban area to the countryside. Integrate and create woodlands and wooded parklands at all available and appropriate sites adjacent to the line.

L5 Support the management of existing woodlands and, where appropriate, extend planting on the open land at Childwall. (A detailed planning framework is under preparation by Liverpool City Council, indicating appropriate sites.)

L6 Promote tree planting on the two golf courses and any other open land at Netherly. Work with Knowsley Borough Council to create a well-wooded landscape on the urban edge.

L7 Support the management of existing woodlands and increase woodland cover, as appropriate, on the parkland and other open space at Calderstones and Allerton.

L8 Support the management of existing woodlands and increase woodland cover as appropriate on the parkland and other open space at Otterspool and Festival Gardens.

L9 Protect appropriate areas of existing woodland in future redevelopment at Garston Dock and create a woodland framework as a new setting for development.

L10 If major redevelopment takes place at Liverpool Airport and the northern airfield, seek extensive woodland planting as part of the proposals. If redevelopment proves not to be a short-term possibility, seek to develop appropriate short-term and permanent woodland areas along the coast.

L11 Work with adjacent local authorities to expand and manage Mill Wood to create a significant area of woodland park on the city boundary serving Speke.

L12 As the continuing restructuring of Liverpool's inner areas takes place, seek opportunities to establish new areas of temporary and permanent new woodland on appropriate cleared and open land within the inner area of the city at present outside the Forest boundary.



Liverpool Loop Line

Background and analysis

Knowsley spans four landscape regions. It has a north–south orientation and crosses from the Lancashire Plain to the Mersey Valley. Superimposed on these in the middle of the Borough are the eastern edge of the Liverpool conurbation and the western edge of the St. Helens coalfield.

Before the Second World War, Knowsley had a rural character, containing only the small town of Prescott and villages of Huyton and Knowsley. Since then, there has been rapid urban growth and infrastructure developments, reaching a peak in the 1960s and early 1970s. Latterly, the pace of development has slowed down and population decline and loss of employment opportunities have had a severe impact.

The most significant landscape change occurred in the north of the borough with the development of Kirkby and the Knowsley Industrial Park on the Lancashire Plain. This urban area is separated from the Liverpool conurbation by a narrow strip of open land along the M57 corridor. Kirkby has few mature trees or woodlands, but does have some large areas of public open space. The industrial estate is one of the largest in Europe, recognition of the problems of unfilled sites and lack of a landscape structure led to the development of the NUVIL project to plant woodland and biomass on the empty sites.

To the north and east of Kirkby is the flat open farmland of the Lancashire Plain, consisting of large arable fields and scattered woodlands. Most of the mossland areas have been drained for agriculture, but Simonswood Moss, lying outside the boundary of the Forest, is being worked for peat.

To the south of this area lies Knowsley Park, it is on the edge of the Lancashire Plain, but has a very different landscape character from the Plain. The park is heavily wooded and the extensive planting around the perimeter wall gives the impression of a large area of forest.

The boundary between the Lancashire Plain and Mersey Valley regions is overlain by the towns of Huyton and Prescott. These two towns are the edges of larger urban areas: Liverpool in the west and St. Helens coalfield in the east. A small area of open land along the M57 corridor provides a break between the two areas and is an important strategic link between the north and south of the borough.

The town of Prescott is characterised by its historic core and mature treescape. It lies on a low hill which is one of a series of north–south ripples

running through the coalfield area and ending at Childwall. The hill dips down to the M62 and from here land slopes gently down to the Mersey Estuary through the Tarbock agricultural area. The former Cronton Colliery is the most visible westward extent of the coalfield area. Adjacent is the M57/M62/A5080 interchange.

An area of open land extends along the M62 towards Liverpool, ending at Bowring Park. It has a variety of urban-fringe uses, but provides an important green wedge into the urban fringe. A smaller but similar area occurs between Netherley and Halewood.

The agricultural area around Tarbock, extends to Cronton and south of the A561 towards Hale. It is virtually surrounded by urban development and is crossed by road and rail routes and pylon lines. The urban influence combined with agricultural change has led to a loss of landscape structure, but some hedges, hedgerows trees and small woodlands remain. There are many small conservation areas based on the historic farming settlements.

Halewood lies to the west of the open agricultural area. It is typical of much of the overspill housing areas constructed on the edge of Liverpool and exhibits many of the common urban–rural conflicts. Halewood Country Park, whose woodland has arisen through natural regeneration on disused railway land, is an example of buffer woodland and parkland that could be created on the urban edge.

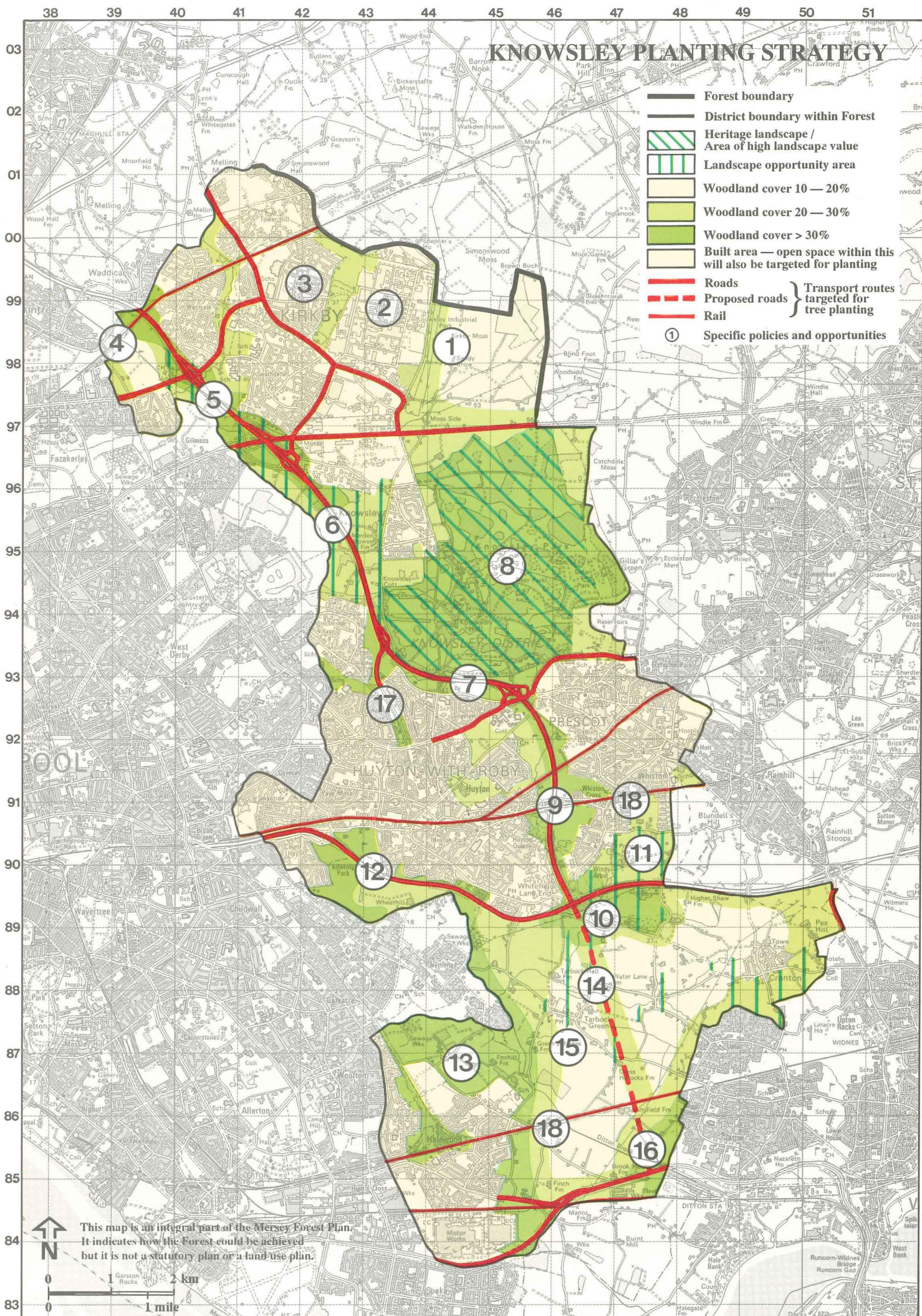
Knowsley was christened the ‘Wildflower Borough’ in 1992 and the wild flower landscapes have won four major awards in 2 years.

Guiding principles

- Create a major woodland corridor along the M57 and M62 motorways. This is the key woodland area in Merseyside as it has the heavily wooded Knowsley Park at its centre and links to woodland planting in Sefton, Liverpool and St. Helens.
- Provide a woodland buffer around the urban edge and create a well-wooded landscape within the fingers of open land enclosed by the urban area.
- Provide a new woodland structure for Kirkby and the Knowsley Industrial Park.
- Reconstruct and enhance the agricultural landscapes in the Cronton/Tarbock/Hale area.
- Transform urban green space into woodland where appropriate and as opportunities arise.

KNOWSLEY PLANTING STRATEGY

- Forest boundary
 - District boundary within Forest
 - Heritage landscape / Area of high landscape value
 - Landscape opportunity area
 - Woodland cover 10 — 20%
 - Woodland cover 20 — 30%
 - Woodland cover > 30%
 - Built area — open space within this will also be targeted for planting
 - Roads
 - Proposed roads
 - Rail
 - Specific policies and opportunities
- Transport routes targeted for tree planting**



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Policies and opportunities

Numbers refer to the 'Knowsley planting strategy' map.

K1 Carry out woodland planting on the periphery of the Knowsley Industrial Park, extending westward into the housing area. Where appropriate, plant copses, and small woodlands and restore hedges in the surrounding agricultural landscape. It is not appropriate to plant new woodland on the mossland areas.

K2 Continue and support the NUVIL project on the Knowsley Industrial Park and extend to other industrial areas. Continue and support the development of the Landlife Wildflower Project.

K3 Plant trees on open land within Kirkby to provide a new landscape structure and woodland setting for the built environment.

K4 Work with Liverpool City Council and Sefton MBC to create a well-wooded area at the Borough boundary from the M57 along the canal and railway corridor at Aintree.

K5 Create an 'in the Forest' landscape for the M57 motorway from the A580 junction north to the Borough boundary. Extend planting into the urban area along the Bank Brook and Kirkby Brook Valley. Work with Liverpool City Council to develop a wooded setting for development, should any take place at Gilmoor.

K6 Create a well-wooded appearance to the land adjacent to the M57 towards Croxteth and at Knowsley Village whilst maintaining views out from the motorway.

K7 Create an 'in the Forest' landscape for the M57 from the M62 junction northwards to Littlewood. Connect planting into the adjacent urban area and Knowsley Park.

K8 Protect woodland assets within Knowsley Park.

K9 Continue and support the creation of wooded parkland on either side of the M57 in and around Stadt Moers Park.

K10 Create a well-wooded landscape around the M62–M57 junction and establish a woodland setting for any development at Cronton Colliery.

K11 Extend woodland planting northwards up the hill to Whiston. Pay special regard to the historic Halsnead parkland.

K12 Create a well-wooded area and 'in the Forest landscape' for the M62 corridor west of the junction with the M57.

K13 Create a well-wooded area around the periphery of Netherley and Halewood, extending to the loop line at Gateacre.

K14 Carry out structural tree planting to integrate the proposed A5300 link road into the surrounding landscape.

K15 Plant small to medium-scale woodlands and restore the hedgerow structure to the agricultural area around Tarbock and Cronton, especially around Pex Hill Country Park.

K16 Create a well-wooded area at the A5300–A562 intersection and extend north and south along the borough boundary.

K17 Support the Alt 2000 project to enhance the River Alt catchment.

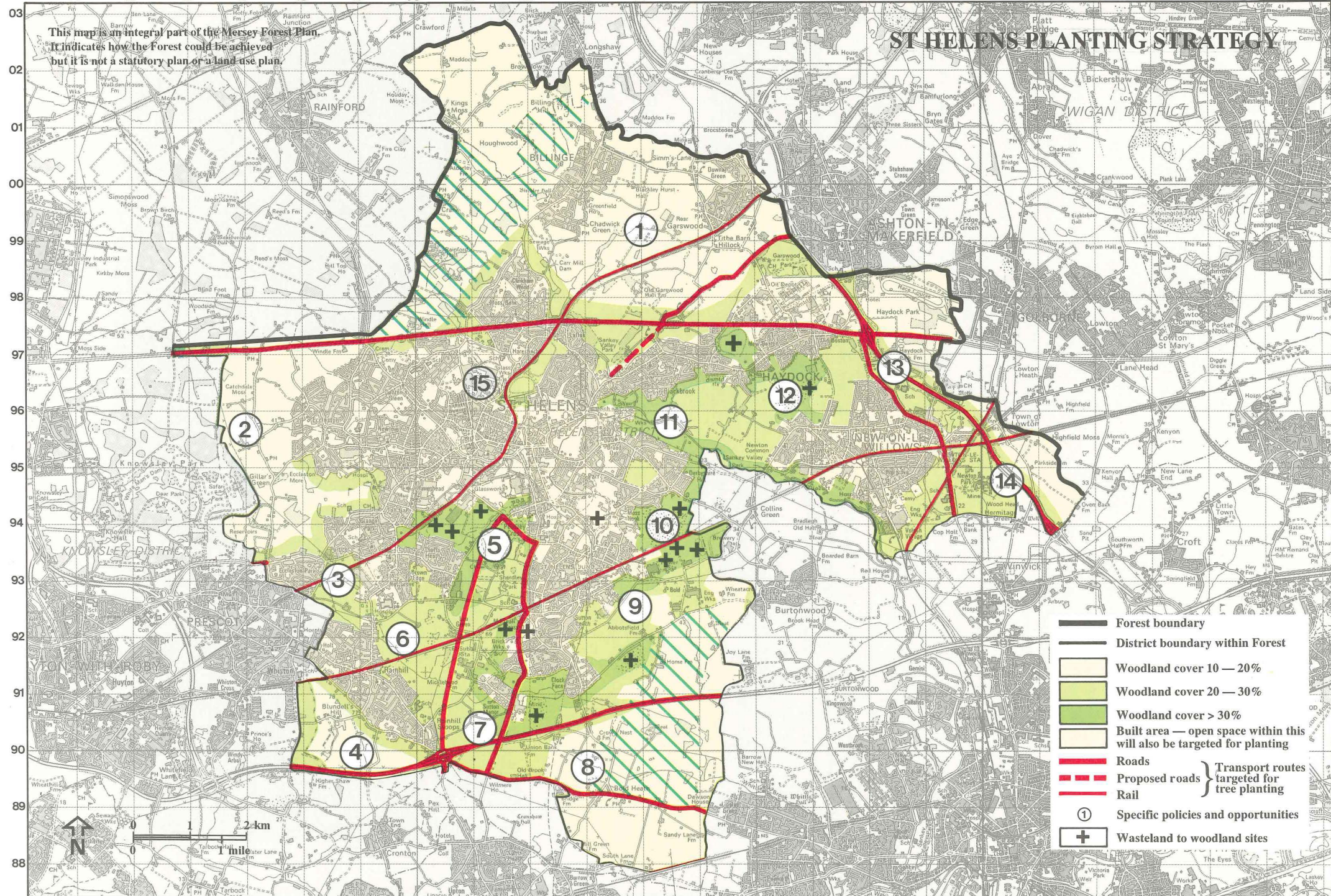
K18 Target the rail corridors cutting across Knowsley for tree planting.



Looking west towards Netherley

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ST HELENS PLANTING STRATEGY



	Forest boundary
	District boundary within Forest
	Woodland cover 10 — 20%
	Woodland cover 20 — 30%
	Woodland cover > 30%
	Built area — open space within this will also be targeted for planting
	Roads
	Proposed roads
	Rail
	} Transport routes targeted for tree planting
	Specific policies and opportunities
	Wasteland to woodland sites



Background and analysis

The landscape assessment placed most of the district within one region: the St. Helens coalfield, which is characterised by the urban nature of the area. This overlays the natural landscape of the Lancashire Plain and Mersey Valley regions. A small area of Lancashire Plain occurs in the north-west of the District and the open agricultural land in the south-east is within the Mersey Valley region.

The landform is gently rolling, but rises steeply in the north at Billinge Hill. South of St. Helens, the land slopes gently down into the Mersey Valley. The large number of colliery tips in southern St. Helens and Haydock has made a significant impact on the landscape, creating an undulating landform in an otherwise flat area.

The nature of the urban area is very different from other urban areas in the Forest and has resulted from the development of the coalfield and related industries. Historically, the district was sparsely populated; as mines were developed, settlements grew up around them and these coalesced to form the present urban area. So the urban edge is highly convoluted, partially enclosing large areas of open and agricultural land.

Within the urban area, there are large open spaces, mainly tips or derelict land. Industrial sites are scattered and intermingled with housing areas and, indeed, a large industrial site is immediately adjacent to the city centre. The decline of the coal industry and related activities has left a legacy of derelict sites, disused infrastructure and a very poor quality urban environment. This is being addressed by initiatives such as Ravenhead Renaissance and Wasteland to Woodland. Both are partnerships between the local authority and private sector to regenerate the area.

The agricultural land near the urban edge has lost its historic structure through a combination of factors. These include trespass, vandalism, construction of railways and pylon lines, poor upkeep of hedges and buildings, horse-keeping and abandonment of cropping.

To the north of St. Helens, the landscape is more intact, but has lost some structure through urban influences and agricultural intensification. The basic hedgerow pattern is still visible, although in a poor condition.

The land to the south-east of St. Helens around Bold Heath and stretching north across the M62 is intensively farmed for cereals. This has caused a dramatic loss of hedgerows and landscape structure. However, the landscape of scattered woodlands on the borough boundary is a designed landscape created in the eighteenth century, rather than the remnants of the historically evolved landscape seen elsewhere.

Guiding principles

- Create a woodland structure based on large derelict sites in south and east St. Helens by supporting the Wasteland to Woodland project.
- Provide a woodland buffer around the urban edge.
- Extend planting into the urban area by taking advantage of appropriate open land and the greenway network based on existing watercourses.
- Provide a new woodland structure for the surrounding agricultural areas.

Policies and opportunities

Numbers refer to the 'St. Helens planting strategy' map.

SH1 In the agricultural area to the north of St. Helens, restore hedges and hedgerow trees, and plant copses and small woodlands within the existing field pattern. Increase the density and size of woodlands adjacent to the A580(T) and around the Haydock Industrial Estate. Careful design of layout will be required on the hillside.

SH2 In the agricultural area to the west of Eccleston, restore hedges and hedgerow trees, and plant small copses and woodlands.

SH3 Retain and manage existing woodland and create new woodlands as part of any redevelopment around Rainhill Hospital.

SH4 At Blundells Hill, plant copses and small woodlands within the existing agricultural landscape. Careful layout will be required on the hillside.

SH5 Carry out extensive planting along the new link road corridor and link to Wasteland to Woodland sites north of Thatto Heath.

15. FOREST DISTRICT: St. Helens

SH6 Create a well-wooded landscape on the open land to the east of Rainhill.

SH7 Create a sweep of woodland around the southern edge of the urban area from Marshalls Cross, through Sutton Manor to Clockface Colliery.

SH8 South of the M62, plant copses and small to medium-sized woodlands in balance with the open agricultural landscape. Support the management of existing woodlands in the east of this area.

SH9 Establish woodlands around the periphery of the urban fringe and industrial edge to the east of Sutton Leach.

SH10 Support the Wasteland to Woodland and Groundwork initiatives for the creation of a large area of woodland in the area of Bold Moss and Bold Power Station. Undertake any redevelopment in a woodland setting.

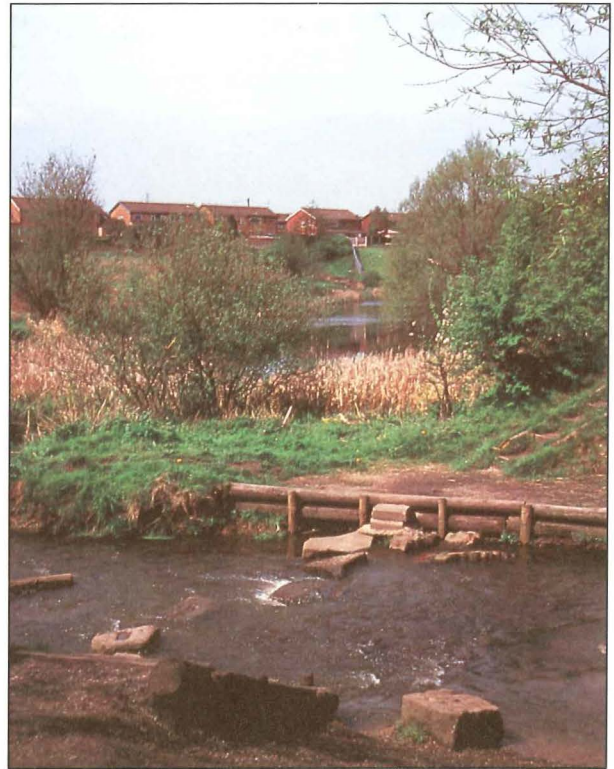
SH11 Carry out woodland planting in the Sankey Valley extending into the urban area and along the edge of Newton le Willows. Work with Warrington Borough to enhance the existing green corridor.

SH12 Create a well-wooded landscape in the open land between Blackbrook, Haydock, Newton le Willows and extending across the M6.

SH13 Create an 'in the Forest' landscape for the M6 motorway north from the Liverpool–Manchester Railway to the borough boundary; preserve some views out, especially towards the Race Course.

SH14 Create a well-wooded landscape for the area around Parkside Colliery.

SH15 Extend periphery planting into the urban area by planting on all available and appropriate sites, especially to create a new woodland setting for redevelopment of derelict or vacant sites. Concentrate early work on the proposed greenway network.



Sankey Valley Park running through St. Helens

Background and analysis

Halton mostly lies within the Mersey Valley region, but in the south-east corner it rises up to the Cheshire Plain. The district is dominated by the two towns of Widnes and Runcorn which lie on each bank of the Mersey and are linked by the Runcorn and Widnes road and railway bridges. Open agricultural land occurs to the west of Widnes around Hale and to the east of Runcorn around Moore and Daresbury.

The development of both towns has been based on the chemical industry. The Mersey crossing is a main focus for the transport network which has its roots in the waterway system – coal came down the St. Helens canal and salt down the River Weaver. Industry is concentrated on the river edge, with housing beyond.

The differences in the appearance of the two towns are linked to topography. On the north bank of the Mersey the land slopes gently down to the river. Industry has spread further back away from the river and the flatter land permitted the development of waste tips. The decline of chemical manufacturing has resulted in a significant number of empty or derelict sites. These, combined with the waste tips, remaining old industry and fringe uses, have created an uneven and very unattractive industrial area. This both dominates the town and cuts Widnes off from the river, so that generally the quality of the urban area is poor.

On the south bank of the river, Runcorn Hill has created a different urban landscape. The industrial area is more constrained to the edge of the river and much of the older town on the steeper slopes looks over the industrial area to the river beyond. There are no significant tip sites within the industrial area and far fewer empty or derelict sites.

The heathland on Runcorn Hill is an important area of natural open space within the town. The development of Runcorn New Town over the last 20 years has more than doubled the size of the town and is continuing to expand eastwards into the Keckwick Brook Valley. Areas of parkland and woodland have been retained within the development and form an important part of the landscape quality of the area.

The open agricultural area around Hale is still moderately intact. It is strongly influenced by the Mersey Estuary and there is an important area of marshland. The urban edge encroaches to the east and west, but northwards the area extends across the A592 into the Tarbock agricultural area.

The agricultural area around Moore exhibits a number of urban-fringe uses. Roads, railways and pylons dominate this landscape. To the south the land rises steeply up Keckwick Hill, which is an important landmark and viewpoint over the Mersey Valley.

Keckwick Hill marks the rim of the Cheshire Plain and south of this there is an agricultural landscape. Although under some urban pressure and in decline, this still exhibits some of the typical Cheshire Plain characteristics of hedgerows, hedgerow trees, ponds and small woodlands.

Guiding principles

- Provide a woodland buffer around the urban edge and create a wooded edge to the Mersey Estuary.
- Extend planting into the urban area using all appropriate and available open land, including derelict land.
- Provide a new woodland structure for surrounding agricultural areas.

Policies and opportunities

Numbers refer to the 'Halton planting strategy' map.

H1 Create a woodland structure along the corridor of open and development land running south from Pex Hill to the A562.

H2 Create a woodland structure on the reclaimed derelict sites and development areas between the A562 and the River Mersey. Create a wooded edge to the Mersey.

H3 Create a woodland corridor along the A562 extending into Knowsley Borough.

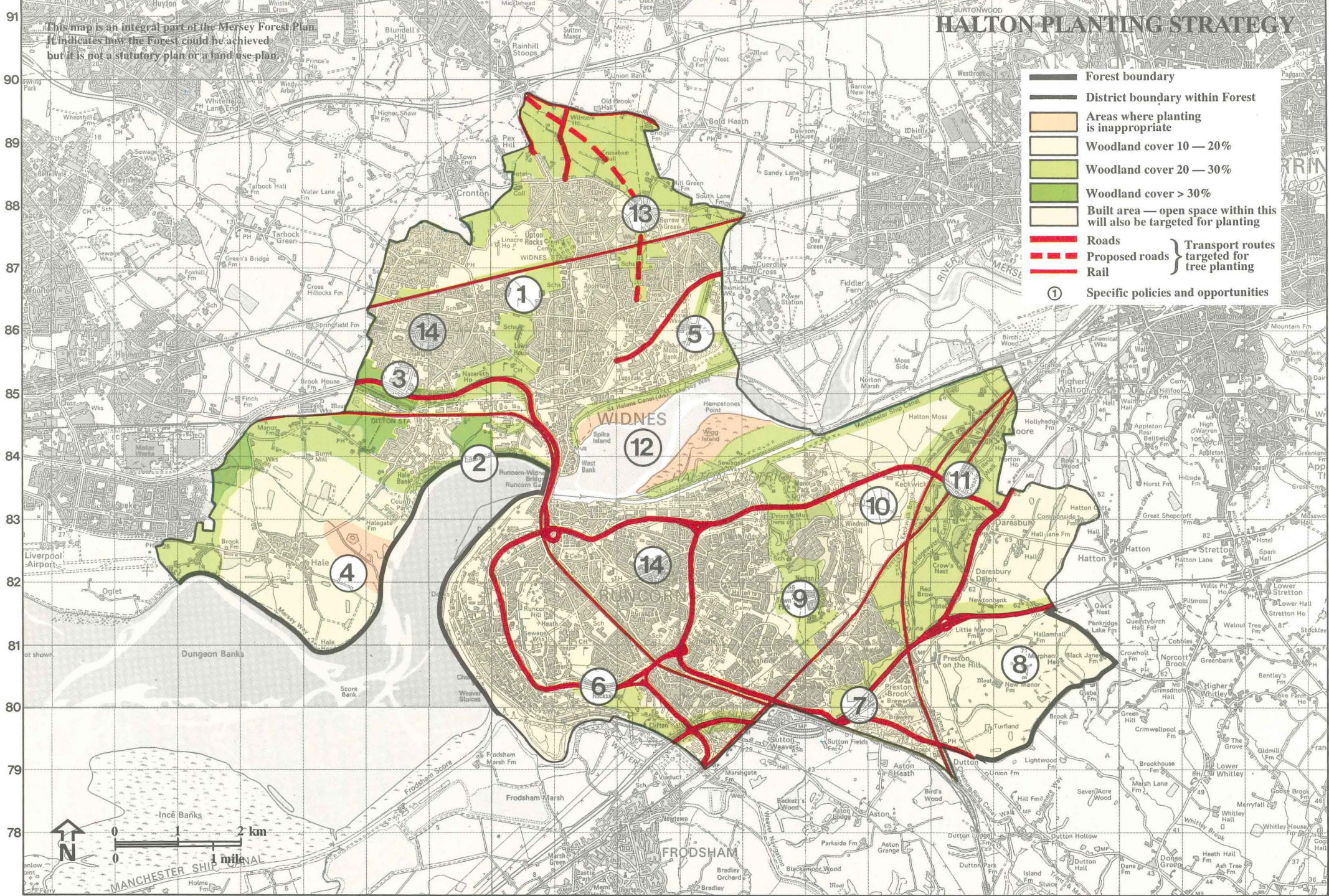
H4 In the agricultural area around Hale, restore hedges, hedgerow trees and ponds, and plant copses and small woodlands in sympathy with the existing field pattern. Support the management of existing woodlands. Increase the frequency and size of new woodlands around the urban periphery to the north-east and west. Safeguard the important open marshland adjacent to Ram's Brook.

H5 Create woodland on derelict sites and as a setting for any redevelopment of the Moss Bank area. Create a tree-lined edge along the north bank of the St. Helens canal.

This map is an integral part of the Mersey Forest Plan. It indicates how the Forest could be achieved, but it is not a statutory plan or a land use plan.

HALTON PLANTING STRATEGY

- Forest boundary
 - District boundary within Forest
 - Areas where planting is inappropriate
 - Woodland cover 10 — 20%
 - Woodland cover 20 — 30%
 - Woodland cover > 30%
 - Built area — open space within this will also be targeted for planting
 - Roads
 - Proposed roads
 - Rail
 - Specific policies and opportunities
- } Transport routes targeted for tree planting**



H6 Create a well-wooded landscape along the open corridor of land from Clifton to Runcorn Hill. Protect areas of lowland heath on the sandstone outcrops.

H7 Establish an 'in the Forest' landscape for the M56 motorway from Clifton to the A56 junction. Liaise with Vale Royal Borough over the corridor at Sutton Weaver. Provide a green barrier at Preston Brook between the industrial area and the village.

H8 In the agricultural area from Dutton to Daresbury, restore hedges, hedgerow trees and ponds, and plant copses and small woodlands in sympathy with the existing field pattern. Support the management of existing woodlands.

H9 Support the management of existing and new woodlands on the eastern edge of Runcorn.

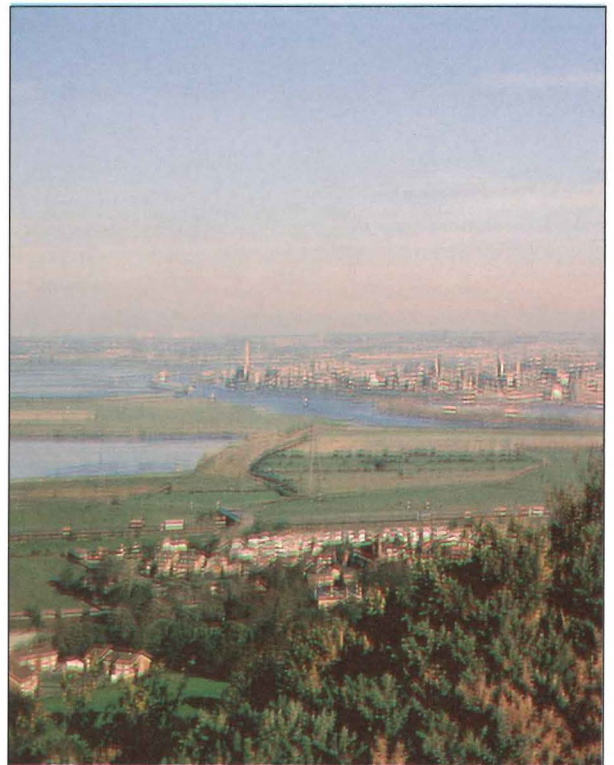
H10 Create a well-wooded setting for the new developments in the Keckwick Brook and Halton Moss area.

H11 Create a well-wooded landscape on the open land from Keckwick Brook to Keckwick Hill and around Moore. Planting is especially required to integrate the railway embankments and infrastructure developments into the landscape. Maintain some open views from the canal towpath.

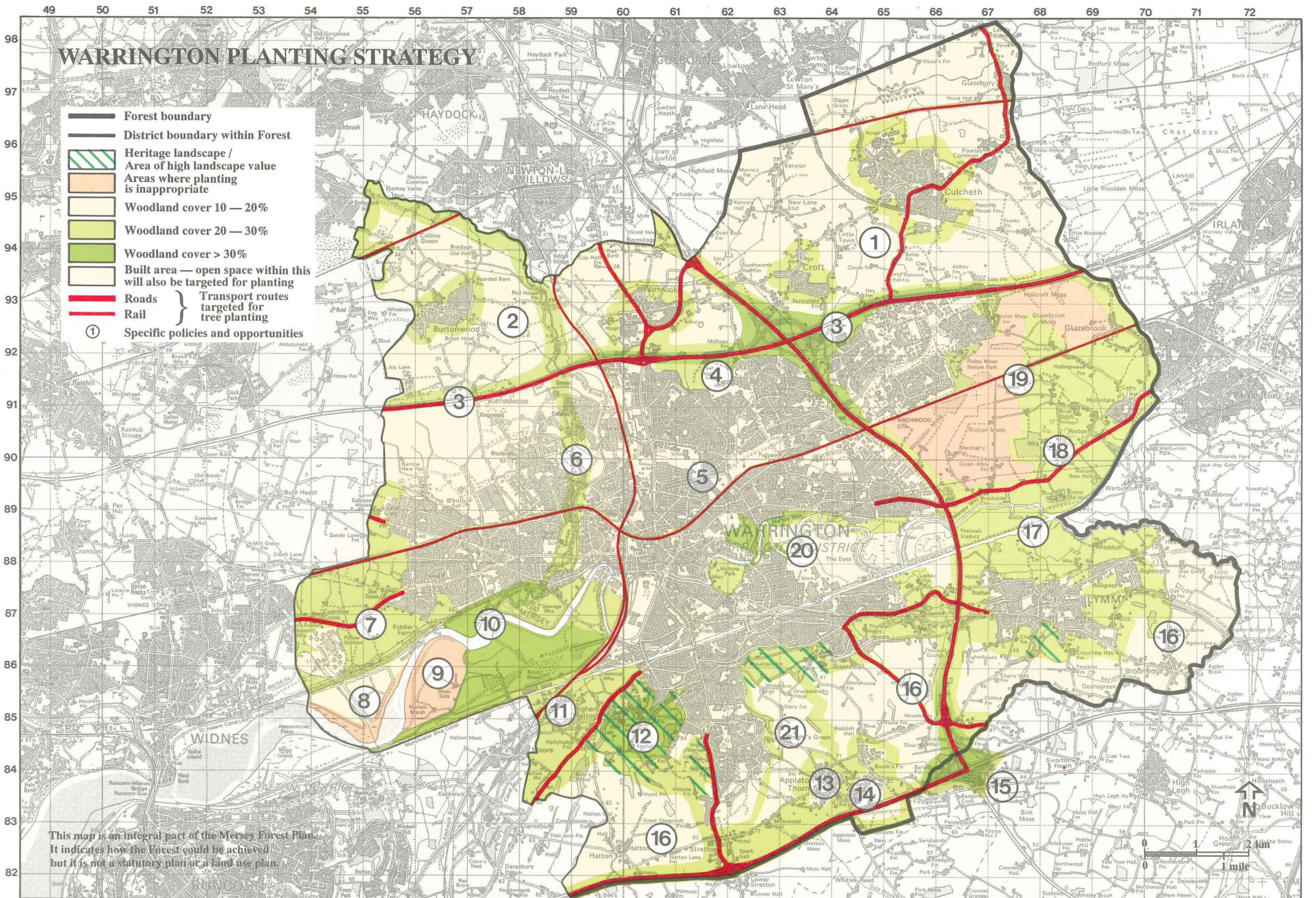
H12 Safeguard the important areas of open marshland on both banks of the Mersey, east of the Runcorn Bridge.

H13 Carry out extensive planting in the Bongs and surrounding open space and school sites to integrate the new link road into the landscape.

H14 Extend periphery planting into the urban areas by planting on all available and appropriate sites, such as school playing fields.



View from Runcorn Hill



This map is an integral part of the Mersey Forest Plan. It indicates how the Forest could be achieved but it is not a statutory plan or a land use plan.

Background and analysis

Two landscape regions occur within Warrington Borough: the Mersey Valley and, along the southern edge, the rim of the Cheshire Plain. From the northern boundary of the borough the land slopes gently downwards to the Mersey producing a flat landscape, which to the east runs into the Mossland around Risley and forming Glazebrook. South of the Mersey, the land rises up to the edge of the Cheshire Plain, a low rounded ridge which dips into the plain, and extends southwards out of the borough.

The town centre is on the north bank of the river at what was historically the lowest bridging point on the Mersey; most of the development of the town, and especially industry, has taken place on the flat valley land to the north.

The River Mersey has become lost in the landscape, because of the dominant effect of the Manchester Ship Canal, and the extensive dredging and waste tipping that has occurred adjacent to the river.

Agricultural land adjacent to the River Mersey has a mixture of uses from agriculture and tipped land around Rixton to urban-fringe uses such as horse paddocks, and nursery and caravan sites around Moore. This gives rise to a degraded landscape lacking in structure.

There are three areas of high landscape value, all occurring on the north-facing slope of the Cheshire Plain rim. Nationally important sites of wildlife interest are confined to the remnant mosslands at Risley Moss and Holcroft Moss, artificial wetland sites at the Rixton Clay Pits and Woolston Eyes dredging grounds. Scattered broadleaved woodlands, wetlands (freshwater and estuaries) grasslands and further mossland sites found throughout the borough are of regional importance.

Communication routes have a dominant effect on the landscape: the M6 motorway runs north–south, the M62 motorway east–west to the north, the M56 motorway east–west to the south; the west-coast main railway line and Manchester Ship Canal both run through the centre of Warrington.

The agricultural land surrounding Warrington is dominated by urban influence and the transport networks. Farming intensification has led to a generally impoverished landscape. The land around Cuerdley Cross and Burtonwood is

intensively farmed for cereal and oilseed crops and there are few hedges, trees or woodlands left in the landscape. The Croft–Culcheth area is more intact as farming is mixed. South of Warrington, the belt of land between the M56 and the urban edge carries a mixture of dairying and cropping. Again, some of the landscape structure has been retained. The mossland landscape has a very different history: its open nature and rectangular farm layout is the main characteristic. The Woodland Trust is now the prime woodland owner in the area.

Guiding principles

- Create two green wedges of woodland running from the east and west along the Mersey into Bridgefoot. This will provide a new landscape for the Mersey, mitigating past damage and taking the Forest to the centre of the town.
- Create a chain of woodlands around the periphery of the urban area, forming a green edge to the town.
- Plant smaller sites within the town and create access routes, acting like the spokes of a wheel leading from the town centre to the green edge.
- Maintain and reconstruct the surrounding agricultural landscape.

Policies and opportunities

Numbers refer to the 'Warrington planting strategy' map.

W1 In the agricultural landscape around Croft and Culcheth, north of the M62, support the creation of small woodlands and copses within a restored pattern of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Manage existing woodlands.

W2 In the area north of the M62 around Burtonwood and eastwards to Winwick, plant hedgerows along roads, tracks, paths and farm boundaries to produce a broad-scale hedgerow pattern. Plant small and medium-scale woodlands within the existing farm structure. Increase density of planting on the urban fringe around the area and along the M62 at the former airfield.

W3 Create a well-wooded landscape along the M62 motorway corridor in the borough. Between junctions 9 and 11 on the M62 and between junction 22 and the Liverpool–Manchester Railway line crossing the M6, create an 'in the Forest' landscape.

15. FOREST DISTRICT: Warrington

W4 Develop community woodland at Radley Common and on adjacent open land.

W5 Extend the Forest within the urban area by planting on appropriate public open space and by linking sites together, for example by planting along stream corridors.

W6 Support the continuing development of the Sankey Valley Park as a major recreational route and woodland area.

W7 Create a well-wooded landscape between Penketh and Fiddler's Ferry Power Station.

W8 Support the development of the Fiddler's Ferry Power Station for nature conservation as detailed in the *Energy for Wildlife* report (Mersey Valley Partnership & Operation Groundwork 1988).

W9 The open agricultural landscape at Norton Marsh and Moss Side Farm is a rare example of undisturbed open valley floor. This character should be conserved and woodland planting is not appropriate; hedgerow management, maintenance of a medium-scale field structure and management of the estuary edge will be supported. Should the area be disturbed by mineral operations, this policy should be reviewed.

W10 Support extensive forestry planting on tipped and industrial land north and south of the river between Fiddler's Ferry and Bank Quay to create a new landscape structure for the lower Mersey Valley. Retain and manage the existing mosaic of woodland, grassland and open water on Moore Nature Reserve.

W11 Create a significant area of woodland in the Moore–Walton area, planting small and medium-scale woodlands. Restore hedges and plant hedgerow trees.

W12 Develop Walton Hall as a major attraction within a mature wooded parkland setting. Manage existing woodlands and look for new planting opportunities on surrounding farmland to the south and east.

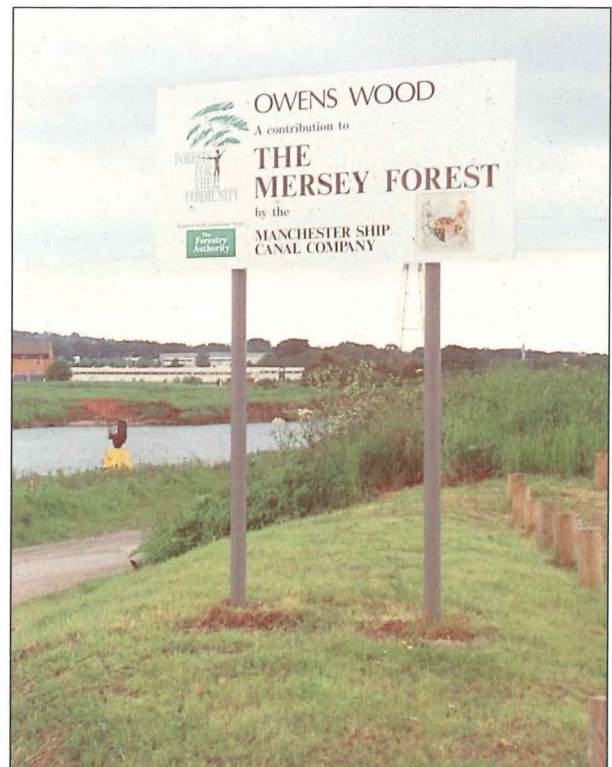
W13 Support the creation of small woodlands and copses between Appleton Thorn, Stretton and the M56. Restore hedges and plant hedgerow trees.

W14 Create a woodland setting for the Barley Castle Trading Estate.

W15 Develop an 'in the Forest' landscape for the M56–M6 interchange, working with the Department of Transport and Macclesfield Borough.

W16 Within the agricultural landscape from Hatton to Lymm, plant copses and small woodlands to fit the existing hedgerow and pond pattern. Restore hedges, hedgerow trees and ponds. Increase density of woodland planting along urban edges and adjacent to the M6.

W17 In the area north of Lymm and south of the A57 east of the M6, restore hedges and hedgerow trees and plant small copses. Introduce large-scale planting on disturbed land and within the large-scale agricultural areas, but keeping a significant area of 'valley bottom' land open.

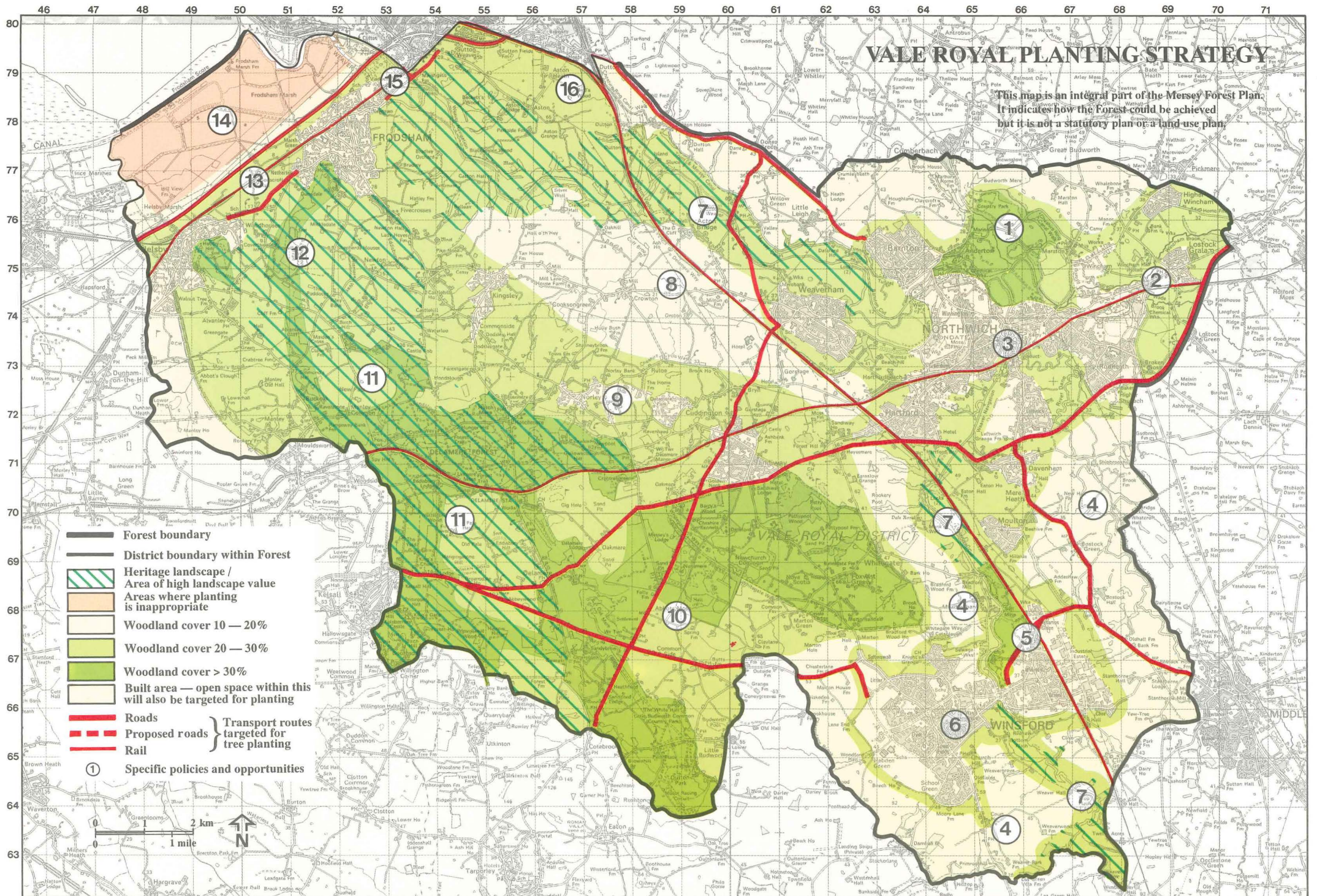


New woodland planting at Moore

W19 Woodland planting is not appropriate on the open mossland area adjacent to Risley. Existing birch woodlands make an important contribution to the character of the area and should be managed.

W20 Create a well-wooded landscape on open land adjacent to the River Mersey approaching the town centre from the east in the Howley, Latchford and Woolston areas. Identify and safeguard valuable open meadow areas.

W21 If the proposal for Bridgewater East Housing Area in the Draft Local Plan is approved, a woodland setting should be created as part of the development package.



Background and analysis

Vale Royal is the largest and most rural of the districts within The Mersey Forest. It is principally composed of the Cheshire Plain region in the east and Delamere region in the west and a small part of the Mersey Valley north of Frodsham and Helsby.

The part of the Cheshire Plain that is within the district is dominated by the River Weaver, which is incised into the plain in a narrow valley. The river runs northwards against the trend of a southern slope in the plain so that the valley becomes deeper as it moves downstream from Winsford to Frodsham. Woodlands on the steep valley sides are an important feature of the landscape and the river has been made into a canal to take small sea-going vessels.

The two towns of Northwich and Winsford developed around the salt industry, which has left a legacy of derelict land and railway and canal infrastructure. A thriving salt-based industry is based on two sites in Northwich, and the process plants and power stations on these sites are a prominent feature within the surroundings of the Cheshire Plain landscape. Both towns are diversifying their industrial base by the continuing development of industrial estates. These contain mostly low-rise buildings, which can be effectively integrated in the surrounding landscape by peripheral woodland planting. Where the river passes through both towns, the steep slopes have constrained development, so it has the potential to act as a green corridor.

The agricultural landscape of the Cheshire Plain is typified by thorn hedges, hedgerow oak trees, ponds and small scattered woodlands. The pressure for agricultural intensification has been less severe than elsewhere owing to the presence of heavy soils and a strong dairy industry. However, there has been a significant loss of hedgerows in several areas and the remaining stock of hedgerow trees is over mature. The landscape for which Cheshire is famous is certainly deteriorating.

The Delamere region has been divided into three landscape types, strongly linked to the geology of the area. To the west lies a ridge of sandstone which is heavily faulted, producing a series of low hills and outcrops, many of which are wooded.

In the Oakmere to Commonsides area, there is a flat step of glacial sand which has a very open nature with some woodlands and sand quarries. Running north-south along the eastern edge of the region is a thin strip of undulating land containing small, but steep-sided, valleys. Here, the land drops from the ridge and sand step on to the Cheshire Plain. It is an intimate, small-scale landscape.

The whole Delamere area was historically forest and principally heathland, much of which was reclaimed in the nineteenth century. The present Delamere Forest is a relic of former crown land lying in a hollow in the sandstone ridge. There are no large settlements and most of the villages occur around the edge of the area.

At the northern edge of the sandstone ridge are the two fault-produced outcrops of Helsby and Frodsham Hills. Here, the Delamere region falls to the Mersey Valley. There is a narrow step of land north of the hills on which Helsby and Frodsham lie, then the land drops down to a wide marshland area and the Mersey Estuary. The M56 runs along the northern edge of the step, separating the settlements from the marsh, the step is also a route for a rail line and main road. Pylon lines run alongside the motorway on the edge of the marsh.

Guiding principles

- Create well-wooded areas on derelict land at Northwich and Winsford.
- Maintain and restore the Cheshire Plain landscape on either side of the Weaver Valley.
- Maintain and enhance the wooded character of the Weaver Valley.
- Extend planting in balance with the agricultural pattern in the Delamere area to create a well-wooded landscape.

Policies and opportunities

Numbers refer to the 'Vale Royal planting strategy' map.

V1 Develop community woodland on the area of industrial dereliction and lagoons on the northern edge of Northwich. The design of sites should pay special regard to the existing high wildlife value.

V2 Create a woodland setting for the industrial and business areas to the east of Northwich, principally at Wincham.

15. FOREST DISTRICT: Vale Royal

V3 Establish a well-wooded landscape around the periphery of Northwich and extend into the town by planting on appropriate and available open land.

V4 In the area of Cheshire Plain landscape south of Northwich and surrounding Winsford, restore hedges, hedgerow trees and ponds, manage existing woodlands and plant copses and small woodlands within the existing field pattern.

V5 Create community woodland in conjunction with development on the area of industrial dereliction to the north of Winsford.

V6 Establish a well-wooded landscape around the periphery of Winsford and, in particular, around the existing and proposed industrial estates. Extend woodland into the town on appropriate and available open land.

V7 Extend the wooded nature of the Weaver Valley by planting on the valley shoulders, valley sides and, where appropriate, valley floor. Care should be taken not to block the line of the valley floor by extensive planting. Support the management of all existing woodlands and pay special regard to the ancient woodland sites.

Where possible, new woodlands should be established adjacent to ancient woodland, or to connect separate wooded blocks.

V8 In the area of Cheshire Plain landscape centred on Crowton, restore hedges, hedgerow trees and ponds. Plant copses and small woodlands within the existing field pattern.

V9 Where the Delamere region slopes down to the Cheshire Plain (from the north of Kingsley to Foxwist Green), create a well-wooded landscape by planting principally on the steeper valley slopes. Some viewpoints should be left open. Careful design in sympathy with the small-scale landscape is required. Maintain and restore hedges and hedgerow trees. Principal tree species should be broadleaved.

V10 Create additional medium-to large-scale woodlands on the flat sand terrace from Oakmere to Little Budworth, but maintain balance with the open agricultural areas. Principal tree species should be conifers. Support the retention of water bodies following sand extraction as an opportunity to create a landscape of woodlands and water, offering benefits for nature conservation and appropriate recreation (subject to the protection of ground water supplies).



A typical scene in the Weaver Valley

V11 Create a well-wooded landscape by planting woodlands within the agricultural areas to the north and south of Delamere Forest. Maintain and restore hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Principal tree species should be conifers with broadleaves in copses and hedgerows.

V12 Support the management and extension of existing woodlands on the steep hillsides to the south of Frodsham and Helsby. Plant woodlands to complement existing field structure to create a well-wooded landscape linking to Delamere.

V13 Establish a woodland framework around Helsby and Frodsham and seek to create a woodland buffer on suitable land between the settlements and the motorway.

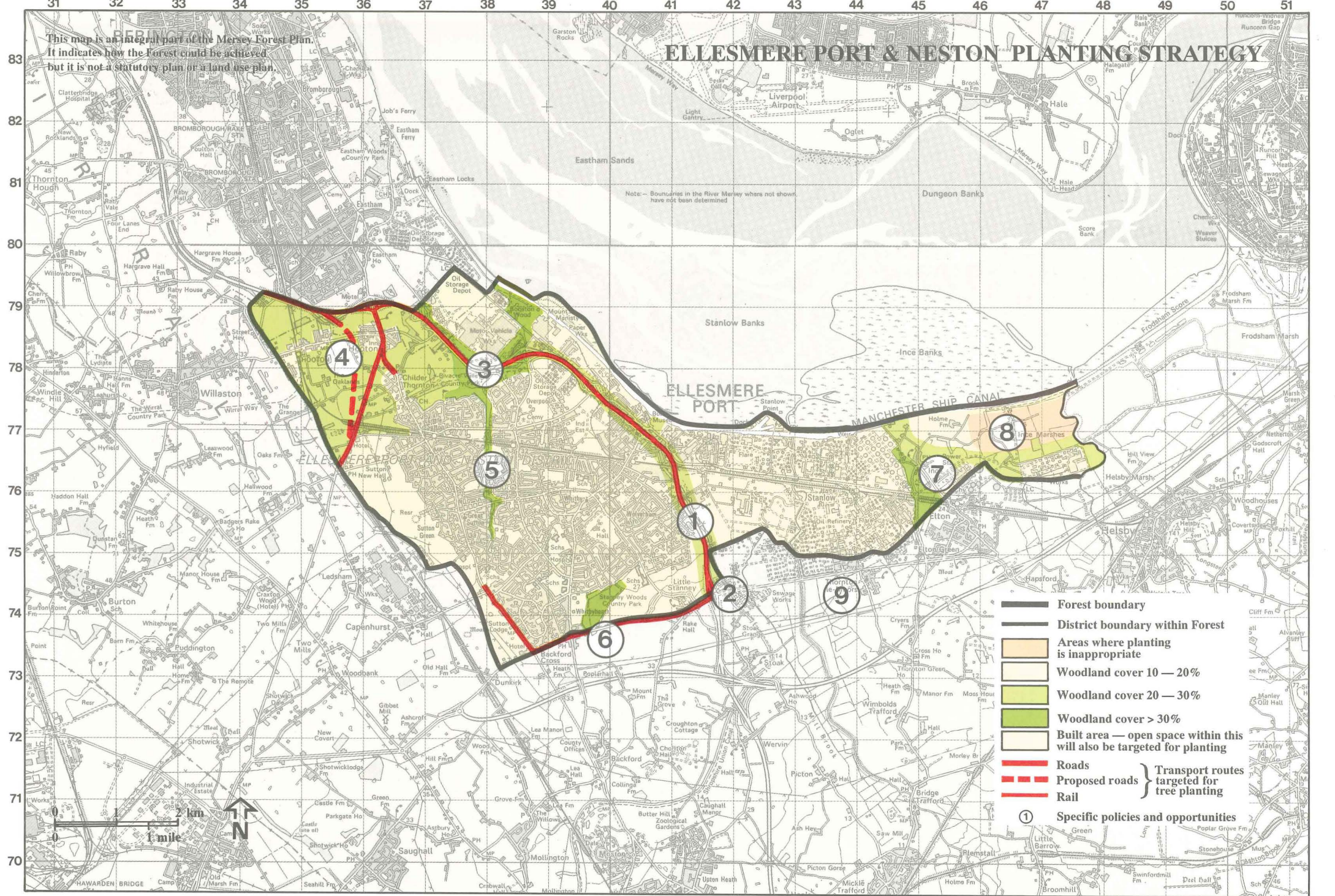
V14 Safeguard the important open nature of Frodsham Marsh. Carry out planting on appropriate sites around the edges of the marsh adjacent to industrial sites and the motorway.

V15 Plant in the lower Weaver Valley to create a woodland setting for the industrial sites and transport corridors.

V16 In the Aston area, create additional large woods in balance with the open agricultural landscape. Maintain existing hedges and plant hedgerow trees. Support the management of existing woodlands.

ELLESMERE PORT & NESTON PLANTING STRATEGY

This map is an integral part of the Mersey Forest Plan. It indicates how the Forest could be achieved but it is not a statutory plan or a land use plan.



- Forest boundary
- District boundary within Forest
- Areas where planting is inappropriate
- Woodland cover 10 — 20%
- Woodland cover 20 — 30%
- Woodland cover > 30%
- Built area — open space within this will also be targeted for planting
- Roads
- Proposed roads
- Rail
- Transport routes targeted for tree planting
- Specific policies and opportunities

15. FOREST DISTRICT: Ellesmere Port & Neston

Background and analysis

Ellesmere Port lies on the southern side of the Mersey Estuary and is entirely within the Mersey Valley region. Little of the historic landscape remains and land within the borough is overshadowed by urban and industrial development. To the east of Ellesmere Port, the borough boundary runs through the Stanlow Refinery complex. The most significant open areas occur in the urban fringe farmland around Hooton and to the north-east of Ince where the land drops down from Ince to the marshes. The large Mersey Estuary mud banks have been excluded from the Forest area, but with the Mersey Estuary they are a major element in the landscape.

The Manchester Ship Canal skirts the Mersey Estuary and provides an edge to the land. West of Ince, large-scale industrial development prevents access to the Estuary and canal edge, except at the Boat Museum. Generally, the M53 forms the boundary between the urban area to the west and the industrial area to the north and east.

There are small but very significant areas of open land within the industrial area and urban areas, such as Booston Wood and the rail corridor through Stanlow, Rivacre Valley, Stanney Wood and sites along the M53. These offer an important opportunity for extending the countryside into the developed area and creating a much needed new landscape structure.

Guiding principles

- Create a wooded corridor running from the north-west to the south-east along the M53.
- Extend planting into the urban area.
- Create a well-wooded landscape to the east of Stanlow.
- Link new planting to the Mersey Estuary at Booston, the Boat Museum and Ince.

Policies and opportunities

Numbers refer to the 'Ellesmere Port & Neston planting strategy' map.

E1 Plant trees on all appropriate and available sites along the M53 to Shropshire Union Canal corridor from the borough boundary to the Boat Museum.

E2 Discuss and implement with appropriate landowners and authorities any opportunities for tree planting in the area between the borough boundary and the M53/M56 junction to anchor the M53 corridor in the surrounding landscape.

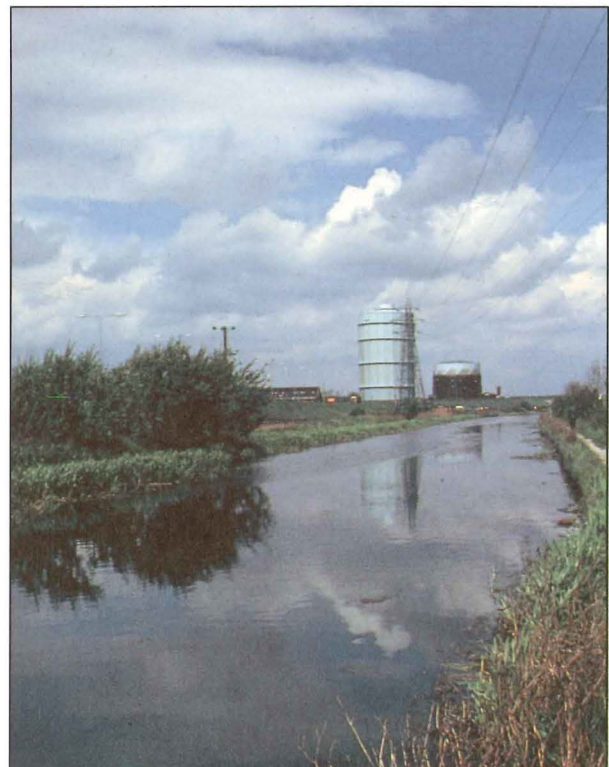
E3 Plant trees on all appropriate and available sites along the M53 corridor from the borough boundary at Eastham to the Boat Museum, link planting to the Rivacre Valley and Booston Wood.

E4 Support the creation of small woodlands and copses within a restored pattern of hedgerows and hedgerow trees in the area around Hooton and Childer Thornton.

E5 Create areas of woodland in balance with open space within Rivacre Park, so that it becomes identifiable as a linear woodland feature extending into the urban area.

E6 Support the management of Stanney Wood. Extend woodland to the north and east by fringe planting around the playing fields and sports clubs.

E7 Promote the creation of a significant woodland area on the eastern periphery of Stanlow refinery adjacent to Ince and Elton. Plant small woodlands and copses within a restored pattern of hedgerows and hedgerow trees on the higher land north of Ince.



Canal/motorway corridor at Ellesmere Port

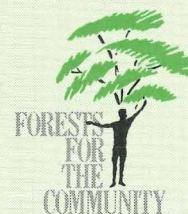
E8 The Ince marshes are an important area of estuary grassland, which should be conserved and therefore it is not appropriate to carry out woodland planting. Industrial land around Ince Power Station and the Kemira factory should be screened by woodlands. Hedgerow and management, maintenance of field structure and ditches will be supported.

E9 Discuss and implement with appropriate landowners and authorities any opportunities for tree planting in the area south of the borough boundary around Thornton-le-Moors.

THE MERSEY FOREST

IMPLEMENTATION

- 16. Achieving change in land use
- 17. Resources
- 18. Planting targets and costs
- 19. Monitoring and evaluation



Introduction

Chapters 5–14 outlined the vision for The Mersey Forest, in terms of specific issues and subjects and of the future woodland cover for the area. The fundamental building block for converting this vision into reality will be the change of existing land use to those more suitable for the Forest's development. This part starts by considering how this might be done.

16. ACHIEVING CHANGE IN LAND USE

Farmland

16.1 The creation of the Forest is intended to support and enhance the agricultural economy and landscape of the urban fringe. It is not intended to compromise the viability of efficient food production. Forestry will be part of farm restructuring or diversification. In diversification, forestry may be the main objective or it may be an element designed to enhance wider activities. A joint statement issued by farming and landowning organisations and the Countryside and Forestry Commissions outlines the relationship between farmers and community forests very well and is contained within the Countryside Commission leaflet (1993) *Farming in Community Forests: The Opportunities and Benefits*.

R38 The partners will seek to integrate farming and forestry to maintain viable farming units and ensure that the new woodlands are well managed.

16.2 Although it is not the initial target for achieving the Forest, ultimately 57% of new planting will take place on farmland within the boundary of The Mersey Forest. This proportion of planting on farmland is in accordance with the national policy for agriculture and the objectives of community forests as set out in Chapter 1. It will mean the transference of 10% of farmland within the Forest boundary (4640 ha) from agriculture to forestry. Further land may come out of agriculture or be less intensively farmed as part of farm diversification and take up new grant packages, such as countryside stewardship, which are aimed at achieving environmental gains and public benefit rather than food production.

16.3 At the moment, despite falling farm incomes, the uptake of grants for tree planting within The Mersey Forest is very low. The reluctance by farmers and landowners to take advantage of the grant schemes currently on offer has its roots in a variety of complex factors which need to be addressed both nationally and by The Mersey Forest partners.

16.4 The current changes in the agricultural economy have had two effects on planting. Firstly, with grant and price support mechanisms in a state of flux, farmers wish to keep their enterprises as flexible as possible, to be best able to respond to new situations such as set-aside. These changes

must settle down before most farmers will contemplate committing their land to a long-term use such as forestry. Secondly, the fall in farm incomes over the last 10 years, compounded by the often high level of borrowing, has resulted in a lack of funds to invest in a new enterprise.

16.5 There is a perceived shortfall in incentives to plant trees. Income from timber sales will not be received for at least 20 years and will extend for between 40 and 100 years; grants available for planting rather than the return over the whole rotation are therefore compared with annual returns from other farm enterprises.

16.6 The Farm Woodland Premium is comparable to set-aside payments, but the Woodland Grant Scheme is a contribution to planting costs; therefore, there may be a shortfall in the short and medium term. A comparison of annual returns between different farm enterprises suggests that support for farm woodland planting would have to increase by 40–50% to be comparable to existing average returns from livestock or arable enterprises.

16.7 The nature of farm ownership, and especially tenancy, is an additional complication. Within the Forest area, 54% of farmland is tenanted (see Table 3.2). Both tenant and landlord must be in agreement before planting can be carried out and, therefore, in a tenancy situation forestry is a less attractive enterprise. Existing woodlands in the area offer a poor example because of their low value, as previously described. A farmer with an apparently worthless woodland is unlikely to invest in forestry. Trespass and vandalism is sometimes seen to be a threat from increased tree cover.

16.8 In the light of the above factors it is not surprising that in 1992–1993 only 3.8 ha of land was planted with trees by farmers within The Mersey Forest. Clearly, if The Mersey Forest is to be successful, this must be addressed; however, there is time within the implementation programme for some issues to be resolved through the course of events taking place at a national and international level and through action by the Forest partners.

R39 The partners will actively market the existing grants to farmers and this encompasses three areas of work:

16. ACHIEVING CHANGE IN LAND USE

- *research to identify different sectors of the farming community, their objectives and constraints;*
- *promotion of grant packages backed up by advice;*
- *additional work with representative farms to provide model examples of grant packages and diversification options.*

16.9 At the national and European levels the completion of Common Agricultural Policy reforms over the next few years will provide a more stable policy and economic environment within which farmers and landowners will be able to make long-term decisions. It is likely that more land will be taken out of production and the Forest would be a major beneficiary if permanent set-aside included a forestry option. Whole-farm packages such as that pioneered by Countryside Stewardship facilitate the changes in working practices and farm enterprises that substantial planting will entail.

R40 The partner authorities support the Countryside Commission policy statement advocating the re-targeting of agricultural support from production payments to payments for environmental benefits (Dobson & Moffatt 1993).

16.10 Forestry must also become more 'farm friendly' and The Mersey Forest Team will work with other organisations to explore this through research and direct investigation. The aim is that techniques of forestry planting and management

will become more compatible with present farming regimes and technology. This will enable farmers to carry out more planting, establishment and management work themselves, thus making current incentives more attractive. The provision of training for farmers and landowners should also be investigated.

16.11 Belts of woodland within working farms would not only dramatically add interest to the landscape, but would also offer real advantages to agriculture. A network of shelter belts would reduce overall windspeed, raise ambient temperatures, increase crop yields and reduce the risk of soil erosion. With proper design, crop loss could be kept to a minimum and the woodland could produce a timber crop, in both the short and long term. The composition could be a combination of fast-growing poplar hybrids, for short-term (30 years) yield, with a mixture of suitable indigenous trees and shrubs. This will have a rapid and significant impact at minimum cost, in the sort of time-scale to which farmers could relate. Long-term set-aside could be the stimulus.

R41 The partners, working with other organisations, will explore methods of making forestry more farm friendly.

16.12 Reversing the experience of existing low-value woodlands has been discussed. It could be used as a springboard to develop new woodlands on farms; the extension of existing woodlands may hold the key to their long-term viability.



Woodland will enhance landscapes such as this at Winwick

16.13 The threat of vandalism and trespass will be tackled by a broad range of measures, many of which are at the heart of the principle of community forests. Public access is not compulsory and there are additional grants and support for landowners inviting the public on to their land. Woodland planting on the urban fringe will act as a buffer, reducing the pressure on adjacent agricultural land. The provision of recreational routes and many more recreation facilities will steer people through the countryside and concentrate them in places and activities away from agriculture.

R42 Awareness and respect for the countryside will be promoted throughout the Forest. Access into the countryside will be managed by the partners. Undesirable activities will be minimised through careful design.

Derelict and disturbed land

16.14 The treatment of derelict land and disturbed land such as landfill sites offers a major opportunity for the early creation of The Mersey Forest. Chapter 3 established the scale of the problem of derelict land. Much derelict and disturbed land is close to housing, and afforestation would have a great impact on people's lives. Left in its present state, derelict land detracts from the appearance of the region and poses a health hazard as well as a reminder of industrial decline. Reclaiming derelict land will therefore bring positive benefits.

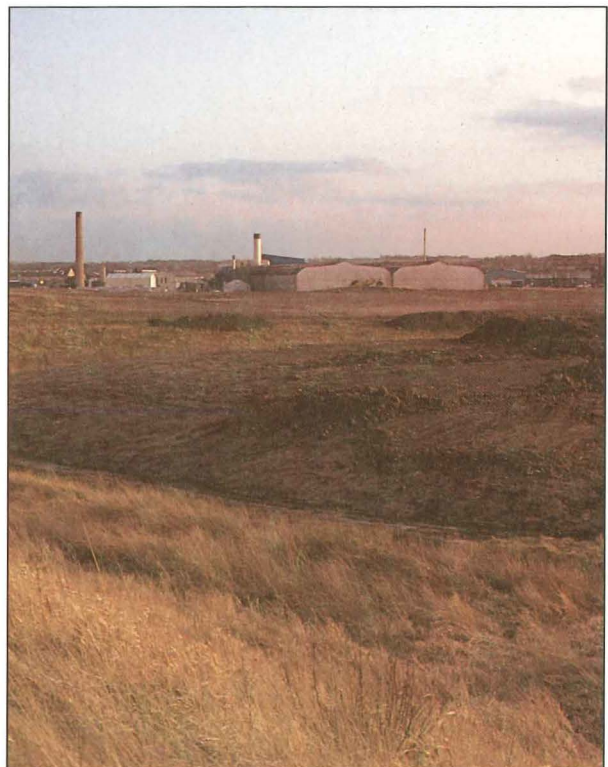
16.15 There are a number of good reasons for restoring a site to community forest use. It is cheaper to restore land to forestry than to any other active land use. Reclamation for forestry (where it is appropriate) can cost a small fraction of reclamation for hard development. A large proportion of the derelict land is within the green belt, which precludes a great deal of hard development; also, many sites have unsuitable ground conditions for building. In view of the surplus of farmland, restoration to what is often low-grade agriculture is not desirable. Forestry offers the opportunity to integrate the sites into the surrounding landscape, many of which, such as waste tips, are alien landforms in the landscape. Thus, blight is converted to an asset for the whole community.

16.16 Forestry is not an excuse for a lower standard of site restoration; the site must be reclaimed to a safe condition and be suitable for tree growth; standards are presented in Moffat &

Bending (1992). The actual techniques of restoration, preparation of site for tree planting and choice of species will depend on the material involved. Research by the Forestry Commission (Dobson & Moffat 1993) has shown that it is possible and even desirable to plant landfill sites, given the correct restoration techniques. It is possible to phase tree planting either in line with a reclamation programme or as the site conditions change and ameliorate over time.

R43 The partners will promote the latest techniques for woodland establishment on restored sites in order to create successful woodlands for the minimum cost.

16.17 Major initiatives to tackle derelict land are taking place within The Mersey Forest area supported by the Department of the Environment and Merseyside Task Force through derelict land grant and formerly through the urban programme. These schemes include the rolling programme of land restoration in the Weaver Valley carried out by Cheshire County Council and the Wasteland to Woodland initiative in St. Helens, a partnership between the private sector and St. Helens MBC. The urban programme funded a large number of schemes within the Merseyside authorities and Halton BC, but was recently terminated. Restoration for green after-uses has been seen as



Landfill sites offer opportunities: a former tip at Latchford

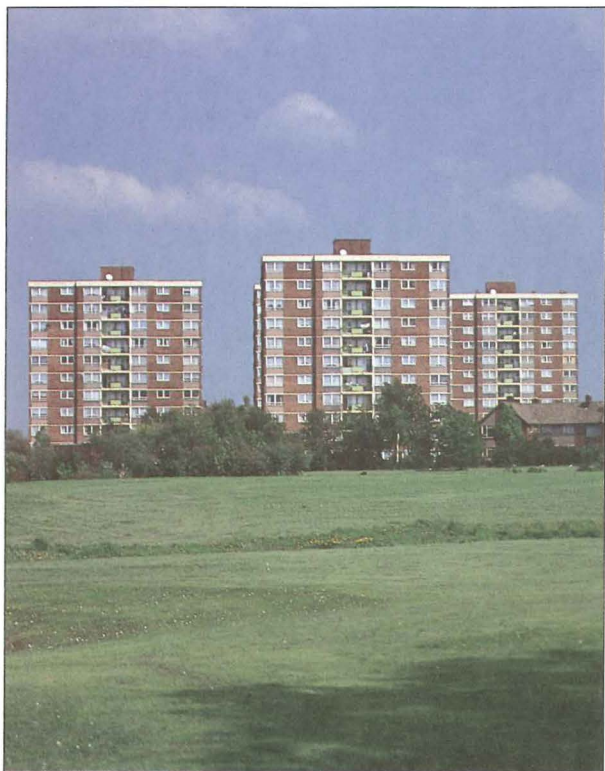
an essential part of economic regeneration. However, the support mechanisms for reclamation are changing owing to reorganisation within the Department of the Environment and the formation of English Partnership and it is not yet clear whether grant aid for green end-uses will continue at its present level.

16.18 Restoration of sites to woodland will create a significant part of the Forest where it is most needed and make a major contribution to the economic regeneration of the region.

R44 The partners will target appropriate derelict land and support existing reclamation projects for community forest uses.

Public open space

16.19 The partner authorities own a considerable amount of land within the Forest as either formal parks or public open space. Much is well managed, but some areas are neglected or under-developed because of the costs of capital works and maintenance. Large areas of public open space often fail to meet the needs of local communities; they can be unattractive and offer few recreational opportunities – the so-called ‘green deserts’. They can be expensive to maintain; annual mowing costs are a continuing drain on local authority funds.



*Some public open space would benefit from additional tree planting:
Kirkby*

16.20 Whilst open space is an essential part of the Forest, creating woodlands within the ‘green deserts’ and increased woodland cover on other areas will offer landscape, recreational and environmental benefits. Many of the open spaces are not actually used by people; filling the empty spaces with trees increases the ability of the space to absorb people without seeming overcrowded and creates a sheltered environment that is much more hospitable for recreational use. Surrounding housing and industry is screened – changing the atmosphere from urban to rural – and the increased wildlife adds interest. Public safety is, of course, an important concern, but careful study of how a site is used and appropriate design, involving the local community, will overcome most problems.

16.21 Woodland planting supported by grants can be carried out at little extra cost; in the long run, it offers significant savings over grass maintenance and may even yield a return from timber production. An example of costs and savings is presented in Appendix D. Typically, the net accumulated cost for planting and establishment will be well below the accumulated cost of grass maintenance after 5 years. Even if additional fencing is required as part of the scheme, forestry offers a saving after 10 years. Once fully established, woodland maintenance costs much less than that of a comparable area of mown grass. Therefore, converting appropriate open space from grassland to woodland not only yields the benefits offered by community forestry, but also contributes a significant saving in local authority expenditure.

R45 The partner authorities will review all public open space to identify where woodland creation and other habitats are appropriate. A gradual programme of implementation will be undertaken with the local communities.

Planning and development land

16.22 Almost half the land which might be planted with trees as part of The Mersey Forest is in the green belt; this places obvious limitations on the extent to which the planning system will be able to encourage and deliver the Forest through development-led tree planting. It is Government policy not to allow development in the green belt,

save in exceptional circumstances, and this policy is strongly protected in both Merseyside and Cheshire. The Mersey Forest will play an important role in supporting local authority policies for reinforcing and protecting the green belt.

16.23 This means, therefore, that some of the main opportunities for establishing the Forest through planning and development will arise in areas outside the green belt where sites are proposed for development. These range from large sites for industry (such as the 150 ha Omega site in Warrington) to smaller sites suitable for housing. Significant opportunities will not be numerous and it is therefore vital that a consistent approach to The Mersey Forest is taken across the whole of the area.

R46 The partner authorities will establish a working party of planners to ensure that planning policies are consistent and that local plans and unitary development plans provide a mechanism to deliver substantial contributions to The Mersey Forest where appropriate.

R47 Not all development sites represent an opportunity for The Mersey Forest, but partner authorities will seek to achieve the creation and

management of woodland areas as a requirement of planning permission especially where new woodland would serve objectives such as to:

- ***provide woodland settings for new developments;***
- ***strengthen green belt boundaries;***
- ***contribute to the creation of a network of public open spaces or wildlife corridors;***
- ***soften the impact of development, possibly through planting before any development;***
- ***protect existing sites of ecological value.***

16.24 In general, applicants for planning permission which involves woodland creation should be encouraged to enter into the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme. In order that The Mersey Forest Team is able to contribute to any negotiations in these areas, effective working practices will be developed to ensure their involvement in relevant planning applications.



Development can take place within a woodland setting

16. ACHIEVING CHANGE IN LAND USE

16.25 Applications for landfill sites, mineral extraction and new roads offer the planning authorities particular opportunities to work with the private sector to achieve significant areas of woodland, either as screening during operation or as a condition of restoration at the end of operations. Existing sites, however, have conditions already attached to them which may not fulfil their potential as part of The Mersey Forest and the partners will have to ensure that they are brought within the scope of the Forest Plan, providing this would not result in a lower standard of restoration. It is likely that amendments to mineral- and waste-restoration schemes can be made through negotiation as and when opportunities arise.

16.26 The Mersey Forest is not a statutory plan. The local authorities will aim to incorporate the above recommendations into their own local plans to maximise the planning system's contribution to The Mersey Forest.

16.27 If, at some stage, a review of green belt boundaries is required, whilst it is not suggested that changes should take place, important opportunities may present themselves. New development could be surrounded by a woodland buffer which would serve to strengthen the new green belt boundary and provide new homes and jobs in an attractive woodland setting.

R48 Where it is necessary to release land in the urban fringe for development, partner authorities will consider means to ensure significant woodland planting, including a requirement that, in developing the newly released land, developers should provide and make arrangements for the management of the 'green land' areas as a contribution to The Mersey Forest.

Industrial landholdings

16.28 A few companies own significant areas of land within the Forest area.

16.29 The large landowners include British Rail, Ford UK, General Motors (Vauxhall), ICI, the Manchester Ship Canal Company, North West Water, Pilkington, Shell and UK Waste. Usually, private-sector companies own a factory or other plant, set in extensive grounds including car

parking areas. They may also own large areas of adjacent 'expansion land' held in reserve to enable future expansion of their plant. Some companies also own extensive areas of disused and derelict land, or land which has little apparent use.

16.30 Almost all of these landholdings present opportunities for expanding the Forest. These areas are often prominently located on the edge of built-up areas, adjacent to motorways, main roads or railways. Some industrial activities, with associated storage uses, are intrusive or even offensive features in the landscape, and establishing new areas of woodland on the edge of these sites would bring immediate benefits to local communities as well as to the image of the companies themselves. Most private companies are anxious to project a green image to their customers and improvements to the external appearance of their manufacturing plant would serve as a permanent reminder of the companies' commitment to environmental matters. It would help to improve the image of the Forest area to visitors and outside investors. It could also help to ease staff-recruiting difficulties, where highly skilled staff do not wish to relocate to an area with a poor environmental image.

16.31 Some companies have put little emphasis on the appearance of their plants in the past, and present-day management has inherited the results of the past economic activities. Environmental issues, however, are more prominent these days and in most companies management and staff are keen to improve the environments in which they live and work. These issues are also an important factor in sales and product image and are likely to be more so in the future.

16.32 There are also practical problems. Companies are in business to make industrial products and they are unlikely to have expertise in managing woodland. The simplest solution is to erect a security fence, lay grass and have it mown regularly – or leave it to lie fallow. There are also concerns about security.

16.33 Companies will need to be persuaded that woodland planting is desirable and feasible. They will need to be offered advice and assistance, both in developing and managing schemes and in applying for grants, and they will need to be sure that there is a significant public relations and image benefit from the Forest.

16. ACHIEVING CHANGE IN LAND USE

16.34 Fortunately, there are already several agencies in the Forest area who can offer these services, including the Groundwork Trusts, the Mersey Valley Partnership and some of the local authorities. A number of successful path-finding projects have been carried out, such as Wasteland to Woodland, NUVIL and the Energy for Wildlife project with Powergen. In these projects, the environmental agencies have supplied the expertise to manage and develop the sites (including help with grant applications) whilst the companies have supplied land and, often, some financial support. These successful models can be developed throughout the Forest area.

R49 Approaches to companies in respect of The Mersey Forest will be coordinated by The Mersey Forest Team, in association with the partners. They will open discussions with landowners and identify opportunities for planting in a free feasibility study. If negotiations are successful, the Team will introduce the company to a managing agency.

16.35 The managing agency will take care of all practical matters including design, management and grant applications, using private contractors where necessary. The Mersey Forest Team will coordinate the project including the provision of permanent site boards to indicate the company's support for

the project and other public relations activities. A permanent site board would give companies a further incentive to participate in the project.

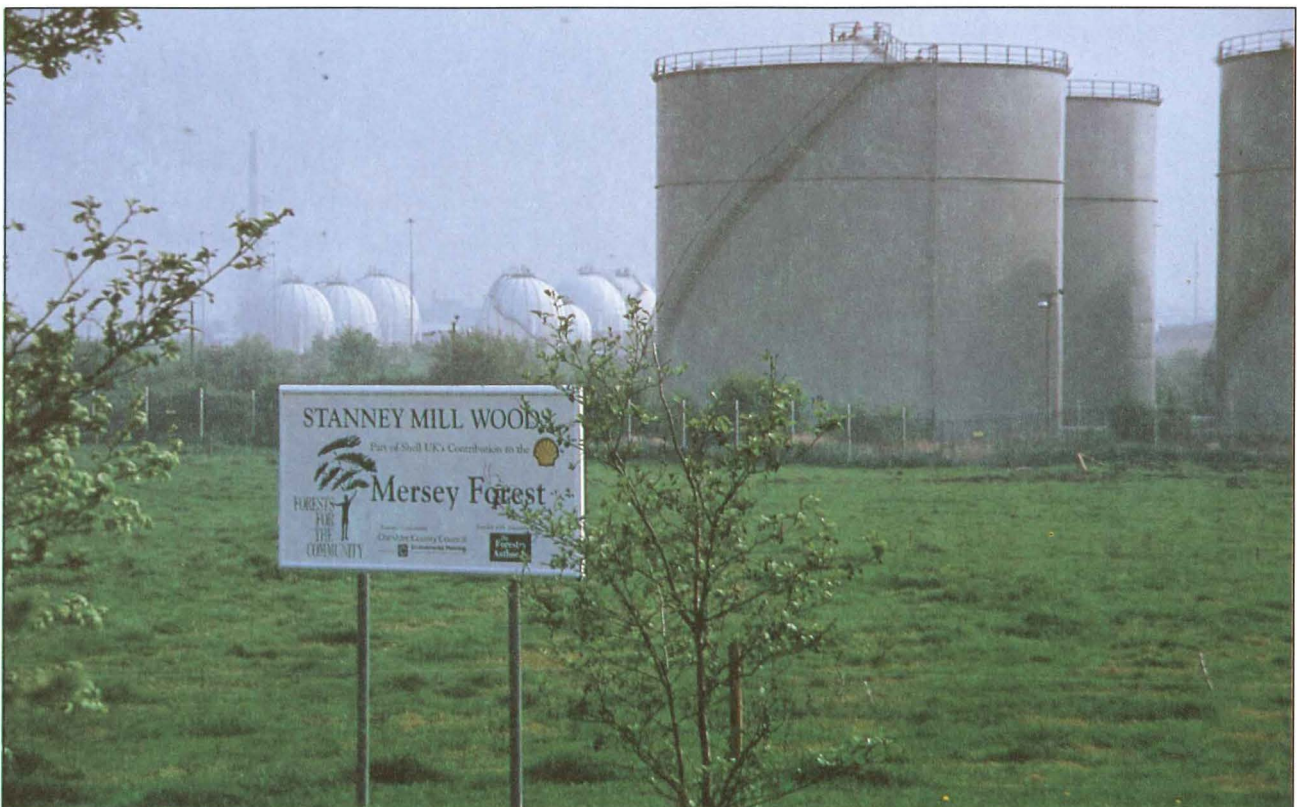
R50 Partner authorities will give special consideration to the erection of Mersey Forest site boards in terms of their planning control.

16.36 Projects with some companies – notably Shell UK, ICI and the Manchester Ship Canal Company – are already well under way and other major landowners will be contacted within the next 12 months.

16.37 There are many other ways in which companies can become involved in The Mersey Forest, apart from using their landholdings. These are outlined in Chapter 17.

Management and training

16.38 From the completion of tree planting and construction of facilities, Mersey Forest sites will require management. This encompasses management of the trees, wildlife, facilities and people and has significant implications for resources. Without the necessary commitment of time, money and skills, the sites will fail and fall into disrepair; and the initial effort of design, community liaison, construction, planting and the capital investment will be wasted.



Stanney Mill Wood: New woodland planting by Shell UK Ltd

16. ACHIEVING CHANGE IN LAND USE

16.39 The management of woodlands and in some respects other aspects of community woodlands can be divided into three parts: establishment of the plants, management (control of changes within the site) and maintenance of woodland structures and facilities. If the trees or other planting do not become established (capable of unaided growth), the woodland, hedge or meadow will not materialise; at best, perhaps, the planting scheme will produce an area of scrub.

R51 Woodlands within The Mersey Forest should not be planted unless the necessary resources for establishment are available.

16.40 Once established, the woodland will continue to grow and change. The process of change requires management in order that the objectives for the site and the intention of the design can be met or modified to suit new conditions. For example, if trees have been planted in a mixture including nurse trees, these should be removed at the correct time. Failure to do so could result in the nurse species taking over and becoming the dominant species in the woodland. Woodland management and preparation of plans will require a professional forestry input.

R52 Management plans should be prepared for all woodlands and used to secure Forestry Authority management grants.

16.41 In association with operations to manage the growing woodlands, sites will also require maintenance. Over time, fences, footpaths, bridges, drains, car parks and buildings all succumb to the ravages of weather, decay and public use. So that they will continue to perform their respective functions to an adequate standard, maintenance and eventual replacement will be required. Successful management of the growing community forest resource is essential if it is to yield the benefits it has to offer and meet all its objectives.

R53 Provision should be made for the long-term management and maintenance of Mersey Forest sites.

16.42 How a woodland is managed depends on the skills and resources available. The actual resources and skills required will depend on the design, use of the site, objectives for management and present condition of the site. Initial design is

critical in this process. A woodland with a large number of formal paths and areas of mown grass, unproductive tree species in a complex mixture, poor vehicular access and many recreational uses will be very expensive to manage. A strategy can be adopted to minimise future management costs:

- Choose tree species and mixtures that are correct for the site, easy to manage and will produce saleable timber.
- Design woodlands for minimum maintenance and maximise any revenue potential to offset management costs.
- Concentrate on key infrastructure details, such as vehicular access, bridges and key footpath links, but put in the minimum of facilities commensurate with the objectives – extra facilities can be developed later as required.
- Design and use materials for maximum maintenance-free life.
- Identify the management requirements of specialist uses or particular features of the site and how these can be funded.
- Do not try too many things within one site. The diversity of the Forest will be achieved by a wide variety of sites across the whole Forest not within individual sites.



Proper management benefits wildlife and visitors alike

16.43 The management of visitors to Mersey Forest sites and users of the recreational routes throughout the Forest, also has important implications for the resources of Countryside Management Services and other agencies, such as Mersey Valley Partnership and the Groundwork Trust. Local communities will play a key role, as discussed in Chapter 5. Support from the private sector will continue to be necessary. The involvement of landowners is also an essential element and this will be aided by grants such as the Forestry Commission Woodland Grant Scheme, Community Woodland Supplement and Special Management Grants, and the Countryside Commission Stewardship grants. Where woodland is created through the planning system, provision for recreation management should be considered.

R54 If the full recreation potential of The Mersey Forest is to be realised, it is essential that long-term provision is made for visitor management.

16.44 It is clear from the discussion of both management and design of The Mersey Forest that a wide range of skills will be required from both professionals and volunteers alike to implement the Forest. It is also obvious that a new concept such as community forestry will require a change in the approach to creating and managing woodlands. This approach needs to be introduced to a wide range of people throughout the public and private sectors and throughout the community. Effective training which raises standards and leads to the best possible design and working practices will maximise efficiency and minimise costs.

R55 The partner authorities will provide appropriate training for staff. They will work with appropriate training agencies to promote training for landowners, farmers, the voluntary sector, contractors and consultants.

17. RESOURCES

17.1 The success of The Mersey Forest will depend upon the extent to which the partners, other supporting agencies and the private sector can work together to produce concerted action based on the strategies outlined in this Plan. It is important that The Mersey Forest has a distinct identity of its own whilst allowing for local variation and character; a very high level of cooperation across boundaries, organisations and functions will be required to achieve this. The number of organisations from whom support and cooperation is required is vast, but The Mersey Forest offers many benefits and is already illustrating how partnerships can thrive under these circumstances.

Partners

17.2 The **Countryside Commission** was the initial driving force behind community forests in England and has a vital role to play in ensuring its continued growth and success. The Mersey Forest is the largest of the second tranche of forests and its nine local authority partners will require ongoing support and encouragement. This will mean that:

R56 The Countryside Commission will:

- *continue support for the expansion of multipurpose forestry in England through a wide range of partnerships and mechanisms;*
- *maintain effective incentive packages to encourage countryside management and access and support for policies which will achieve the conversion of suitable areas of agricultural land to community forestry;*
- *support the local authority countryside services and encourage continued expansion in their role in the forests;*
- *continue to emphasise the importance of community involvement, the arts and environmental education in community forests.*

17.3 The **Forestry Commission** has recently undergone reorganisation to separate the functions of management of the publicly owned forests, through Forest Enterprise, and guiding and controlling forestry through the Forestry Authority. The Forestry Commission continues to provide a focus for national forestry policy and research, through the Forestry Authority.

R57 The Forestry Commission will:

- *continue to support the expansion of multipurpose forestry in England through a wide range of partnerships and mechanisms;*
- *continue its support of The Mersey Forest by providing access to its expertise, research and publication;*
- *regularly review the structure of grants and incentives for achieving targets for woodland management and recreation in The Mersey Forest;*
- *support the promotion and marketing of sustainably grown English timber and the development of timber-based industries on both a national and a local basis;*
- *continue to support the objectives of The Mersey Forest through the management and development of Forest Enterprise forests at Delamere Forest Park and elsewhere throughout the Forest area.*



The Forestry Authority offers professional advice to landowners

17.4 The **local authority partners** already make important contributions to The Mersey Forest, but the successful development and management of the Forest will place considerable demands on the internal organisations and cultures of the partners and the extent to which they can focus the activity of a wide range of departments and committees.

R58 Local authorities will seek to:

- *accept the principles of this Plan in order to achieve a corporate approach to their implementation,*
- *incorporate the objectives of The Mersey Forest Plan into corporate activities and programmes,*
- *develop the role of their representatives in promoting and coordinating the aims of The Mersey Forest,*
- *ensure that staff have the broad range of skills required to achieve a successful community forest.*

17.5 The continuing support of local authority agencies such as the Joint Countryside Advisory Service and the Mersey Valley Partnership is vital if the community forest is to be successfully promoted, designed and managed.

Other national agencies

17.6 Several national agencies have been involved in the preparation of this Plan. In particular, **English Nature** supports the project through its position on the Officers' Working Group. In future it should:

- provide advice for the management of existing and the creation of new habitats,
- provide a focus for discussions on nature conservation issues within The Mersey Forest and for coordinating local activity,
- continue to support existing sites and approve further local nature reserves,
- provide support for ecological surveys and research within The Mersey Forest.

17.7 The **Sports Council** strongly supports The Mersey Forest and, indeed, provides significant funding through its support of the Sports Development Officer. It sees community forests as playing a major part in fulfilling its own vision for sports and recreation around towns and cities and can therefore continue to contribute by:

- providing advice to landowners on the potential for sport and recreation on their sites and on access to the leisure market,
- continuing to support suitable developments through Capital Grant aid,
- continuing to provide support for employment posts within the Forest,

- encouraging participation by all sections of the community in sport and recreation in The Mersey Forest.

Voluntary sector

17.8 A range of voluntary organisations, such as the **National Trust**, an important landowner in the Forest area, will play a role in developing The Mersey Forest. Many have already contributed to the creation of the Plan and these are listed in the Acknowledgements.

17.9 The **Woodland Trust**, has an important and long- term role in creating the Forest. As a national charity, the Trust aims to acquire existing woodlands or bare land for planting and already owns significant areas of woodland in The Mersey Forest area. It encourages direct community involvement in the acquisition and management of its woodlands and can contribute by:

- continuing to acquire and manage existing woodland in The Mersey Forest area;
- acquiring bare land and planting new woods using *The Mersey Forest Plan* for guidance;
- developing partnerships with the private and public sectors for the funding, acquisition and management of existing and new woodlands;
- working with The Mersey Forest partners to further the aims of the Woodland Trust within the context of The Mersey Forest.

17.10 The **BTCV** is a national charity which promotes practical conservation projects on the ground. It can:

- continue to encourage direct community involvement in conservation and woodland management;
- offer training courses, promoting best practice, in subjects related to The Mersey Forest;
- promote and expand its volunteer network within the Forest area;
- work with The Mersey Forest partners to implement the Forest Plan.

17.11 The **Cheshire Wildlife Trust** and the **Lancashire Wildlife Trust** between them cover The Mersey Forest area and both are part of **The Wildlife Trust's nationwide network**.

17. RESOURCES

They all have an important role to play in providing advice and expertise in nature conservation and associated subjects. They can also contribute to the success of the Forest by:

- developing their community action programmes across the Forest area,
- managing important sites and expanding into new areas,
- working closely with the partners in promoting nature conservation policies within the Forest area.

17.12 There are two **Groundwork Trusts** in the Forest area. Their operational areas cover Vale Royal, St. Helens, Knowsley and Sefton, south of the River Alt. The Groundwork Trust in St. Helens is responsible for many leading projects across St. Helens, Sefton and Knowsley and is a fundamentally important agent in the implementation of *The Mersey Forest Plan* in these areas. Macclesfield and Vale Royal Groundwork Trusts have developed recreational cycle routes and established a range of environmental improvement projects. The Trusts' future contribution is likely to be:

- the continuing development of important projects implementing and complementing *The Mersey Forest Plan*,
- working closely with The Mersey Forest partners to further the aims of community forestry across a range of relevant issues,
- liaising with The Mersey Forest to coordinate research on common issues and cross-fertilisation of ideas and initiatives.

17.13 Local organisations, such as the **Cheshire Landscape Trust**, local conservation or action groups, such as ACE in Knowsley or Friends of Owley Woods, will have a vital role to play as the Forest develops, as will people who presently participate on an individual basis, for example by becoming tree wardens.

Private sector

17.14 The private sector will add a vital dimension to the broad partnership that will create The Mersey Forest and it is important that it is fully represented on the appropriate bodies that

will guide the Forest to a successful future. **Companies** have an important role to play, not only by contributing financial resources but also by playing an integral part in the Forest's development. This will involve, amongst others:

- working closely with The Mersey Forest partners to maximise opportunities for forest creation, particularly, as outlined earlier in this chapter, on their own land,
- supporting local community groups who want to become involved in the Forest,
- seeing the Forest as an opportunity for sponsorship on a sound commercial footing and recognising the broad range of possibilities that this can offer,
- providing other resources, such as secondments or work in kind, where this is appropriate,
- encouraging the participation of their own staff in local Forest projects.

17.15 **Farmers and landowners** also have a fundamentally important role, of course. It is one which will develop and change as time goes on and will be influenced by many national and international factors. They can:

- remain open to the concept of community forests and the ideas they promote,
- continue to be prepared to listen to proposals which will help the Forest to develop,
- work with the partners to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

17.16 The private sector is an essential partner in The Mersey Forest and this role must continue. It is very important that there is scope for it to play a part in steering the development of the Forest and for it to increase its involvement over time.

The Mersey Forest Team

17.17 The Mersey Forest Team is the product of the current agreement between The Mersey Forest partners, which expires at the end of August 1994. By then, the priority task of the Team – that of compiling the Plan and organising its consultation process – will be completed and the foundation for the future development of the Forest will have been laid.

17.18 A fundamental decision will need to have been made, however, about the role of the Team and its future structure. One influences the other, but it is clear that the following functions will need to be carried out as part of a successful future for The Mersey Forest and the implementation of this Plan.

Marketing and promotion

17.19 It is essential that The Mersey Forest has a clear and separate identity which people recognise and relate to. Once this identity is established in the eye of the landowners, companies and communities, it will be much easier to encourage planting as part of the Forest, to attract sponsorship and other resources to the Forest, and to ensure participation by local communities in the management and ownership of the Forest.

17.20 This clear identity will be established through promotional and other activities which need to be professionally planned as part of a marketing strategy, and effectively and efficiently implemented in conjunction with all the partner's activities. Approaches to landowners, including

farmers, will need to be carefully researched and presented. Across the Forest area, there must be consistency of message, balance in advice and support, and focus of effort.

Training and advice

17.21 Throughout this Plan, a need for a professional and coordinated approach to the main aspects of the community forest has been identified. This applies not only to the design and management of woodland, vital though this is, but also to the development of sports and recreation, the arts and community participation. Much expertise in the area already exists within the partner authorities, but The Mersey Forest Team can act as a focus and central resource for some of these activities through its links with community forests elsewhere and with the Forestry and Countryside Commissions. Best practice, particularly in the technical areas, must also be made available to private landowners in The Mersey Forest, many of whom will need substantial support and guidance in the early years.

17.22 In general, a central resource offering technical expertise, training and seminars, and access to publications will be cost effective and in demand.



Promoting The Mersey Forest: a business exhibition at Burtonwood

Project initiation and coordination

17.23 Much of the work in implementing the Forest Plan will be opportunistic in character. As sites become available, as developments take place or as grant structures change, so the opportunities created will need to be identified and grasped. This will frequently involve the initiation of cross-boundary, multifunctional projects, often linking with private-sector organisations to complement the resources of the public sector, and probably requiring centralised project management.

17.24 Similarly, many of the activities of The Mersey Forest form the hub of a network of existing agencies or functions. The Forest Plan will act as a focus for these activities and will, for the most part, be implemented by the agencies and groups. However, there will be a need for coordination from the centre if the true potential of community forests is to be realised and a sense of direction maintained.

18. PLANTING TARGETS AND COSTS

18.1 To create The Mersey Forest it is proposed that 8140 ha of woodland will be planted over 30 years. This will not happen at an even rate or be evenly spread across the Forest area and, although guided by the Plan, implementation will rely on decisions made by individual landowners. However, given the existing factors and future changes discussed in the Plan it is possible to put forward the implementation programme detailed in Table 18.1.

18.2 This shows the number of hectares targeted to be planted in 5-year periods (over 30 years) for six land-use types. These are the five types presented in Chapter 16, plus land associated with transport routes for which recommendations are made in Chapter 7. The total planting figure for each land-use type is an estimate of the land that is available and desirable to plant, to achieve the woodland cover presented in Chapter 3. The rate and phasing of the planting is based on

assumptions about grant uptake by private individuals and the existing tree-planting programmes of the partner local authorities. The rate of planting on derelict land will be affected by any future change in the policy of the Department of Environment towards green end-uses for reclamation, and it is unlikely that the higher rates of planting on farmland will be achieved if changes such as permanent set-aside are not introduced.

18.3 It is possible that up to half the costs will be provided in the form of government agency grants to landowners, the remaining costs being shared amongst the various stakeholders in the Forest and spread over 30 years.

Table 18.1 Implementation programme for Mersey Forest (area in ha).

Land type	Years						Total area implemented
	1–5	6–10	11–15	16–20	21–25	26–30	
Derelict or disturbed	500	500	200	150	50	50	1450
Industrial	100	100	50	50	0	0	300
Development	150	150	150	100	100	100	750
Public	150	300	200	150	50	50	900
Transport	50	30	20	0	0	0	100
Sub-total	950	1080	620	450	200	200	3500
Farmland	270	550	1010	1180	1020	610	4640
Total (ha/5 years)	1220	1630	1630	1630	1220	810	8140
Ha/year	244	326	326	326	244	162	

19. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

19.1 The Mersey Forest will be a large-scale, long-term project and, in common with other such undertakings, it will require a suitable mechanism for monitoring its development and evaluating its performance against predetermined targets. It is envisaged that a detailed 3-year business plan will be produced shortly after the publication of this plan in which budgets, forecasts and targets will be agreed, the future structure of the project addressed and a review process established. Techniques for the evaluation of progress will be investigated as part of the process of producing this business plan, but it is anticipated that performance indicators against the following objectives will be developed:

- public awareness and community participation;
- woodland planting and management, and other land uses;
- uptake of grants;
- improvements to the area's landscape;
- extensions to public access, both to woodland sites and recreational routes;
- provision of recreational facilities and the extent of their use;
- the contribution that The Mersey Forest makes to the local economy, in terms of employment and investment.

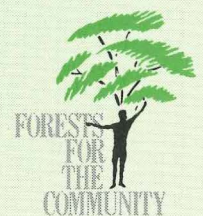


The Mersey Forest: an investment in the future

THE MERSEY FOREST

APPENDICES

- A. Plans and documents relevant to the Forest
- B. Landscape assessment and strategy
- C. Grants in The Mersey Forest area
- D. Cost of converting amenity grassland to woodland



APPENDIX A: PLANS AND DOCUMENTS RELEVANT TO THE FOREST

Cheshire County
Council:

Cheshire Waste Disposal Local Plan (1985)
Mersey Marshes Local Plan (1986)
Cheshire Minerals Local Plan (1987)
Countryside Recreation Strategy (1991)
Archaeology Strategy for Cheshire (1991)
Woodland Strategy for Cheshire (1992)
Nature Conservation Strategy for Cheshire (1992)
Derelict Land Strategy for Cheshire (1992)
Landscape Strategy for Cheshire (1992)
Cheshire State of the Environment Report (1992)
Cheshire 2001 Replacement Structure Plan (1992)

Department of
the Environment:

PPG16. *Archaeology and Planning* (1990)
PPG17. *Sport and Recreation* (1991)
PPG7. *The Countryside and the Rural Economy* (1992)
PPG12. *Development Plans and Regional Planning Guidance* (1992)
PPG2. *Green Belts* (1988, revised draft 1994)
Draft PPG. *Nature Conservation*

Ellesmere Port
& Neston BC:

Ellesmere Port & Neston Local Plan (excluding the Mersey Marshes)
For land transferred from Wirral MBC to Ellesmere Port & Neston BC due to boundary changes: *Behington Town Maps* (1958)
Ellesmere Port Town Map (as amended) (1967)
Merseyside Structure Plan (1980)
Merseyside Green Belt Plan (1983)
Local Policy Guidance Note: *Recreation Land* (to be adopted)
Local Policy Guidance Note: *M53/Shropshire Union Canal*
Cheshire Planning Standards: *Open Space* (1989)
Corridor Strategy (1994, to be adopted)

Halton BC:

Lancashire County Development Plan, Widnes Town Map (1964)
Runcorn New Town Master Plan (1968)
Runcorn New Town Master Plan Amendment No 1 (1973)
Runcorn New Town Master Plan Amendment No 2 (1976)
Halton Legacy (derelict land strategy) (1991) (will be superseded by the *Halton Local Plan*)

Knowsley MBC:

Halewood Action Area Local Plan (1983)
Tushingham Quarry Action Area Plan (1983) (will be superseded by the *Unitary Development Plan*)
Environmental Charter (1991)
Countryside Recreation Strategy (1992)

Liverpool CC:

City of Liverpool Development Plan (1958)
Countryside Recreation Strategy (1989)
Liverpool's Countryside Report of Survey (1989)

Merseyside:

Merseyside Structure Plan (1980)
Merseyside Green Belt Plan (1983)
Merseyside Waste Disposal Plan (1989)
Mersey Estuary Management Plan (draft 1994)

- Sefton MBC: *Stanley District Local Plan* (1983)
Derelict Land Survey (1988) (Phase I and Phase II 1990/91)
Sefton Coast Management Plan (1989)
Countryside Recreation Strategy (1991)
Rimrose Valley Feasibility Study (1991)
A Working plan for Woodlands on the Sefton Coast
Survey of Outdoor Recreation Provision (1991)
Greenspace Survey (1991)
Sefton Transport Policy and Programme (1991/92)
Sefton Unitary Development Plan (1993)
- St. Helens MBC: *St. Helens County Borough Development Plan* (1953)
 Amendment No. 1 (First Review) (1965)
 Amendment No. 2 (CDA No 1 1969)
Lancashire County Council Development Plan (1956)
Widnes Town Map (1964)
East Merseyside Town Map (1965)
Ashton-in-Makerfield Town Map (1966)
Rainford Town Map (1967)
Newton-le-Willows District Plan (1982)
Sutton Local Plan (1983)
St. Helens Town Centre Local Plan (1984)
Draft Haydock Local Plan (1984)
Draft Ravenhead Local Plan (1986) (superseded by the *Unitary Development Plan*
Draft Policy for Nature 1986)
- Vale Royal BC: *Northwich Community Woodlands: Vale Royal BC proposals*
Vale Royal Countryside Recreation Strategy (1989)
Vale Royal Tourism. The Way Forward (1990)
Vale Royal Local Plan (1992)
Countryside Recreation Strategy (1992)
Vale Royal Arts Development Plan (1993)
- Warrington BC: *Rixton Brickworks Local Plan* (1980)
Walton Park Local Plan (1982)
Stretton Airfield Local Plan (1982)
Warrington Town Centre Local Plan (1982)
Old Howley Local Plan (1984)
Orford South Local Plan (1984)
Outer Warrington Local Plan
Whitecross/Arpley Meadows Local Plan (1986) (will be superseded by the *Warrington Borough Local Plan*)

The landscape assessment subdivided the Forest area into landscape regions, landscape types and landscape units. The landscape regions and landscape types are detailed below and within the map 'Landscape assessment of The Mersey Forest area'. The landscape units are also shown on the Plan and full details can be found within the landscape assessment (Mersey Forest Team & Land Use Consultants 1993).

Landscape regions

There are seven landscape regions within the Forest area. None is wholly contained within the Forest and some regions (such as the Lancashire Plain and Cheshire Plain) are only partly included in the Forest.

The regions are as follows:

- **Sefton coastline** A coastal fringe to the Lancashire Plain, formed by an extensive sand dune system. Within the Forest area the region is divided equally between open poor quality farmland and urban development. Pine woodland occurs around Formby.
- **Lancashire Plain** A low-lying plain of high quality farmland. The western third is agricultural fenland running up to the coastal fringe. Inland, the slightly higher ground forms rich farmland areas of cultivated basin peat. Extensive urban development has taken place on the south-west edge of the plain around Maghull and Kirkby.
- **St. Helens coalfield** This region is dominated by a scattered settlement pattern which has its origins in the development of the coalfield and subsequent industries. The urban edge is highly convoluted and a considerable amount of open agricultural land occurs within the urban fringe.
- **Liver conurbation** A large conurbation of sufficient size to be regarded as a separate region. The densely built-up Victorian core of the city has not been included in the Forest. The outer ring of mainly post-War development includes some large areas of undeveloped land and parkland of former country houses.

- **Mersey Valley** An area defined mainly by topography and the urban edge to the north-west, but containing a complex mixture of open and built landscapes. Its focus is the River Mersey and Estuary, although to the east the river becomes subsumed by urban development and the Manchester Ship Canal.
- **Cheshire Plain** Running south from the Mersey Valley and enclosing the Delamere region outside the Forest boundary, the Cheshire plain is a large region, of which only a small part occurs in the Forest. It is principally an agricultural plain dipping to the south; the River Weaver cuts through it, running north to Runcorn and forming the focus for urban development and industry.
- **Delamere** A small region with only a small part lying outside the Forest. Its character is dominated by landform created by a north-south ridge of sandstone to the west and a 'shelf' of glacial sands and gravels to the east. The area has little settlement and was historically a hunting forest. Delamere Forest occurs in the centre of the region.

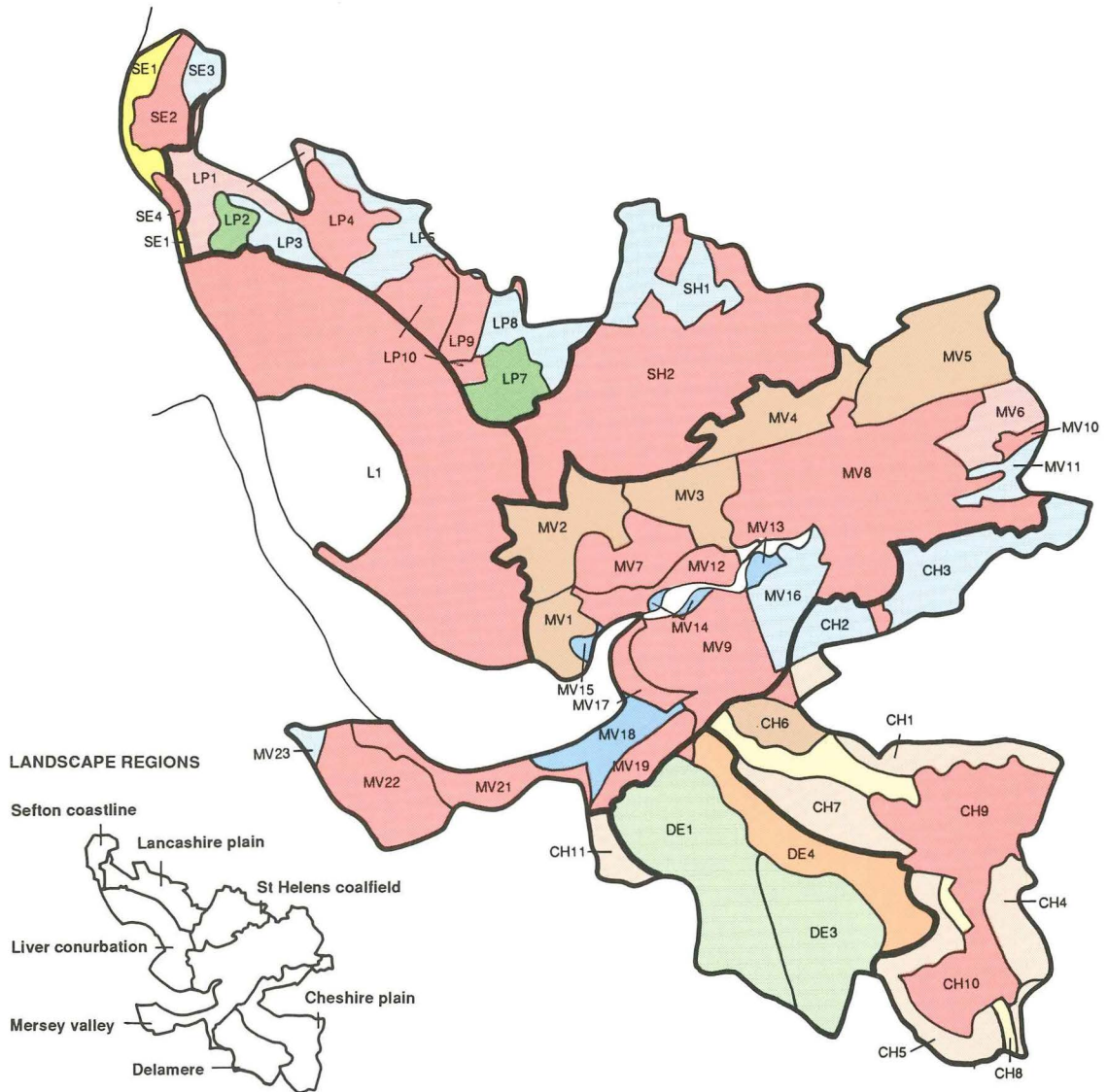
Landscape types

Across the Forest area, 14 landscape character types have been identified, as follows:

Settled

- (1) **Community urban fringe:** areas containing a mixture of landscape influences, all dominated by human activity. This includes housing, industrial land, quarries, tips, amenity land, neglected or derelict land and areas of farmland. The farmland can be very variable in quality of character, including a variety of agricultural uses from horticultural and fringe activities to small areas of actively worked farmland under urban pressure. This landscape type is much used by the local community and provides a valuable amenity and recreation resource.
- (2) **Large-scale industry:** landscapes sharing a concentration of industrial activity, originally from a heavy industrial base but with more recent lighter industrial diversification.

LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT OF THE MERSEYSIDE FOREST AREA



LANDSCAPE UNITS

Sefton coastline

- SE1 Sefton Dunes
- SE2 Formby
- SE3 Formby Hall
- SE4 Hightown

Lancashire plain

- LP1 Alt
- LP2 Blundell
- LP3 Lunt
- LP4 Maghull
- LP5 Melling
- LP7 Knowsley Park
- LP8 Knowsley North
- LP9 Kirkby Industrial Estate
- LP10 Kirkby

Liver conurbation

- L1 Liver conurbation

St Helens coalfield

- SH1 Garswood
- SH2 St. Helens

Mersey valley

- MV1 Hale
- MV2 Tarbock Green
- MV3 Bold Heath
- MV4 Burtonwood
- MV5 Culcheth
- MV6 Glazebrook
- MV7 Widnes
- MV8 Warrington
- MV9 Runcorn
- MV10 Hollin
- MV11 Warburton
- MV12 Ditton Ferry
- MV13 Norton
- MV14 Halton Marshes
- MV15 Hale Marsh
- MV16 Moore
- MV17 Weston
- MV18 Frodsham Marshes
- MV19 Helsby-Frodsham
- MV21 Booston-Stanlow
- MV22 Ellesmere
- MV23 Hooton

Cheshire plain

- CH1 Frandley
- CH2 Hatton
- CH3 Bradley
- CH4 King Street
- CH5 Darley
- CH6 Aston
- CH7 Crowton
- CH8 Weaver
- CH9 Northwich
- CH10 Winsford
- CH11 Dunham

Delamere

- DE1 Eddisbury
- DE3 Nunsmere
- DE4 Norley

LANDSCAPE TYPES

- Community urban fringe and large scale industry
- Urban fringe farmland
- Coast and dune
- Wooded parkland
- River valley
- Estuary farmland and estuary marsh
- Moss farmland
- Wooded small and large scale farmland
- Large scale farmland
- Medium to large scale farmland
- Small to medium scale farmland

Agricultural

(3) **Urban-fringe farmland:** landscape of actively farmed land obviously separate from community urban fringe. The urban influence is still strongly present and often the structure of the landscape is starting to breakdown, for instance low-cut and gappy hedges. The farmland is under high public pressure with some other uses such as horse grazing and caravan storage. These landscapes offer much scope for improvement.

(4) **Large-scale open farmland:** landscapes characterised by large, sometimes very large, fields, predominantly arable, hedgerow trees or woodland; this openness allows for long views throughout. There are isolated farmsteads and older village settlement patterns. The landscape types occur principally north of the River Mersey.

(5) **Medium- to large-scale farmland:** landscapes with medium to large field patterns created by less intensive agricultural changes, found principally on the Cheshire Plain south of the River Mersey. The field pattern produces a relatively intact landscape, both pasture and arable, containing hedges, hedgerow trees and small copses and woodland. Regular field boundaries indicate enclosure by Act of Parliament, irregular boundaries indicate ancient enclosure (before the Enclosure Acts).

(6) **Small- to medium-scale farmland:** the landscape is more intact than in the above two types, with smaller fields and more hedges and hedgerow trees. The agricultural use is mainly pastoral, with field enclosure mainly of ancient origin.

(7) **Moss farmland:** a flat landscape with no historical evidence of hedgerows or hedgerow trees, relying on drainage ditches to divide fields. Very intensive, farmed for cereals or vegetables such as carrots, cabbages and onions. An open feel with few farm buildings, there are some small pockets of woodland, principally from birch colonisation or alder carr.

Wooded

(8) **Forestry/large-scale farmland:** a farming landscape with a well-wooded appearance, and large fields. One example occurs on former heathland.

(9) **Forestry/medium-scale farmland:** also a well-wooded appearance, but associated with smaller fields and a more undulating terrain.

(10) **Wooded parkland:** an attractive landscape associated with walled parkland, often part of older estate holdings.

River and estuary

(11) **River valley:** an intact river valley distinguishable from the surrounding landscape.

(12) **Estuary farmland:** open flat farmland sloping towards the Mersey Estuary with both arable and pasture uses. Where the land is flooded by spring tides, there are no hedges and the land is poorer pasture; if a sea wall is present, hedges and better quality farmland occur.

(13) **Estuary marsh:** open landscapes, adjacent to open water and mud, providing poor or seasonal grazing. Land flooded by spring tides.

Coastal

(14) **Coastal dune:** a landscape dominated by sand dunes and coastal pine woodland.

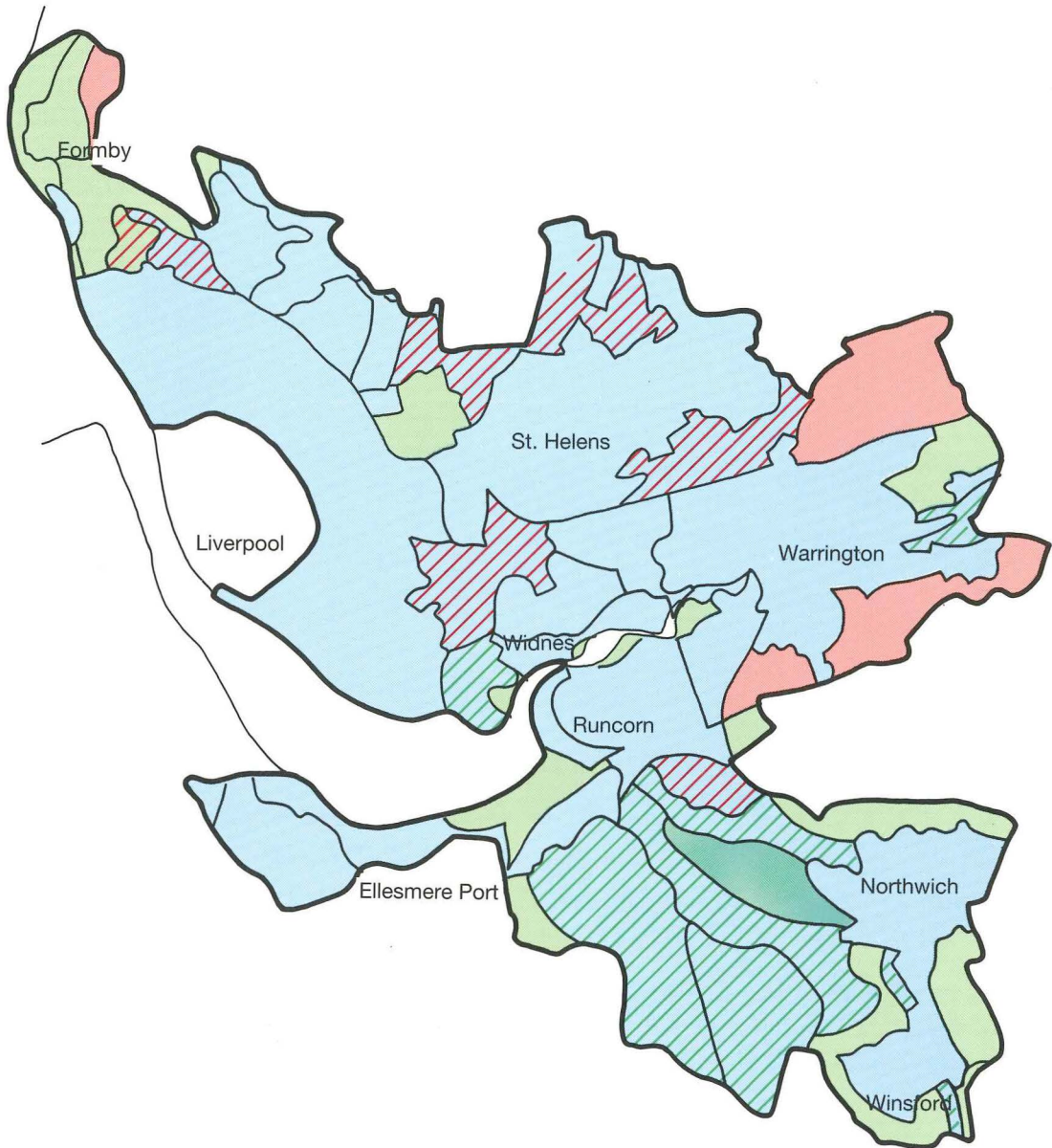
Landscape strategy: six options







For each landscape unit described by the landscape assessment a decision has been taken about the broad direction of desirable change; this is presented as one of the six options described below and within the map 'Landscape strategy for The Mersey Forest area'. Each decision was made on the basis of the existing character, quality and condition of the landscape unit.

(1) Maintaining character

Areas such as the Cheshire Plain, Lancashire Plain, Fenland, Mersey Valley Mossland, Knowsley Park and Sefton coastline are the most complete landscape structures within the Forest, occupying 12.9% of the Forest area. In these mainly rural areas, the landscape character is recognisable and at least moderately intact. The Cheshire Plain, for example, is characterised by medium to large fields surrounded by hedges, with numerous hedgerow oak trees, ponds, scattered red-brick farmhouses and flat topography.

LANDSCAPE STRATEGY FOR THE MERSEY FOREST AREA



- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|--|
|  | Maintain existing character |  | Careful balance of creation and restoration |
|  | Restore existing character |  | Careful balance of maintenance and restoration |
|  | Create new character |  | Careful balance of maintenance and creation |

The Sefton coastline's wide beaches are backed by high and extensive sand dunes, pine woodlands, golf course links and seaside development. Blanketing these landscapes with woodland would be a great loss to the region's landscape diversity and a waste of resources. The aim in these areas should be to maintain and support the existing character. In some cases, such as the mossland and fenland, this will mean a general recommendation against tree planting. In other areas, planting can and should be carried out, but only in sympathy with the existing character. On the Sefton coastline, this will mean assessing sites suitable for planting pines that do not conflict with the maintenance of the open sand dunes system. On the Cheshire Plain, small copses, scattered small to medium woodlands, hedgerow oaks and the safeguarding of ponds are recommended. Existing woodlands and trees should be well managed and this will mean reversing the recent history of neglect. Where this landscape borders urban areas (such as Northwich and Winsford) tree planting can be increased around the urban edge.

(2) Restoring character

In these mainly agricultural landscapes, agricultural intensification and urban influences have reduced landscape character, but the character is still apparent and can be salvaged. Only 6.6% of the Forest area is suitable for this option, including the Formby Hall area in Sefton, the northern edge of the Cheshire Plain to the South of Warrington and the Culcheth area.

The basic aim will be to use tree planting to rebuild the original character, so the option is similar to 'maintaining character', but more work is required. Pressure for negative change is more intense, so it may be necessary to go beyond the elements of the original character. Because of these pressures it may not be possible to re-create the original landscape. Thus, on the north side of the Cheshire Plain (where there is more arable farming than in the centre), it will not be possible to put all hedgerows back or re-create ponds and small copses. But some hedgerows may be replaced or restored and existing ponds restored. New woodland will have to fit into the existing farming structure. Along the urban edge it will be desirable to increase the woodland cover to mitigate urban influence. For example, in the

Appleton Thorn area, woodland should be significantly increased in the form of copses and small woods to provide a buffer between the urban edge and the motorway.

(3) Creating new landscapes

In these areas the landscape character has become so degraded that it would be impossible to re-create even a poor imitation of the original. A loss of structure and character has been caused by urban and industrial development, mining, quarrying and tipping; infrastructure development such as motorways, pylons and railways; agricultural intensification associated with modern arable farming; and urban influence on farming. The landscape is fragmented, has an incoherent structure and is dominated by unattractive uses made unsightly by their setting.

These landscapes occupy 57% of the Forest area. Examples are the fringe of the Liverpool conurbation around Fazakerley and Aintree; industry at Stanlow and Rocksavage; the extensive coal tips south of St. Helens; dredging lagoons and refuse tips adjacent to the Mersey in Warrington; the agricultural area around Moore criss-crossed by railways, canals, pipelines and pylons; and the intensive arable agriculture around Bold Heath.

At present, these areas do not have a recognisable landscape structure, and creation of The Mersey Forest offers an opportunity to establish a new landscape structure and a new landscape character. As the base on which such a structure will be built varies enormously from area to area, so the nature of the new landscape developed will also vary.

To the west of Warrington, for example, the banks of the Mersey are dominated by tipping. The Gatewarth tip is complete and is now being restored, while, the Arpley tip is active. The final landform will leave the river running between two low hills, which is an entirely alien landform in the open Mersey flood plain. Extensive tree planting will soften the shape of the 'hills' and integrate them into the surrounding area, creating wooded hillsides running down to a tidal estuary with fingers of woodland running back into the urban area. The new woodland will unify the landscape and bring about a coherent structure. Similarly, the colliery tips around St. Helens can be integrated into the landscape by woodlands.

Changing the surrounding landscape structure for many of the large infrastructure or industrial sites would also have a tremendous impact. For example, Stanlow Refinery, Rocksavage chemical plant or Fiddler's Ferry Power Station would all be much improved by a woodland setting of a comparable scale rather than the disparate urban fringe farmland in which they currently sit. Woodland hides both ground clutter and approach infrastructure and offers a unifying single land-use on the same scale as industry. The complicated pipework, shapes and shining metal work of a large industrial complex provide an exciting contrast with a large woodland. When further contrast with the Mersey Estuary is added, a landscape structure could be developed which is bold, stimulating and exciting, even attractive!

In all cases, new woodland can provide the structure and setting for surrounding land, integrating otherwise unrelated land uses into a unified whole.

(4) Creating and restoring landscape

These landscapes are all large-scale farmland on the urban fringe, occupying 7% of the Forest area. There has been a loss of structure caused by farming intensification, with urban influences on the periphery. The Tarbock Green area, for example, north-west of Widnes, is virtually surrounded by urban edge, yet is clearly an agriculture landscape with remnants of hedges, hedgerow trees and small woodlands. Aston, on the other hand, has a smaller urban influence and the choice of this option arises out of its recent switch from pastoral to arable farming.

At Tarbock Green the 'restore' option refers to the central core of farmland. The 'create' element should be pursued around the urban periphery, where a new landscape structure of woodland is required, merging into the restored structure of the farmland core.

At Aston, the situation is somewhat different, some of the original pastoral landscape remains as low-cut hedges and there are existing woodlands. These remnant features should be retained and, if possible, restored as the basic landscape structure, but, given the nature of the change in farming, it would be unreasonable to expect the landscape to go back to a pastoral framework. So, the opportunity should be taken to enhance the emerging landscape. Since the area borders the Weaver Valley, has several ancient woodlands and is on the north of the Cheshire Plain bordering Runcorn New Town, an increased woodland area would be very appropriate.

(5) Maintaining and restoring character

This option occurs at one wooded parkland at Ince Blundell. The woodlands are over-mature, requiring regeneration and the area may be bisected by a new road. The character of the area should be maintained by management of the woodland. The proposed new road will cause a loss of landscape structure, and new woodlands will be required to restore this structure.

(6) Maintaining and creating landscapes

These landscapes occur in the Delamere region, around the edge of Frodsham Marsh, Hale and Warburton, occupying some 14.5% of the Forest area. Whilst elements of the landscape character are relatively intact and worthy of conservation, there is also an opportunity and need for a new landscape created through woodland planting. These differences in approach are caused by variations in the landscape character across the whole unit or within parts of the unit.

In the Warburton area, for example, there is large-scale open agriculture on the Mersey flood plain. Landfill sites, urban edge and landscape intensification have all degraded the landscape. Whilst it is important to retain the open flood plain element, the degraded elements of the landscape require integration through a new structure provided by woodland planting.

At Frodsham Marsh, the central marsh area should be left open. Yet the fringe has become degraded as a result of industrial, urban and road development. Woodland planting around the margins will provide a structured edge to the intact core.

The Delamere region contains three landscape units, all with different characteristics. The mixture of intact and degraded elements plus the historic background of the ancient hunting forest give rise to this combined option. As the units have different characteristics, the detailed prescriptions are also different. To take one example, the Nunsmere area is a flat shelf of glacial sand and gravel that was formerly heathland. It contains areas of open agriculture, small meres, pine woodlands and sand quarries. The latter offer the opportunity to create additional meres, while new tree planting on a scale similar to the existing woodlands will re-create the old forest area. At the same time it is important to safeguard some of the open heathland aspect of the landscape and the existing meres.

APPENDIX C: GRANTS IN THE MERSEY FOREST AREA

Organisation	Work covered	Value	Notes
Department of the Environment			
The Single Regeneration Budget	Brings together 20 separate funding programmes from five Government departments and is administered by the new integrated Government offices for the regions. It will support initiatives which meet one or more of a list of stated economic and social objectives		
English Partnerships	Funded from the above budget and with a specific remit on urban regeneration.		
Forestry Commission			
Woodland Grant Scheme	Ground preparation, fencing, planting, establishment to year 10	Varies according to size of woodland and species. Fixed rate £615-£1575/ha	No restrictions on applicants (can be Planning Permission related). Paid in instalments, 70% on planting, 20% year 5, 10% year 10.
Community Woodland Supplement	Access for public into woodland	£950/ha	Must qualify for WGS and be supported by an agreed strategic plan.
Better Land Supplement	Any crop land/improved grassland planted with woodland	£400 for conifers £600 for broadleaved trees	Must qualify for WGS and be on arable or improved grassland.
Woodland Management Grant	Management of woodland over 10 years old	£10-45/ha	No restriction on applicants. Must have a management plan and carry out agreed works to a higher value than the grant.
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food			
	Payment for converting agricultural land to forestry	£250/ha paid annually for 10 years (crop more than 50% conifers) or 15 years (crop more than 50% broadleaved)	Farmers only. WGS scheme must be approved. Size: 1 ha to 50% of farm holding.
	Shelter belts, all work as approved Hedgerows	Of 50% + broadleaf, 40% of approved cost Others 15% costs	Farmers only.
Countryside Commission			
Section 9 Local Government Act Grants including Groundwork	Variety of activities funded Amenity tree planting recreation paths and bridleways, information and visitor services, rangers. Access and management agreement etc.	25 -50% Agreed costs	Like to approve annual programme of work from local authorities etc. Individuals or voluntary bodies can make applications but most public schemes are submitted by local authorities.
Countryside Stewardship	Targets: 8 landscapes In Mersey Forest there are: small areas of lowland heath, river valleys/waterside landscapes, historic landscapes, coastal landscapes and urban fringe. 10-year agreement. Hedgerow Incentive Scheme.	Variety of fixed annual and capital payments.	Landowners, farmers, local authorities, etc. Agreed 10-year scheme.
English Nature			
Project Grants	Mainly SSSIs.	Up to 50% accepted costs.	Discretionary; applicants must have legal interest in land.
Community Action for Wildlife	Assist conservation in urban areas and urban fringe.	£500-5000 up to 50% costs.	Aimed at voluntary groups and trusts but anyone can apply. Discretionary.

APPENDIX D: COST OF CONVERTING AMENITY GRASSLAND TO WOODLAND

Example of woodland planting for grant purposes – 2.5 ha of broadleaf species which would be eligible for Forestry Commission Woodland Grant Scheme and Community Woodland supplement.

All costs and grants are calculated on a hectareage basis and in real terms.

Example for planting 2.5 ha of broadleaved trees	
	Cost (£)
Planting*	
Ground preparation	500
Plants and planting	1000
Replacement of failures	200
First-year establishment	800
Design and supervision	250
Sub-total	2750
Establishment (years 2–10)	
Including herbicides, inter-row cut to year 5 and litter picking †	3400
Total planting and establishment	6150
Grants from the Forestry Commission	
Woodland Grant Scheme	
1st instalment	963
2nd instalment	275
3rd instalment	137
Community Woodland Supplement	950
Total Grants	2325
Net cost of planting and establishment of 1 ha over 10 years	3825
*In most open-space situations, fencing is not required.	
†£600 per year falling to £200 per year by year 7.	

Costs for mowing amenity grass have been obtained from partner authorities. A typical cost would lie in the range £500-900/ha per year (inclusive of scavenging and perimeter strimming) and this does not vary greatly with the type of mowing; 17 cuts per year with a gang mower can cost less than six cuts per year for semi-rough grass or a once-a-year mow and rake off.

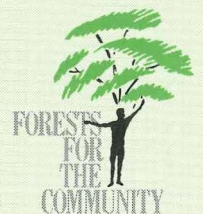
The total accumulated costs in real terms for maintaining 1 ha of grass over 10 years will be £5000–9000. This is significantly more than the cost of tree planting. Even if total maintenance costs were as low as £400/ha per year, by year 10 the woodland would be showing a lower accumulated cost.

The costs have been presented on the basis of a high standard of ground preparation and maintenance. It is possible to reduce these costs, achieving further significant savings or money could be invested in other infrastructure development within the park. A comparable relaxation in the mowing regime will not yield similar savings since there is no cost reduction in reducing the number of annual cuts, and complete abandonment of mowing is likely to be unacceptable.

After year 10, annual average management costs will be below £100/ha per year and the woodland would probably be eligible for a Forestry Authority Special Management Grant of £45/ha per year.

THE MERSEY FOREST

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The Mersey Forest is a partnership project; the following is a list of major contributors.

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Department of the Environment (Merseyside Task Force)
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Sports Council
National Rivers Authority
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (ADAS)
Mersey Forest Project Team

Study groups

In 1992 a series of study groups was set up to investigate a wide range of subjects relevant to the Forest. Many of the groups' findings have been used as the basis for this Plan.

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