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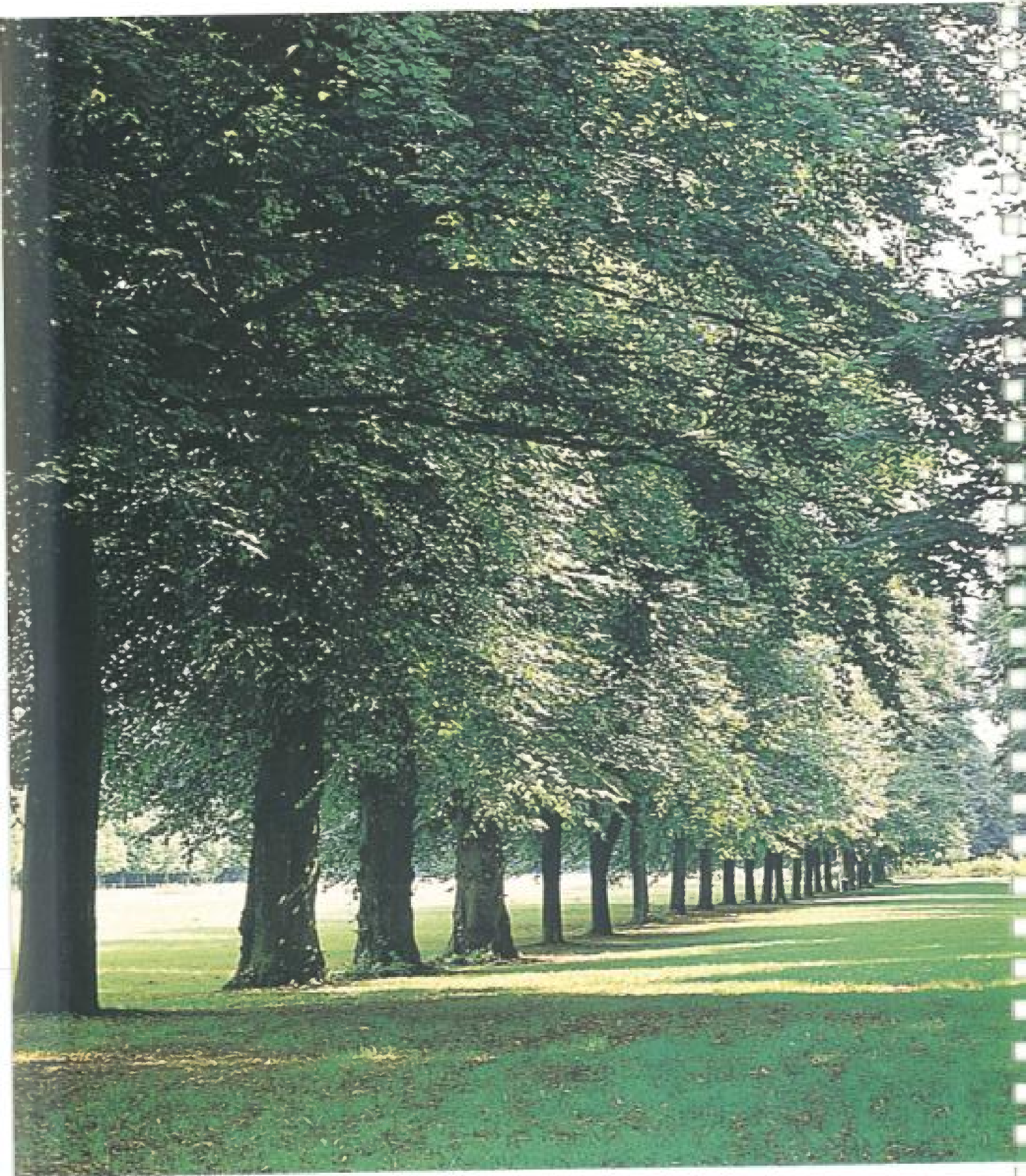
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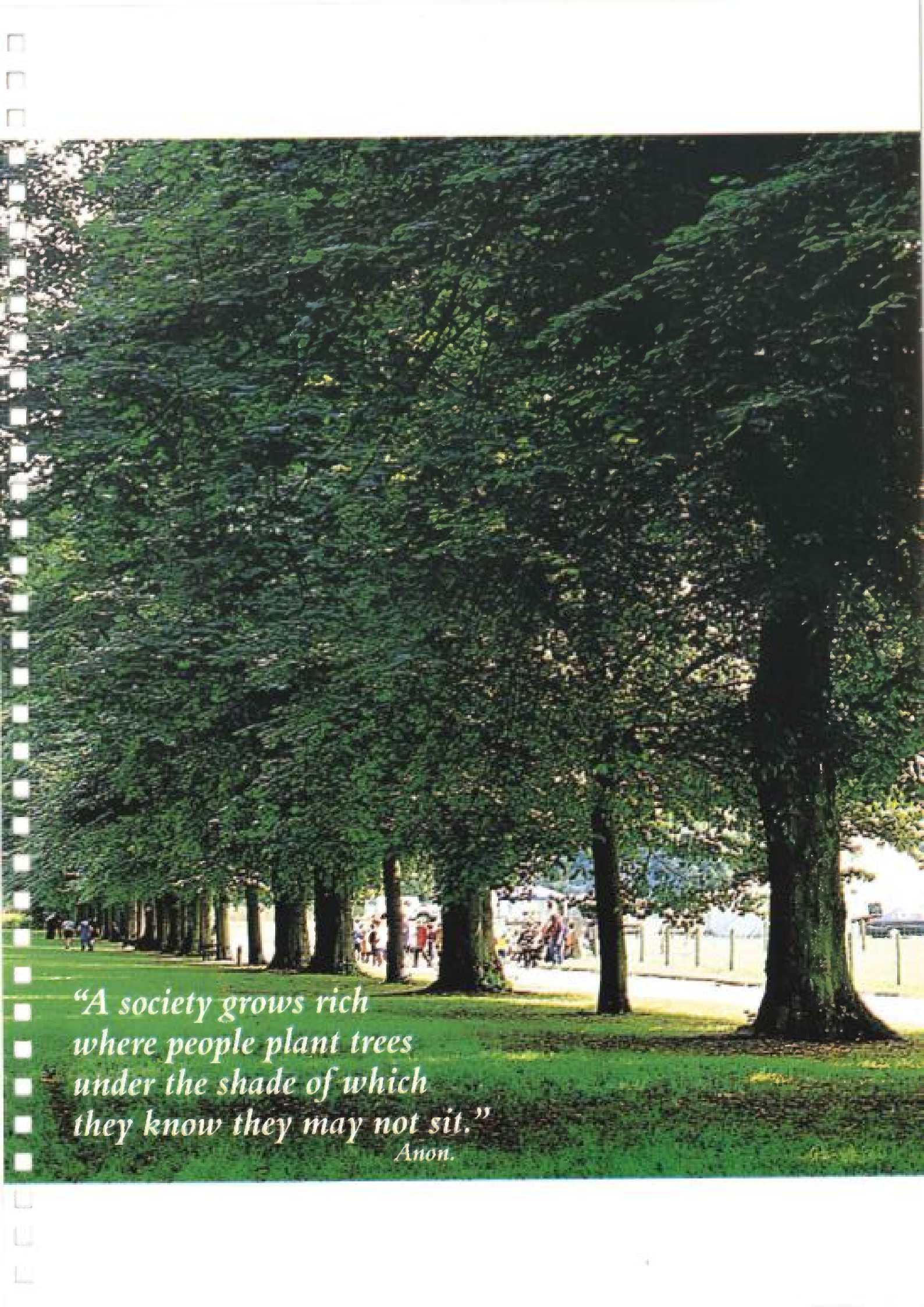
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The Mersey Forest Plan



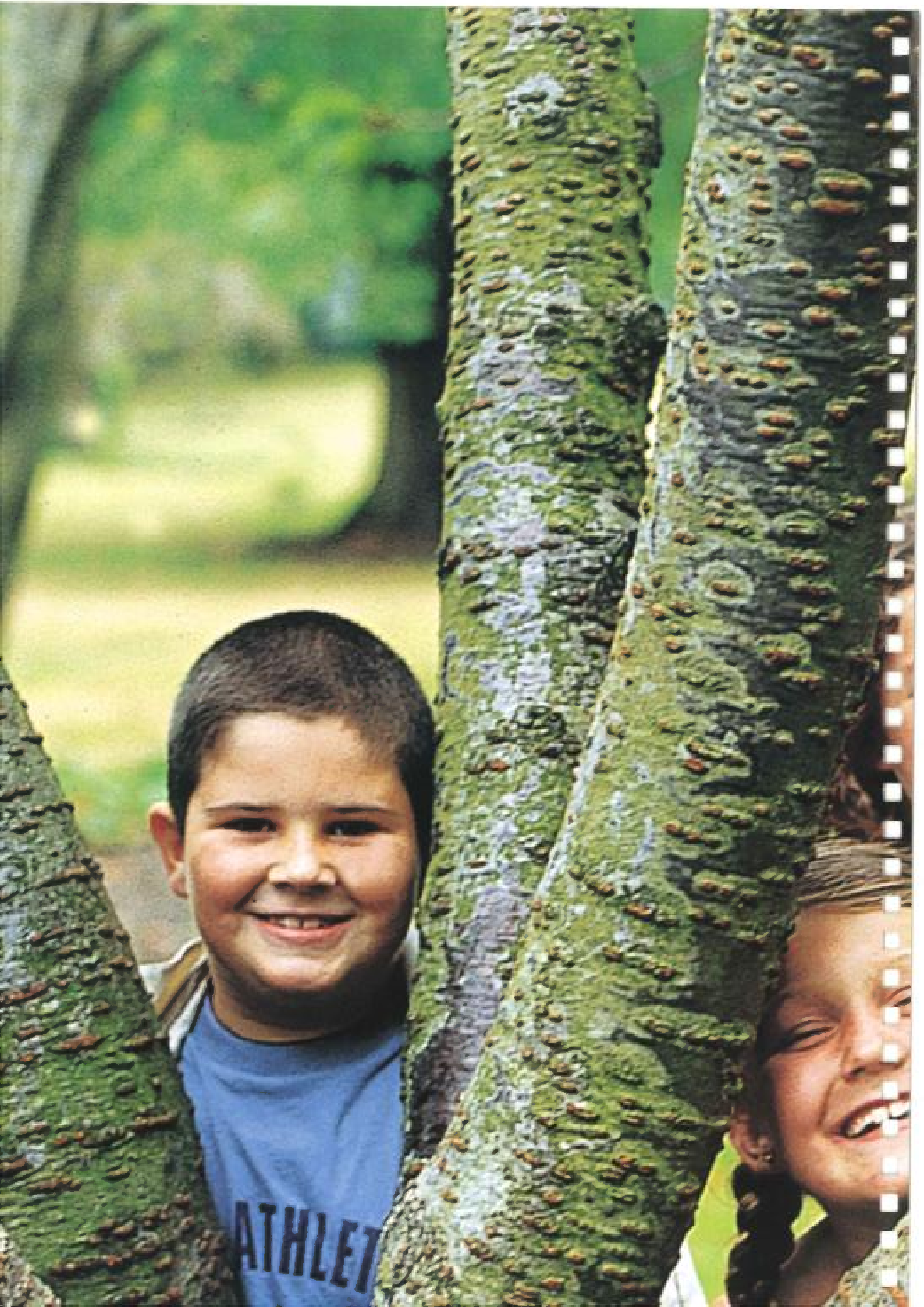
The National *community forest* Partnership

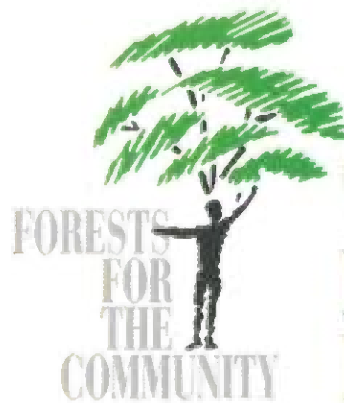
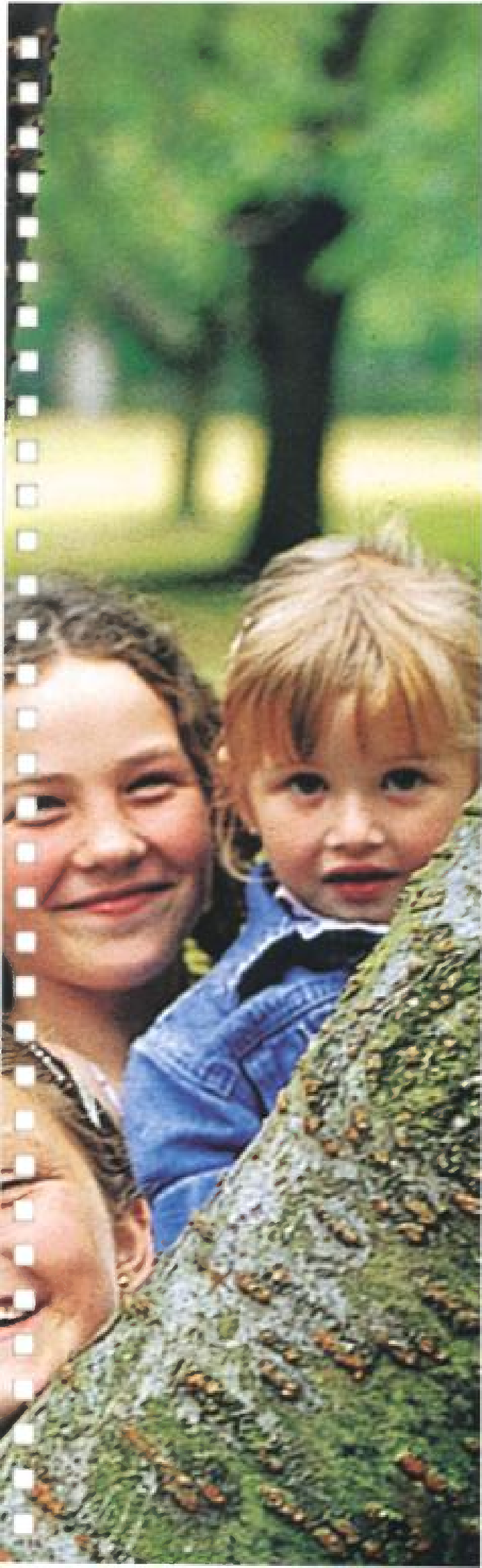




*“A society grows rich
where people plant trees
under the shade of which
they know they may not sit.”*

Anon.





THE MERSEY FOREST

FOREST PLAN AUGUST 2001.

Countryside Agency

Forestry Commission

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

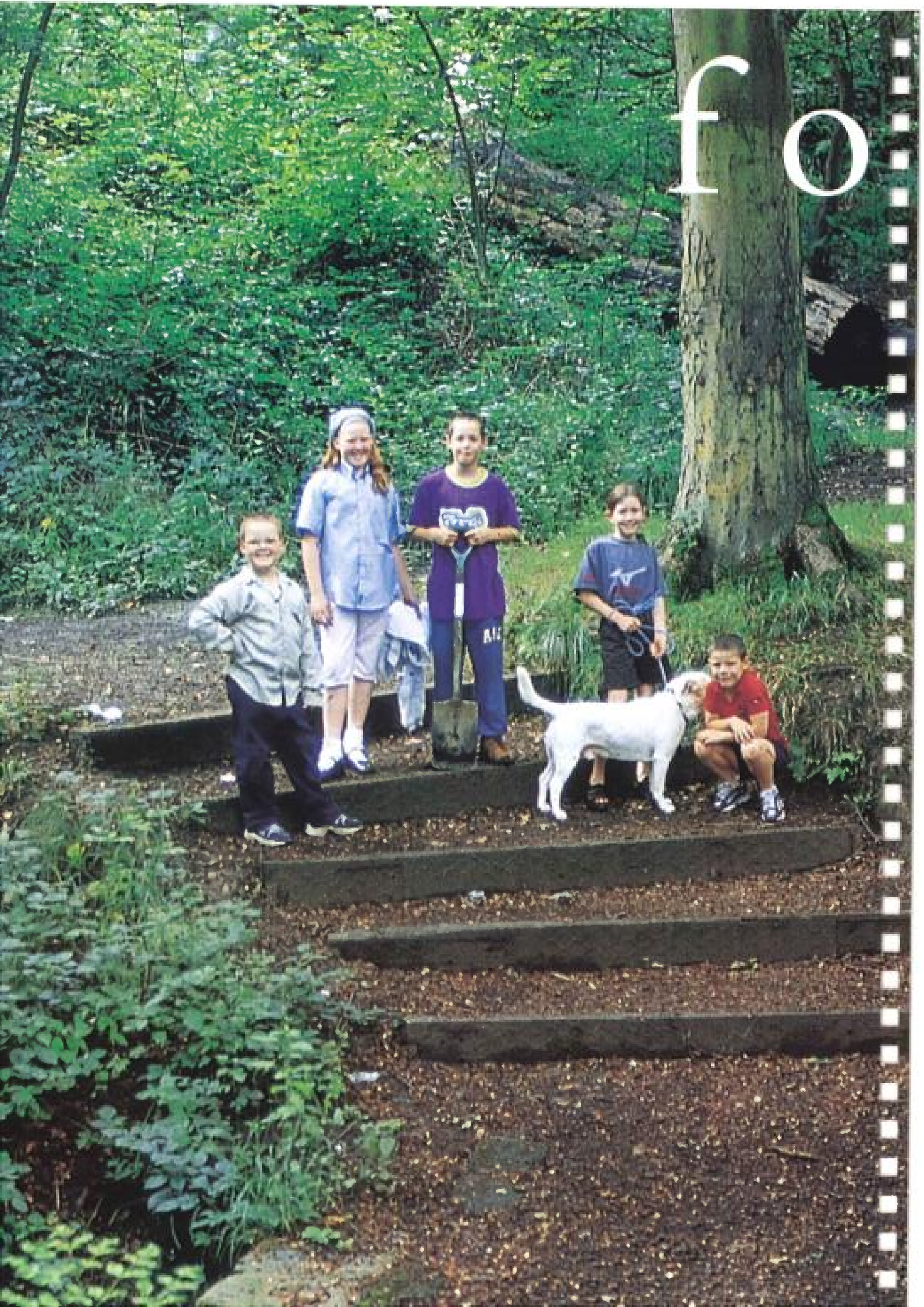
Vale Royal Borough Council

Warrington Borough Council

Photographs by

Mike Anders • Steve Barlow • Lee Dudley
David Ford • Jo Sayers • David Woodfall

f o



r e w o r d

"Like all good ideas, The Mersey Forest is simple in concept. By creating a new, extensively wooded landscapes 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 - 1994-1999

The paragraphs on the left introduced the first Mersey Forest Plan in 1994.

Seven years on they remain just as appropriate as an introduction to The Mersey Forest. The difference is that we now have tangible evidence of the real benefits being delivered through The Forest partnership and of the difference that The Mersey Forest can make to the quality of life of people in our area.

The success to date of The Mersey Forest is seen in the large areas of new community woodland created, the new funding that has been brought into the area through Mersey Forest projects, new jobs created and in the involvement of tens of thousands of people each year in forest events and campaigns.

Since The Mersey Forest began there has been a 45% increase in woodland cover, almost 1000 ha of non-woodland habitat has been created or brought into effective management. In all over 2500 ha of land has been transformed by work related to The Forest. The partnership has made great progress in delivering The Mersey Forest.

We are however still in the early stages of The Mersey Forest and there is still a great deal to do in order to achieve the vision set out in this Plan.

The review of The Mersey Forest Plan, carried out in 1999/2000, allowed the partnership to consider the changes that have taken place over the past 7 years, to include new areas and new activities that can contribute to the vision for The Mersey Forest. An obvious change is the fact that the forest has become bigger, the project area now covers over 115,000 ha. The boundary changes not only deal with issues of service delivery within partner authorities but also open up new areas for Forest activity.

Any success achieved to date has been through strong and effective partnerships between a wide range of private, public and voluntary organisations. The continued success of The Mersey Forest will be achieved by building on these partnerships to continue to turn our vision to reality.



Paul Nolan
Director, The Mersey Forest.

Copies of this plan and the Annual Business Plan are available on the Mersey Forest website:
www.merseyforest.org.uk



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Abbreviations in this plan

BC:	Borough Council
BTCV:	British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
CAP:	Common Agricultural Policy
CC:	City Council or County Council
CMF:	Capital Modernisation Fund
DEFRA:	Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DETR:	Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions (now part of DEFRA)
EU:	European Union
KR:	Kommunalverband Ruhrgebiet
MAFF:	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (now part of DEFRA)
MBC:	Metropolitan Borough Council
NUFU:	National Urban Forestry Unit
NWDA:	North West Development Agency
NWRA:	North West Regional Association
NUVIL:	New Uses for Vacant Industrial Land
RPG:	Regional Planning Guidance
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

First published by The Mersey Forest, August 1994.

Review published by The Mersey Forest, December 2001.



Intro

The Mersey Forest, one of 12 community forests promoted by the Countryside Agency (formerly 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. 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 Aim of The Mersey Forest partnership is:

To provide environmental, social and economic benefits for local people through the creation of a community Forest

This aim will be achieved through the following objectives:

- The establishment and management of trees and woodlands and associated non-woodland habitats
- Involving local people in the creation and management of the community forest
- Facilitating the use and enjoyment of community forest sites by local people
- Increasing the economic viability of woodlands

The Mersey Forest Team was set-up in 1991, with financial support from the former Countryside Commission and the partner local authorities. The Forest Plan was first adopted in 1994, and set out the policies and objectives of The Mersey Forest. The Mersey Forest receives support from the Countryside Agency and the Forestry Commission, along with the local authorities within The Mersey Forest area. They comprise Sefton MBC, Liverpool City Council, Knowsley MBC, St Helens MBC, Halton BC, Warrington BC, Vale Royal BC, Ellesmere Port and Neston BC and Cheshire County Council.

The Forest Plan has now been reviewed, and takes into account changes in government planning guidance, regional and local policies and strategies, and changes to the landscape of The Mersey Forest area which have occurred since the inception of the original Forest Plan. Ultimately, this Forest Plan Review seeks to build upon the successes of the first seven years of the Forest.

It is important that the Plan's recommendations are taken into account in regional planning strategies and advice for the North West; for example, those being coordinated by the North West Regional Assembly (NWRA) of local authorities and The North West Development Agency (NWDA).

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

*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 (1094-1155)

Education

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 community woodland strategies for each local authority district.
- **Implementation** outlines the potential mechanisms for changing land use within the Forest and makes recommendations for improving effectiveness.

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 continues to be 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 depends 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 fully 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.



1. Forests for the Community

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 it meant something quite different. Then, the great forests of England were not only trees, but also 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. 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.



LOCATION OF THE 12 COMMUNITY FORESTS IN ENGLAND

1.2 Community Forests cover large areas in and around the edges of towns and cities. They are not continuous plantings of trees but a rich mosaic of wooded landscapes and land uses including farmland, villages, leisure enterprises, nature areas and public open space. The aim is to create well-wooded landscapes for wildlife, work and education, with new opportunities for recreation, all on the doorstep of half of England's population.

1.3 The Forests for the Community programme that consists of 12 Community Forests in England is now over five years into implementation. Established by the Countryside Agency (then the Countryside Commission) and the Forestry Commission in partnership with a wide range of local partners, much has been achieved in the first few years. In total over 6,000 hectares of new woodland planting has been created, along with numerous benefits to the landscape and to local people. Importantly, Community Forests have become a mainstay of environmentally led regeneration and sustainability.

The 12 Community Forests are:

- Forest of Avon around Bristol
- Forest of Mercia in southern Staffordshire
- Great North Forest in south Tyne and Wear and north-east Durham
- Great Western Community Forest around Swindon
- Greenwood Community Forest north of Nottingham
- Marston Vale Community Forest to the south of Bedford
- The Mersey Forest on Merseyside and in North Cheshire
- Red Rose Forest in Greater Manchester
- South Yorkshire Forest near Sheffield
- The Tees Forest around Cleveland
- Thames Chase to the east of London
- Watling Chase in south Hertfordshire/north London

1.4 Each Community Forest has a non-statutory plan, approved by Government, which describes the proposals for developing that forest over the next 30 years and guides its implementation.

1.5 In each forest the Countryside Agency, the Forestry Commission and 58 local authorities have appointed dedicated project teams to oversee implementation. Many other national and local organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors have become involved and are now supporting the partnerships. All are valued partners, crucial to the success of the forests.

Aim and Objectives

1.6 The aim of the national programme of Community Forests is to achieve major environmental improvements in and around towns and cities, creating beautiful areas rich in wildlife, with associated provision for access, leisure and education, thereby making them more attractive places in which to live, do business and enjoy leisure time.

1.7 The corporate objectives agreed by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (now DEFRA) which each Community Forest has adopted are:

- To regenerate the environment of the Green Belt and equivalent areas, where it is public policy to keep it open, and help to ensure that it is permanently green and open.
- To improve the landscape of the area, including reclamation of derelict land, to create a visually exciting and functionally diverse environment.
- To increase opportunities for sport and recreation, including artistic and cultural events, and access.
- To protect areas of high quality landscape or historical or archeological interest.
- To protect sites of nature conservation value and create new opportunities for nature conservation.
- To provide new opportunities for educational use of the area, and ensure the mosaic of habitats in the forest can be used for the full range of environmental education needs of the surrounding schools. Also to ensure that urban schools are not disadvantaged in meeting the needs of the National Curriculum.
- To protect the best agricultural land and increase opportunities for farm diversification elsewhere in accordance with Government agricultural and local planning policies.
- To establish a supply of timber and other woodland products.
- To achieve a high level of local community commitment to the concept and involvement in its implementation.
- To give public and private sector confidence in the long term prospects for the area and to provide a proper base for investment.
- To improve the environment near housing and local industry and to increase the value of properties and businesses and encourage inward investment.
- To seek private sector support to implement the forest and to invest in leisure and other relevant service sectors.
- To create jobs in the new woodland industries, both management of woodland and use of the raw materials.
- To create jobs in the leisure industry developed in and around the Community Forest
- To sustain other local jobs by providing an outstanding environment as a comparative economic advantage over competitor areas.
- To complement the Government's priorities for inner cities, by providing for associated leisure and open space needs at the physically closest locations.
- To remain flexible in the light of changes, such as in the leisure market.





1.8 In 1998 the DETR funded an evaluation of the first five years of the Forests for the Community programme. The conclusions were positive and confirmed the success of the first five years of implementation. It also confirmed that the objectives of Community Forestry remain valid. (Scenario Analysis of Community Forestry 1993 – 1997, ERM 1998)

1.9 Existing tree cover within the 12 forests at the start of the programme averaged 6.9%, with an average of 170 hectares of woodland planted each year. The aim is to increase tree cover to about 30% of the available open land, over about 30 years. This implies a significant increase in tree planting. In the first five years, 6,000 hectares were planted throughout the 12 forests.

Current policy framework

1.10 As the Community Forests develop, so too does the policy framework which embraces them. Community Forests have pioneered an approach to regeneration through community-based partnerships that give them life well into the 21st century. They are well placed to respond to future policy changes across a broad spectrum of interests, including environmental, economic and social.

1.11 Internationally, the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 acknowledged the essential nature of forestry for the well being of the planet and marked the first ever-global agreement on forest principles. The need to make future development sustainable was clearly recognised. Community Forests embrace the government's four objectives for sustainable development:

- Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone.
- Effective protection of the environment.
- Prudent use of natural resources.
- Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

(DETR, 1999)

1.12 Nationally, the Government has begun a programme of devolution in Scotland and Wales, and regionalisation in the creation of regional development agencies in England. There has also been an increasing emphasis on 'sustainability' as a fundamental attribute of government-funded regeneration and development programmes. The Community Forests offer the regional development agencies a tried and tested model that combines a strategic mechanism for delivering environmental improvement alongside sustainable economic regeneration.

1.13 Community Forests operate in a climate of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform through Agenda 2000 which is designed to pave the way for European Union enlargement and, in relation to agriculture, to address international trade concerns by bringing EU farm prices nearer to world market prices. This simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy is a further step towards decoupling farm support from production, and pave the way for a new "second pillar of the CAP" designed to promote environmental action, forestry and rural development.

1.14 The introduction of the new Rural Development Regulation provides the framework for making rural development a "second pillar" of the CAP as more resources are diverted from mainstream CAP support. The Regulation is a small step in the transition towards fully integrating agricultural policy with rural policy to meet the environmental, social and economic needs of rural areas. The Regulation brings together nine separate measures into a single framework which provides the foundation on which to build a long term, integrated, rural policy, linking agriculture, forestry and support for the wider rural economy. (Forestry Commission, 1999).

Countryside Agency

1.15 On 1 April 1999 the Countryside Commission became the Countryside Agency, merging with elements of the Rural Development Commission. The Countryside Agency is the

new statutory body working:

- To conserve and enhance the countryside.
- To promote social equity and economic opportunity for the people who live there.
- To help everyone, wherever they live, to enjoy this national asset.

(Countryside Agency, January 2001)

1.16 The former Countryside Commission's publication "England's Trees and Woods" (The Countryside Commission, 1993) expresses the Agency's overall policy and remains valid as a context for increasing tree cover in England, especially through the principles of multi-purpose forestry embraced by the Community Forests. A new policy context for the regeneration of the countryside in and around towns, 'Linking Towns and Country', was published in March 1999, in which the multi-purpose, strategic, community-based partnerships pioneered by Community Forests are flagships.



1.17 The Countryside Agency's objectives cover the full breadth of sustainable development - social, economic and environmental - and the Agency intends to use Community Forests to test innovative approaches. The recently published Urban and Rural White Papers (DETR, 2000) reinforce the validity of the Community Forests within this policy arena, and set a comprehensive framework in which the Forests can help to achieve innovative approaches towards the objectives of sustainable development. The new Countryside Agency Strategy (2001) will allow it to make full use of the Community Forests as test-beds for a wide range of these policies.

Forestry Commission

1.18 The Government decided following devolution that the Forestry Commission would continue to be the department with responsibility for forestry throughout Great Britain. The Forestry Commission is now organised to meet the requirements of devolution with structures in place to serve the needs of England, Scotland and Wales, while drawing

upon central resources where needed. These arrangements allow the Forestry Commission to develop policies tailored to the particular needs and circumstances of each country. In England this will involve building on the "England Forestry Strategy - A New Focus for England's Woodlands", launched by the Forestry Commission in December 1998.

1.19 The "England Forestry Strategy" sets out the Government's strategic priorities and programmes over the next five to ten years. It demonstrates strengthened commitment to social forestry in England as well as focusing on areas of greatest opportunity and need. The strategy has four key programmes:

- Forestry for Rural Development
- Forestry for Economic Regeneration
- Forestry for Recreation, Access and Tourism
- Forestry for the Environment and Conservation.

The delivery of these programmes can be greatly assisted through the Community Forest programme and the Forests will remain major partners with the Forestry Commission in achieving these goals. The Community Forests are therefore seen as a major delivery mechanism to achieve large scale, multi-purpose, sustainable forestry where it is most required.

1.20 Forest Enterprise, together with the Forestry Commission, have set up the Land Regeneration Unit, with the aim of greater involvement in restoring derelict land, targeting, where possible, the Community Forest areas. This innovative approach is opening up a significant number of opportunities where substantial areas of new woodlands are already planned or under way.

1.21 The Countryside Agency and the Forestry Commission remain committed to the Forests for Community programme. They will continue to be national lead partners. Their roles as national lead partners are undiminished.



Funding Regimes

1.22 The creation of Community Forests is not dependent upon large-scale changes in land ownership. The main approach is to encourage farmers, landowners and businesses to consider the opportunities which the 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.

1.23 Finance for the development of Community Forests comes from a number of sources. Grants from the Forestry

Commission, the Countryside Agency, DEFRA, Regional Development Agencies and other bodies help with planting, management, restoration of derelict land and provision of facilities for sport and recreation. Further money comes from local government and industry. Private investment is attracted from companies who see a market potential such as those for wood products or in the leisure sector. Resources from voluntary sector organisations such as The Groundwork Trust and the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) have an equally valuable role. Sound business partnerships are the key for those responsible for planning, developing and managing a Community Forest.

1.24 Since the establishment of the programme, Community Forests have drawn in substantial funds from other sources such as the National Lottery, European Union, landfill tax, business sponsorship, developers' contributions for projects on the ground, and donations from charitable trusts for land acquisitions and tree planting. The gearing ratio, for example, of the Countryside Agency's expenditure on Community Forest teams and project work is excellent. The forests are well placed to make the most of new funding opportunities, offering strategic vision, local, regional and national partnerships and a proven record of delivery. The Forest Enterprise have already successfully applied for £12 million of Capital Modernisation Fund (CMF) money, which was set up by the Treasury in 1998 to support innovative investment programmes which modernise and reform public services. This is just one example of how the partnership is attracting large additional funds.



Conclusion

1.25 Community Forests will take 30 years to mature and perhaps 30 years to develop their full potential, but the improvements are already tangible. 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, to be used by future generations.

“The aim is to move from 5% to 12% woodland cover over the next 25 years. The Forest Strategies show where this change will be focused.”



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





LOCAL

context

2. Case for The Mersey Forest

2.1 The Mersey Forest project includes the Merseyside Boroughs of Knowsley, St. Helens, 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 Agency, the Forestry Commission and the partner authorities, a boundary for the Mersey Forest has been agreed, giving a project area of over 115,000 ha.



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 re-housed 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. Objective 1 funding, a European Union funding mechanism for the poorest of

the EU regions, has been targeted at Merseyside to try to alleviate some of the structural issues that limit economic growth.

2.5 The Index of Multiple Deprivation Statistics (DETR, 2000) highlights the complexity of socio-economic problems within the Merseyside Region, with Knowsley and Liverpool ranked second and third for multiple deprivation respectively, out of 355 districts across the country. Halton and St Helens are ranked at 16 and 40, and although they fare slightly better than the inner city areas, are also of socio-economic concern.

2.6 In line with revised EU policy, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), in conjunction with the DETR, has reviewed the designation of 'Assisted Areas', which are eligible for Regional Selective Assistance. This aims to focus on high-quality, knowledge based projects which provide skilled jobs (DTI, 1999). Merseyside, comprising the metropolitan districts of Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens and the Wirral qualify as "Tier 1" Assisted Areas, with parts of Halton and Ellesmere Port & Neston qualifying for "Tier 2" designation.

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 former 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 has considerably increased the funding available from the EU.

2.8 The Mersey Forest partnership has been able to utilise elements of funding that have been targeted at the area for regeneration. The outcomes from projects supported from these funds are linked to job creation and an improved image for the area, which links directly to some of the core strategies identified in Regional Planning Guidance and Regional Economic Strategies (NWRA, 2001 and NWDA, 1999). These funds add value to the traditional sources of project funding from the Countryside Agency, and the Forestry Commission and include:

- Single Regeneration Budget
- Regional Challenge Funding
- Objective 1 and 2
- Rechar

Dereliction and environmental quality

2.13 With a few notable exceptions, such as Warrington New Town and more recently Liverpool's Albert Dock and the Mersey Basin campaign, 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 in the past.

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).

2.15 The nature of dereliction varies from place to place, reflecting industrial history and the relative strength of the property market. 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.



2.9 In addition, funding for projects has also become available through:

- National Lottery
- Landfill Tax Credit Scheme
- Private Sector Sponsorship
- Section 106 Planning agreements

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 an impact on the buoyancy of neighbouring areas. This is reflected in the Assisted Areas designations referred to above.

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. One of the core strategy objectives of the North West Economic Strategy is to 'project a positive image' and to 'restore the environmental deficit' (NWDA, 1999), both of which can be actively supported by The Mersey Forest.

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. The quality of the environment plays a crucial role in contributing towards both of these components. Woodland cover in The Mersey Forest area extends to only 5%, compared to a 7% average for England as a whole (Forestry Commission, 1998), which in itself falls well behind all other EU countries except for Ireland.





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.

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 Between 1992 and 1994 the Forestry Commission carried out a cost-benefit study for all community forests: (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 There are many other benefits that 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. In the first few years of The Mersey Forest over 40 new jobs have been created already.
- **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 cardio-vascular 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.

Initiatives such as "Walking the Way to Health" aim to promote exercise in areas like community woodlands as a way of improving the health and fitness of people.

- **Tourism:** 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

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

2.24 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.

2.25 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).

2.26 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.

2.27 Over the last 40 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



2.28 Today, some 17% of the Ruhr is forested, creating a new green setting for industry, housing and recreation. Verbandsgrünflächen - 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.

2.29 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, provides the framework for a similar concerted programme of action.

Six central themes

2.30 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.


2.31 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. That vision remains valid now, 10 years on.


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

Converting wasteland to community 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 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.

Capitalising on the existing woodland assets:



The 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.

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. red sandstone appears in the Delamere area and other small outcrops due to faulting, which has lifted it near the surface.

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.

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 A)

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 deforested 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 ridge-lines eastwards from the coast.

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 international 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 former National Rivers Authority (NRA), the Environment Agency 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 Transport and the Regions and local authorities. Redundant infrastructure is also being redeveloped, such as waterways for recreational use and railways for footpaths, cycleways and bridleways.

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 in 1994 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.

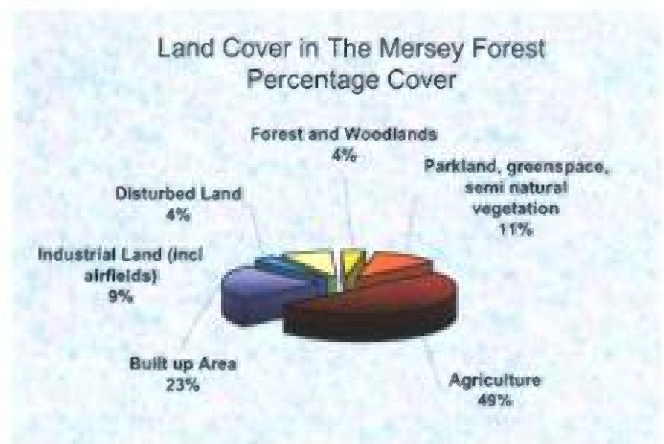
3.12 The categories of land cover are not correlated directly with the area of land available for tree planting. The built-up area is not available, but a small part of the industrial land and approximately half the derelict land can be planted. Conversely, a significant part of the parkland, green space 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.

Figure 3.1



Disturbed land

3.15 A survey carried out in 2001 by the Forest Commission, Mersey and Red Rose Forests focused on the location and extent of derelict under-utilised and neglected land in the Mersey belt. This work identified large areas for potential community woodland on these sites (DUNL Survey, TER, 2001).

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 carried out by The Mersey Forest Team and partners 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 (Bending and Moffat, 1992 & 1997 and The Mersey Forest, 1999)



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.

3.22 Over 80% of the existing 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.

3.23 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

3.24 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.

3.25 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.

3.26 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.

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

3.18 Ownership of such sites is also varied. 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 acquired by Cheshire County Council. 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 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.

3.20 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

3.21 Woodland cover in The Mersey Forest area extends to 5%, having risen from 4% since the inception of The Forest in 1994. This remains low however, when compared to the average woodland cover of 7% for England as a whole. 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. 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. Those in private

Agriculture

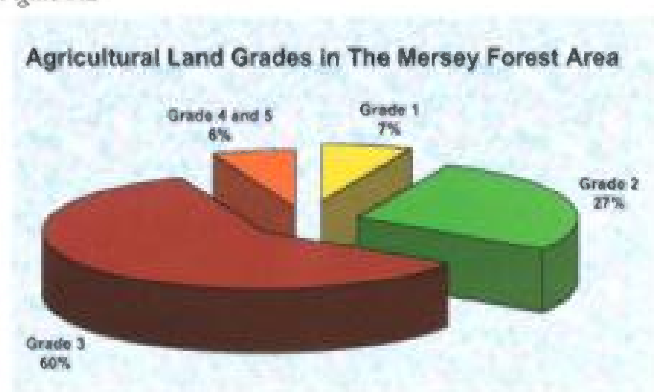
3.28 Half of the land within The Mersey Forest is farmed and, of that farmland, 80% is within the green belt. The type of farming varies greatly across the Forest, from horticulture and arable to dairying. Only beef and sheep farming is poorly represented, although this does occur as an element of mixed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

3.29 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.

3.30 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.

3.31 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.

Figure 3.2



3.32 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.

3.33 Within the Forest boundary there are 1276 holdings registered with MAFF, 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

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	
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	Of the total registered farm area 92% is under crops and grass
> 100	7	
From information supplied by MAFF		
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.		

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 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.

3.40 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

3.41 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 Plan (Mersey Forest Team, 1994) 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.

3.42 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.





3.43 The Forestry Commission's original 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).

3.44 The existing footpath network is typical of similar areas of Britain, being variable, but generally fragmented, and lacking circular routes. There are an increasing number of new cycle routes, but there are opportunities to add to the network. The Trans-Pennine Trail forms an important 'backbone' for any future development. Bridleways are few and scattered. The canal and navigable river system also forms an important recreational route way both for boating and as a footpath route along the towpaths.

Greenways

3.45 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.

3.46 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. The Mersey Forest can therefore make a

positive contribution to The Strategy for Tourism in the North West (North West Tourist Board, 1999). Land regeneration projects will improve the image of the area, by increasing green cover and turning derelict and underused land into areas of considerable environmental and socio-economic interest.

3.47 The health benefits of exercise have been known for a long time, but Health Authorities, the Countryside Agency and organisations such as The British Heart Foundation are now actively involved in promoting gentle exercise, such as walking and cycling to improve peoples' health.

"A physically active lifestyle, including walking, cycling or participating in sport, reduces the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke and promotes good mental health."

Saving Lives – Our Healthier Nation, 1999

Wildlife and nature conservation

3.48 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.

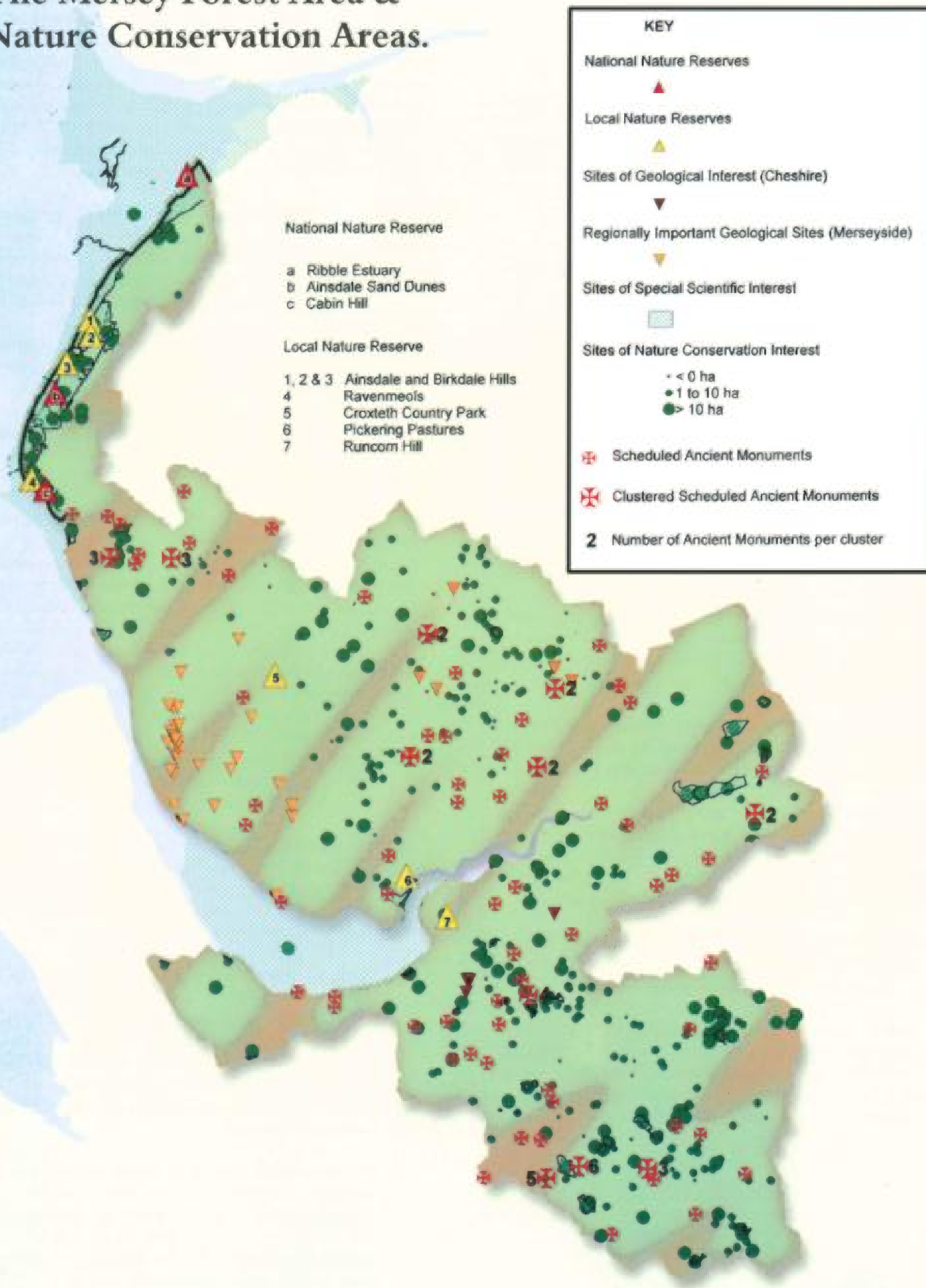
3.49 There are 21 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Those of international importance include the saltmarsh and mudflats of the Mersey Estuary, the Sefton coastlands and a network of mosses and meres along the Mersey. These are complemented by a number of nationally important SSSIs of ancient woodland, peatlands, wetlands and ponds and species-rich grassland. There are two National Nature Reserves on the Sefton Coast and a number of Local Nature Reserves. A non-statutory three-tier system of Sites of Biological Interest, numbering over 120, covers the remaining sites of ecological importance. The principal wildlife sites are shown in the map of 'Sites of Archeological and Nature Conservation Interest in The Mersey Forest Area.'

3.50 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.

3.51 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 designated RAMSAR site.

3.52 River corridors contain some of the greatest concentrations of wildlife habitats, such as ancient woodlands along the River Weaver.

Scheduled Ancient Monuments within The Mersey Forest Area & Nature Conservation Areas.



3.53 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.

3.54 The areas 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 Colliers 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 archeological 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-AD 43) is reflected by hill forts, such as at Edisbury, 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. Scheduled ancient monuments and other important sites are shown in the map of 'Sites of archeological and nature conservation interest in The Mersey Forest area'.

Landscape assessment

3.60 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.

3.61 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.

3.62 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.

3.63 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.)

3.64 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.

3.65 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.

3.66 The Character map of England was published in 1996 by the former Countryside Commission and English Nature.

Subsequently the NW Regional Countryside Character volume has been published. (Countryside Agency, 1998) This applied a common methodology for assessment for the whole of England. Whilst the map corresponds well with the original landscape assessment undertaken as part of the development of the original Mersey Forest Plan there are some differences in classification and areas.

3.67 Some Local Authorities have built upon this National Classification to carry out additional local landscape assessments. In Sefton's case, the Council has built on this national Character Assessment and has carried out a detailed 'Sefton Landscape Character Assessment' (SLCA), which has identified and established further landscape character units at a district level, and which will form the basis for guidance in the borough. A separate 'Sefton Historic Landscape Characterisation Programme' (SHLCP) has been carried out, which has assessed the rich diversity of historical patterns and attributes within Sefton's landscape. These form the new context to Sefton's Planting Strategy.

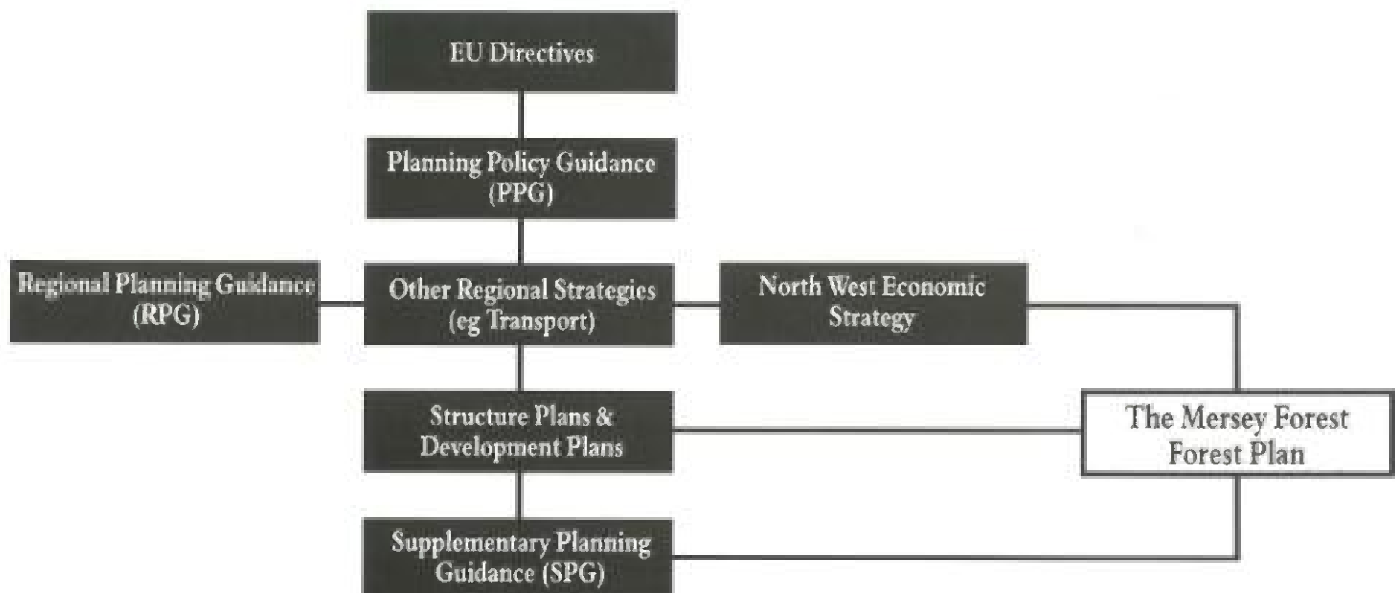
4. Planning Context

National and regional guidance

4.1 The European Union produce binding legislation, known as EU Directives, concerning the environment and socio-economic development which member states are obliged to comply with. National governments consequently produce their own legislation, which provides a national framework of policy to compliment those produced at international level. In the UK, Government planning policy is defined in a series of Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPG's), published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Local authorities are required to take full account of these policies when preparing their development plans, and the same is true of this Forest Plan. The most relevant of the PPG's to The Mersey Forest are:

- PPG1 - General Policy and Principles (Department of the Environment, 1997)
- PPG2 - Green Belts (Department of the Environment, 1995)
- PPG7 - The Countryside Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development (Department of the Environment, 1997)
- PPG11 - Strategic Guidance for Merseyside (Department of the Environment, 1998)
- Draft PPG17 - Sport and Recreation (DETR, 2001)

Figure 4.1 - Planning Policy Framework





4.2 Regional Planning Policy (RPG) also forms an important policy framework in which the Forest Plan operates. The Draft RPG for the North West (NWRA, 2001) essentially translates central Government policy, into a planning framework tailored for the socio-economic and environmental conditions of the North West, and operates in conjunction with the Regional Economic Strategy (NWDA, 1999).

4.3 Each of the eight local authorities which partner The Mersey Forest have their own Development Plans, which guide national and regional planning policy into a land use allocation plan for the local authority area, whilst there is also a Structure Plan which covers all of Cheshire, and is published by Cheshire County Council to guide its local authorities in the preparation of their development plans.

4.4 Partner local authorities each have policies within their plans that seek to promote The Mersey Forest concept. Partner authorities are working together to produce Supplementary Planning Guidance.

Role of the Forest Plan

4.5 The policies defined within the local authority development plans form the core parameters in which the Forest Plan may be implemented. However, whilst site specific planning of The Mersey Forest will be guided by land use designations and relevant policies in local plans, The Mersey Forest will also seek to support and actively implement other relevant national and regional strategies, particularly the North West Economic Strategy (NWDA, 1999) and the Draft Regional Planning Guidance (NWRA, 2001). In this context this Forest Plan will have four central 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 environmental protection and socio economic development within the Forest area.
- It will act as a tool for the local interpretation of planning policies.
- It will provide a means of achieving policy and strategy aims through direct programmes of action and implementation.

4.6 Other local non-statutory plans and strategies will play an important role in the continued development of The Mersey Forest, and the Forest can play a valuable role in achieving objectives within strategies such as "Knowsley's Tomorrow - A vision and strategy for a sustainable Knowsley in the 21st Century" (Knowsley Borough Council, 2000) and "A Tree and Woodland Strategy for Warrington" (Warrington Borough Council, 2000).

The Red Rose Forest

4.7 The Red Rose Forest is another of the 12 Community Forests nationwide, and has a remit which covers the Greater Manchester area, immediately adjacent to that of The Mersey Forest. In light of the proximity of The Red Rose Forest, there are considerable opportunities for the two Forest Teams to work in close partnership, producing valuable benefits for communities across a wide region. An example of this partnership producing valuable results, is the publication of "Creating Community Woodlands on Closed Landfill Sites" (The Mersey and Red Rose Forests, 1999) following an extensive, joint research project.

The Red Rose Forest also published their Forest Plan in 1994, which was reviewed in 2000 with the "Red Rose Forest Plan Supplement" (Red Rose Forest, 2000).

“The Mersey Forest will be a mosaic of woodlands and other habitats of different sizes and densities linked by network of green routeways and transport corridors”

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





FOREST-WIDE
VISION

Introduction:

The six central themes that formed the initial approach to creating the Forest (see paragraph 2.32) combined with the landscape strategy described in Appendix A which form the backbone of the Plan for physically achieving the Forest vision.

The structure of The Mersey Forest will be achieved by increasing community 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 and the complexity of land uses within the area, The Mersey Forest will be a mosaic of woodlands and other habitats 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 objectives of The Mersey Forest. This may be achieved through the management of new and existing woodlands, through agricultural diversification and set-aside to create new wildlife habitats, and through the provision of opportunities for people to enjoy informal countryside recreation.

In addition, areas will be managed for their nature conservation and amenity value within urban fringe and urban areas, and will all combine to form The Mersey Forest in and around our towns and cities. The community woodland will form the backdrop for the wide range of activities that will take place within and around them.

The 'Forest Strategy Maps' (Chapter 16) illustrate 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 continues to be a true partnership between local authorities, landowners, business and communities. The comparatively low existing tree cover within the Mersey Forest area means that targets for achieving the Forest Vision must be ambitious, but, confined to realistic and achievable time-scales.

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 of the Mersey Forest Area, is described in terms of three preferred levels of woodland cover; 10-20%, 20-30% and greater than 30%, which are applied to the Forest Strategy in each of eight local areas, broken down for convenience by local authority. These 'local' planting strategies appear in Chapter 16. This section 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 Models of Community Stewardship have been developed in The Mersey Forest over the last few years building on previous knowledge and experience of partners. Experience has been gained where active community groups have delivered a range of community woodland projects. The Community Contracting Initiative has engaged a number of community groups in the stewardship of their local woodlands. It has hoped that the model that develops from this initiative will be used elsewhere to increase community involvement in their environment.

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 providing information through to consultation and to community action. Three stages along this gradation are identified as useful examples: plans/activities are driven by (i) the community, with support 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.

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 forest campaigns or on a more formal basis in the design, stewardship and development of local woodlands.

5.5 The latter can take place in a number of ways. For example, the community has been able to work in partnership with the landowner, supported by experienced facilitators to improve Woolton Woods in Liverpool. Vandalism has been reduced and use of the woods by local people has increased since the community group has become actively involved in stewardship of the site with the owner. At Little Wood in Knowsley local people have come together to improve the woodland and the image of the area.

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 authorities and other organisations to help schools and other education 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 have established 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, 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, Groundwork, 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.

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 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.

R4 The benefits that community forestry can provide for local communities will be promoted to partners developing Local Strategic Partnerships to work towards programmes of neighbourhood renewal within the Region.

a number of opportunities for working towards the restoration and renewal of some of the countries poorest neighbourhoods. (Cabinet Office, 2001). The full inclusion of local community groups and individuals is the only way in which a sustained improvement may be achieved. The traditional face-lift approach to neighbourhood regeneration provides only a short-term solution and does not tackle the underlying problems of crime, disorder and decay.

Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens and Halton are all eligible areas for Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) support. The Mersey Forest will therefore work with these local authorities, along with other important groups such as Groundwork and BTCV to co-ordinate strategies for neighbourhood renewal.



6. Access, Sport, Recreation, Tourism & Health

6.1 300 million visits are made to England's woodlands every year (Forestry Commission, 1999). 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, although the development of the National Cycle Network will improve the recreational accessibility of the region (NWRA, 2000). 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 term 'greenway' is being used to define multi-user routes to or through green areas. Greenways are multifunctional routes that contribute to the local transport network as a whole, rather than just the recreational elements of it.

R5 The partner authorities will continue to support the Countryside Agency Policy that the statutory rights-of-way network should be legally defined, properly maintained and effectively promoted (Countryside Agency 2000). Local Transport Plans will increasingly offer opportunities to develop new greenways, as prescribed in contemporary Regional Planning Guidance (NWRA, 2001).

6.3 Recent work by Groundwork in St Helens, working as agents to Sustrans, a national charity for sustainable transport (The Groundwork Trust, 1999), 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 (Countryside Agency, 2000).

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



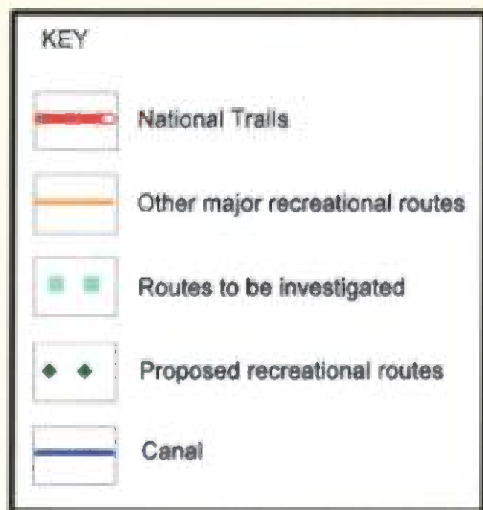
increased with the volume and speed of traffic.

6.5 At present, at least 70% of trips to the countryside are made by car. Inner-city residents, 40% of whom do not have access to their own car, are poorly represented (DETR, 1999). 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 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 suitable for walkers, cyclists, and in many places horse-riders and the disabled. The route runs through the Forest area from Ainsdale to Warrington and connects with other strategic proposals that will take the Trail over the Pennines to Hornsea, ultimately connecting the east coast to the west coast (Environmental Resources Management, 1999).

R6 The Mersey Forest partners will aim to establish a network of greenways across the Forest area at both a local level (linking people with local sites on their doorstep) and at a strategic level (providing longer routes crossing local authority boundaries).

NATIONAL TRAILS ARE THOSE ROUTES DESIGNATED AS SUCH BY RELEVANT LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITIES OR THOSE WHICH FORM PART OF THE 'SUSTRANS' NATIONAL CYCLEWAY NETWORK.



Strategic Routes in The Mersey Forest Area

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. In order for The Mersey Forest to become a resource that can be used and enjoyed by all it is important that access to community woodlands should not be conditional on car ownership. The Mersey Forest will focus on the development of greenway networks that facilitate access from where people live to local sites.

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
- Alt Path

6.9 It is now recognised that multi-user routes can work well for pedestrians, cyclists and horseriders. There is currently an under provision for bridleways throughout the forest and little support for toll bridleways.

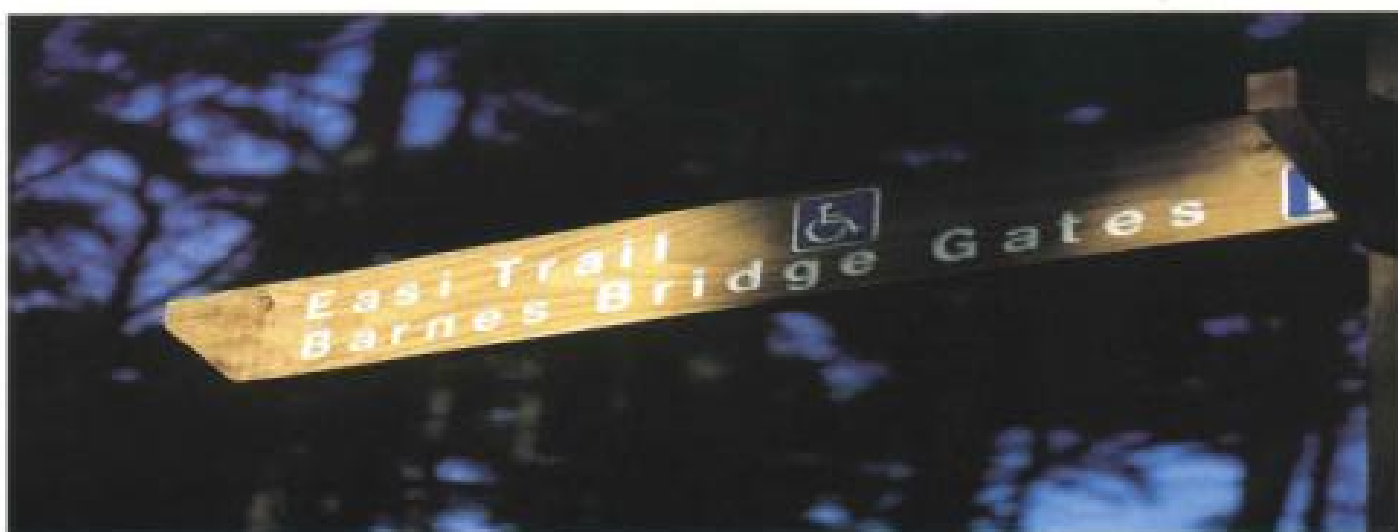
of circular and long- distance routes for walkers and other users. In general, the partners will seek to establish permissive rights of way with the agreement of landowners where improvements in the existing network are desirable.

6.11 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 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.

R8 Gateway sites will continue to be identified and developed by the partner authorities and in conjunction with the private sector.

6.12 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 Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) to obtain access to new woodlands and the provision of recreation facilities, where appropriate.

R9 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.



R7 The partner authorities will seek to integrate facilities for horse riding into new and existing greenways, where practical.

6.10 Access to private land will often be required to secure the network of recreational routes and to increase the provision

6.13 The acquisition of the Old Pale Farm site on the edge of the existing Delamere Forest has opened up a further 138 hectares (341 acres) of community woodland for public access and recreational use. This is considered an important success in the story of the Mersey Forest in so much that the



recreational resource of the Forest has been significantly improved, and the pressures of public use in the existing Delamere estate will be relieved, serving to protect a large proportion of the mature woodland within the Forest area.

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.

R10 In designing access to and within woodlands, special consideration should be given to the needs of all people, especially those with disabilities and impaired mobility, and where possible should comply with recognised standards for disabled access (e.g. Fieldfare Trust, Sustrans, Merseyside Code of Practice on Access and Mobility). Public safety should continue to be an issue which receives priority.

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 (Department of the Environment, 1991).

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.

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 and improving opportunities at existing water bodies will be pursued by the partner organisations such as Mersey Basin Campaign and various River Valley Initiatives taking into account nature conservation interests.

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 will select, 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 greenways 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. Between 1996 and 1998, the North West received around £1,444 million in tourism spending, £423 million of which was spent in Cheshire and on Merseyside, with tourism sustaining over 200,000 jobs in the region (North West Tourist Board, 1999). 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.

6.24 Overnight accommodation associated with sites on the recreational routeway network could include hostels, cabins, caravan and camping sites and camping barns. 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 eg Regional Park Resources.

Health

6.25 Creating new areas of community woodland and encouraging community use for walking and cycling will have a positive impact on the health of local communities. An estimated 70% of the population are not physically active

enough to benefit their health.(Allied Dunbar National Fitness Survey 1992)

6.26 Initiatives such as "Walking the Way to Health" promote the health benefits of recreation. By creating new community woodlands the Forest partnership is increasing the recreational area, providing more opportunities for local people to walk in and enjoy attractive countryside on their doorstep.

6.27 Where new community woodlands are being developed, particularly where they are large sites, particular emphasis will be given to ensuring that the site can link into adjacent or nearby greenways, maximising the opportunities to use the site for healthy recreation.

6.28 Increasingly, health improvements are seen as being a major positive benefit of community woodlands. Through forest events and campaigns people are encouraged to go out and enjoy walking and relaxing in their local woodlands. As The Mersey Forest develops these opportunities will increase and there will be an increasing opportunity for the promotion of projects such as "Green Gyms" pioneered by BTCV.

6.29 It is not just walking and exercise that has positive effects on health, increased woodland cover can also have positive impacts on mental health and close to roads can reduce airborne pollution and noise. Liverpool Health Authority include woodland planting as part of their overall "Health Impact Assessment" of projects.



R16 The Mersey Forest Partnership will work with appropriate Health Authorities and projects to promote the positive health benefits of community woodlands and to encourage a greater use of the increasing community woodland area.

7. Urban trees

Urban trees in the Forest

7.1 Urban trees make an essential contribution to our quality of life. They are the trees in our streets and gardens, outside our offices and factories, and in our parks, open spaces and school grounds. The recently published Urban White Paper "Out Towns and Cities: The Future" (DETR, 2001) places considerable emphasis on improving the urban environment for social, economic and environmental benefits. The Paper leads from the Urban Task Force Report "Towards an Urban Renaissance" (Urban Task Force, 1999), which advocates the creation of comprehensive greenways in towns and cities. The White Paper also offers renewed support for environmental action groups and provides new funding mechanisms for improving urban greenspace. It has been accepted for many years that trees create an aesthetically pleasing environment and are important for wildlife in urban areas. There is a growing recognition that trees and woods also provide a variety of other benefits, which are important to the quality of life for the people who live and work in urban areas (Countryside Agency, 2000).

7.2 The benefits of trees in the Urban Environment include:

Environmental conservation	Positive impact on energy and water conservation, wildlife and soil.
Healthier towns	Filtering pollution, providing shade and reducing levels of stress.
Community	Local and neighbourhood action.
Useful products	Timber.
Landscape	Greening and softening the built environment.
Local economy	Encouragement of investment and increase in property prices.

(Trees Matter, NUFU, 1998)

7.3 The urban tree population for the Mersey Forest is estimated to be up to 5 million trees with 20% in public management. This is equivalent to 50% of the total tree canopy cover in The Mersey Forest. This data has been estimated from information provided by The Mersey Forest Urban Tree Action Group.

Urban Tree Action Group

7.4 The Forest Partnership, in recognition of the important benefits of urban trees to the Mersey Forest community, has established an urban tree action group. The group aims to increase both the quality of existing tree management and amount of new urban tree planting in the Forest.

R16 The Mersey Forest partnership will develop and implement an urban tree action plan to:

- Promote the collection and sharing of urban tree data.
- Encourage the involvement of stakeholders.
- Develop an urban tree valuation system.

- Provide guidance on avoiding or minimising street tree disturbance.
- Promote the development of tree management systems to ensure effective long-term care for urban trees.
- Pilot novel approaches to urban tree planting.
- Develop a timber market for urban trees.
- Develop procedures for identifying new sites and choosing suitable species.

Planning for Urban trees

7.5 The Town and Country Planning system is a positive mechanism for achieving the aims of the Mersey Forest partnership. Developers are usually required to implement landscaping schemes, safeguard existing trees on site and can often be required to provide some 'off site' planting to mitigate the impacts of the development. This provides an excellent opportunity to increase the planting of new trees in the urban environment and fund their establishment.

R17 The Mersey Forest Plan will encourage partners to protect existing urban trees and secure resources



through the development process for planting new urban trees. The private sector will be encouraged to contribute to increasing the number of trees associated with new development and to integrate existing trees and other habitats into new development proposals plans.

The trees on our doorstep

7.6 Urban trees are the "trees on our doorstep". Despite this they are often taken very much for granted, and sometimes only noticed for the first time when they start to create a nuisance or are cut down. Urban trees are the first and only contact many local communities have with the Forest and provide an excellent opportunity to raise the profile of the Forest amongst local communities as well as that of the trees themselves.

R18 The Mersey Forest partnership will promote the benefits of urban trees and help raise public involvement and awareness of their importance and value to the local environment, with a view to attracting public involvement with street tree planting and management.

Funding for urban trees

7.7 Of the estimated five million individual trees which are situated outside woodlands throughout the Mersey Forest, an alarmingly high proportion are fully mature or over-mature. The trees, which will inevitably have to be felled during the next fifty years or so, will need replacement if the quality of our urban environment is to be sustained for future generations. However, the resources to fund new planting on both public and private land (with the possible exception of development sites) are severely limited. Whereas grant aid is available through the Woodland Grant Scheme for planting areas greater than 0.25 hectare, there is no similar grant

scheme for smaller scale planting on verges or in parks, gardens or other suitable open spaces. The present rate of planting of individual trees will not be sufficient to maintain the current urban tree stock in the Forest and new ways of funding will need to be identified.

7.8 Nevertheless, a number of successful street tree planting schemes have been undertaken by organisations in the UK and abroad, where the impetus is centred on community participation and partnership funding mechanisms. When local residents are directly involved with planting operations and species selection, a sense of natural guardianship is imparted, and can considerably reduce the likelihood of vandalism and mis-treatment. Adopt-a-tree schemes have proven particularly successful in New York, USA, and planting in resident's front gardens has significantly contributed to urban environmental enhancement in the City of Oxford (TEP - The Environment Partnership, 2000)

7.9 The "Trees for London" project aims to plant 20,000 urban trees in London between 1998 and 2001. Through a series of community participation and private sector sponsorship initiatives, over 12,000 trees were planted last year alone, with the project set to exceed its target. Much of the success of the project is due to the high-profile publicity which it has received, with a dedicated internet site and a number of media articles raising the profile of the value of street trees, and the innovative approaches to securing the long-term future of street trees in London which the project has pioneered. The profile of The Mersey Forest lends itself to establishing a similar scheme for Merseyside, which could draw upon the success of Trees for London and other similar schemes.

R19 The Mersey Forest partnership will secure additional resources for the planting, and management of urban trees.

8. Transport Corridors

8.1 The Mersey Forest comprises 109 km of motorway and 206 km of major trunk and 'A' class roads outside the built-up area.

8.2 Transport corridors were identified as one of the central themes in 'Preparing the Ground' (Mersey Forest Project Team 1992), and will continue to be a major component of The Mersey Forest Strategy. 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, and is consistent with the 'Greening the Northwest' Landscape Strategy' developed by Sustainability North West in 1996.

8.3 The Forestry Commission has identified major road and rail corridors as important sites for creating and enhancing green corridors through tree planting strategies, which can help to enhance the landscape and provide a buffer from noise and pollution. (Forestry Commission, 1996). The Regional Economic Strategy also highlights major routes within the 'Mersey Belt', but also considers derelict railway lines, canals and cycle networks as a basis for regional environmental improvement (NWDA, 1999). The 'England Forestry Strategy' (Forestry Commission, 1998) also promotes the creation of new woodlands along transport corridors.



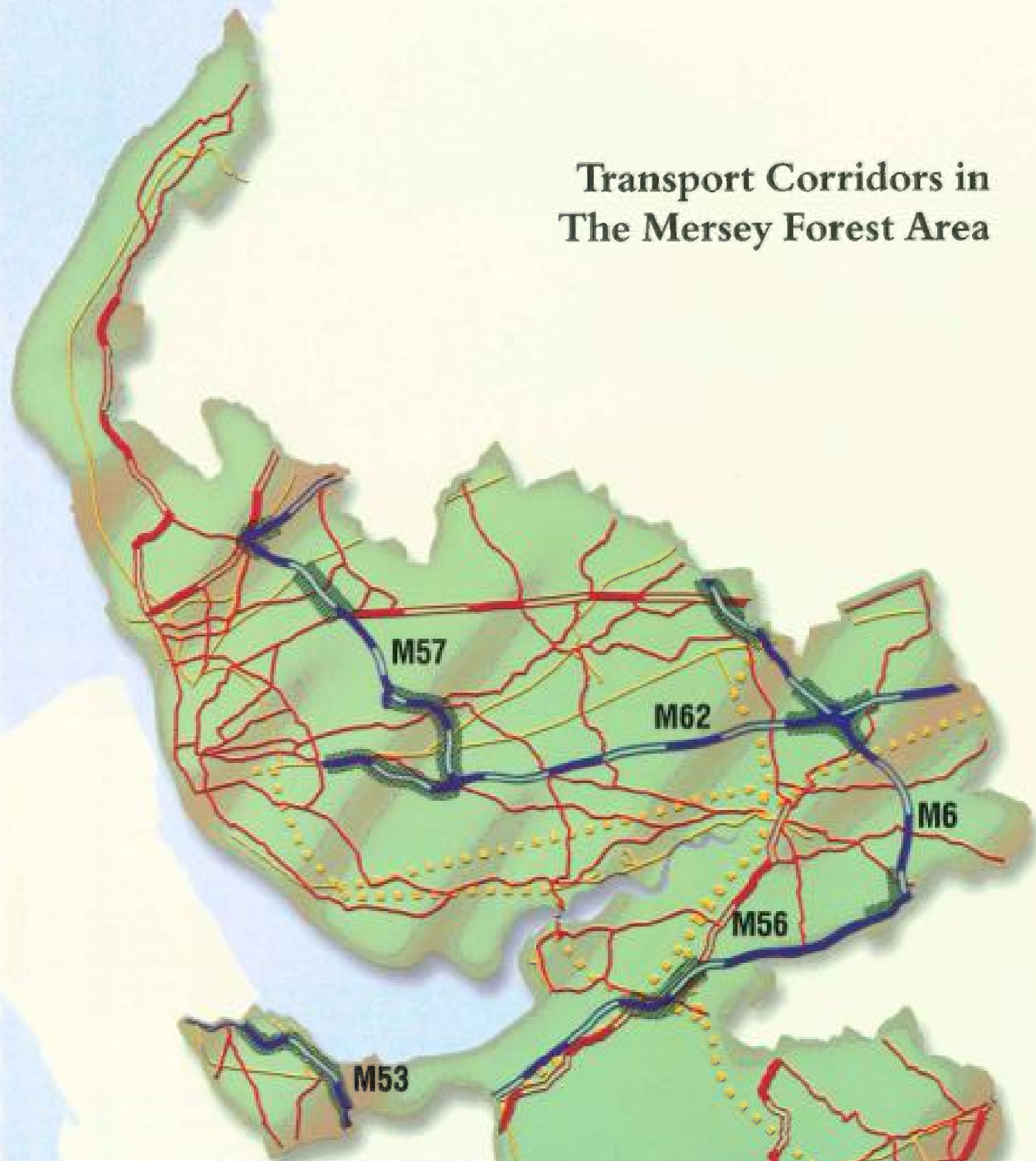
8.4 There is therefore scope for woodland planting along most major transport corridors, but the best opportunity occurs in motorway corridors, because they are highly visible, are large areas of land (cuttings, embankments and roundabouts) and are under the ownership of the Highways Agency. The Highways Agency are committed 'to co-operate with the Community Forest teams on their proposals in areas near to trunk roads' and see tree-planting on Highways Agency land as a principal mechanism for improving the environmental quality of major road corridors (Highways Agency, 1996). Some sections of motorway are already well planted (eg the M62/M6 intersection); elsewhere, planting is inadequate.







8.5 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). The 'Countryside Character Initiative' (Countryside Agency, 1998), and the Landscape Assessment of the Mersey Forest Area (The Mersey Forest, 1994) will be used to provide the basis of planting designs along transport routes.

8.6 Each of the two approaches can be used, depending on the quality of existing views from the roads, existing planting, local landscape character and land availability. The areas considered most appropriate for developing an 'in the Forest' impression are shown on the 'Transport Corridors in the Mersey Forest Area' Plan, and are summarised 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.
- 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.

Transport Corridors in The Mersey Forest Area



KEY	
	'In the Forest' Motorway
	Motorways
	Trunk Roads
	Main 'A' Roads
	Main Railway Lines
	Local Railway Lines



R20 The partners will continue to support and encourage an intensive programme of planting along sections of motorways to achieve the 'in the Forest' landscape.

8.7 This programme will require the co-operation of the Highways Agency and Local Authority Highways Departments to identify sites and funding sources and to develop an achievable programme of work. An example of such a cooperative project has been completed recently at Ellesmere Port, along the M53, with funding from the Bridgewater Paper Company.

R21 The partners will encourage the creation of 'looking at the Forest' landscape sections of roadside planting alongside motorways and other routes.

8.8 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 any new road-building projects, and may be funded through Section 106 Planning Agreements.

R22 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.

8.9 There are 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. NUFU recommend the use of small-leaved broadleaf and coniferous species near to railway lines, so as to prevent the traditional problems of 'leaves on the line'. (NUFU, 2000).

R23 The partners will seek to establish a constructive liaison with British Waterways and encourage the use of community forest planting to regenerate some of the regions key canal routes.

8.10 British Waterways are keen to regenerate a number of canal routes to support the renewed demand for navigable waterways as a recreation resource. The regeneration strategy welcomes the support of external partners who may bring together interested groups and funding (British Waterways, 2001). Furthermore, the North West Tourist Board also recognises the importance of the Region's waterways for their tourism value, and will seek to improve the opportunities for use as a tourism asset (North West Tourist Board, 1999).

9. Wildlife and Nature Conservation

9.1 Biodiversity is the most powerful marker we possess for gauging the health of our planet (NWRA, 2000). A Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for The Mersey Forest will set out the main priorities for nature conservation within the Forest. The policies set out in this section of the Forest Plan seek to reinforce the fundamental principles of a nature conservation strategy, which will be directed by the policies set out in the Mersey Forest BAP.

9.2 A land-based project as ambitious and wide-ranging as The Mersey Forest undoubtedly has the potential to deliver a wide range of benefits for nature conservation. In the period since the launch of the original Forest Plan, there has been a great deal of work on developing the concept of biodiversity. The Forest Partnership has encouraged the production of a Forest Biodiversity Action Plan that can provide clear targets for action to implement a range of activity to increase the biodiversity of The Forest area. The Biodiversity Action Plan will link to the biodiversity action plans that are being drawn up by a range of other organisations, including Local Planning Authorities, Wildlife Trusts and Statutory Bodies and will focus on delivery of positive land use change.

Background

9.3 The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (Department of the Environment, 1994) has the following overall goal:

- To conserve and enhance biological diversity within the UK and to contribute to the conservation of global biodiversity through all the appropriate mechanisms.

9.4 The variety of life or biodiversity has been the subject of nature conservation policy and practice for more than 50 years. It cannot be maintained through small numbers of protected sites alone but requires the whole ecosystem of which a site or protected area is but a part. The definitions emphasise the fact that individuals belonging to one species are not homogeneous and that heterogeneity in the gene pool of and between populations must be considered when biodiversity is examined.

9.5 The UK Biodiversity Steering Group Report defines biodiversity as:

- The variability among living organisms for all sources including, *inter alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part. This includes the diversity with species, between species and of ecosystems.

9.6 World-wide concern over the state of the global environment was expressed at the Rio Conference and on a smaller scale this is also true for the UK and England in particular. The UK government has given a commitment to produce Biodiversity Action Plans at a National level.



9.7 The need to consider biodiversity within a forestry context has also been reiterated in the UK Sustainable Forestry Programme in 1994; the principles set out at the ministerial conferences at Helsinki in 1993 and at Lisbon in 1998; the UK Forestry Standard in 1998 and the England Forestry Strategy, 1998. It is an issue that is important to all organisations with woodland or forest remits and should be part of their thinking in the 21st Century.

9.8 At a national level, Habitat and Species Action Plans have been developed and are being implemented throughout the country. Selected habitats both wooded and non-wooded have been identified by the UK Biodiversity Steering Group (a collection of statutory and non-statutory bodies), as priorities for action under the biodiversity programme.

9.9 These habitats are those for which the UK has international obligations:

- habitats at risk i.e. those that have experienced a high rate of decline over the last 20 years;
- habitats that are functionally critical i.e. those that are part of a wider ecosystem but which provide feeding areas for particular species;
- habitats that are important for priority species.

9.10 For each of these habitats and species an Action Plan has been produced that considers the current status of the habitat or species, what threats it may be under and what is being done for its conservation. An Action Plan sets the targets and actions for what is necessary to achieve and or set in place in order to secure the long-term conservation of a particular habitat or species.

9.11 The National Forest has already produced a Biodiversity Action Plan for its area. It is intended that a similar document, focusing on the species and habitats that The Mersey Forest can most beneficially influence will be produced.

9.12 Maintaining and enhancing species and habitat diversity in The Mersey Forest area may lead to some obvious conflicts of interest. It will be essential to apply as broad a definition as is acceptable to the term 'forest' or 'woodland' where scarce or rare habitats could be seen to be compromised by Forest creation projects.

9.13 Locally rare habitats or species require adequate protection from developments that would see them disappear forever. As a large initiative with many different and diverse local and national partnerships involved, The Mersey Forest can become key to the success and maintenance of local biodiversity. It can be particularly effective in the protection of locally rare areas, for example: semi-natural woodland, mosslands, and wildflower areas, unimproved grassland, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Sites of Biological Importance and Local Nature Reserves.

9.14 As The Mersey Forest develops it will produce an area that:

- Is richer in wildlife through management and creation of new habitats.
- Will have its key conservation features and habitats recognised, recorded and valued.
- Will have extensive areas of regenerating broadleaved woodland.
- Will have coniferous woodland as part of the rich and valued mosaic of woodland habitats.
- Will have wildflower and other non- wooded habitats in abundance.

9.15 Creating this vision will not be easy, grant aid for forestry is limited and in many cases more resources will be required to achieve biodiversity goals. In the agricultural sector, central government support is increasingly likely to be given only where there are clear environmental and/or social benefits resulting from grant aid.

Actions to Enhance Biodiversity

explore joint working with Red Rose Forest to develop a Biodiversity Action Plan for The Mersey and Red Rose Forest areas.

R25 The Forest will be developed with regard to the biodiversity action plans written or adopted by partners, Cheshire Countdown, North Merseyside BAP and The Northwest Biodiversity Audit. The principles and practices described in the UK Biodiversity Steering Group's Report and the UK Central Government's document Sustainable Development will be followed.



R26 The creation of new habitats and the management of existing sites of scientific interest or local nature conservation interest to enhance biodiversity will be a major thrust of Forest development work.

R27 Consultation with relevant statutory and non-government bodies will be undertaken where woodland planting is proposed for areas of known or potential value for biodiversity and wildlife.

R28 The design and management of Forest planting will consider any implications they may have for the spread of recognised pest species to minimise any potential problems that may threaten the biodiversity of the area.

R29 Species and habitats identified by the UK Biodiversity Steering Group that have action plans written and that occur within the area will be safeguarded and encouraged as far as is practicable using existing guidance and statutory protection.

R30 New planting of woodland within the Mersey Forest area should have a positive impact on biodiversity. Areas of existing biodiversity value should be safeguarded and enhanced where possible.

R31 The Forest Partnership will encourage research into the effects of natural processes of woodland disturbance and succession and the interaction between herbivores and woodland plant communities. It will also assist in the provision of on-going research to assess the developing biodiversity of the newly created Forest.

R24 The Forest Partnership will work with a wide range of interested parties, and

10. Archaeology

10.1 The Mersey Forest area has a long history of settlement and a rich heritage of archeological 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. Archeological remains are often a vulnerable part of the landscape and it is vital that they are not damaged or obscured by forestry schemes.



R32 All planting sites should be assessed for their archeological 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.)

10.2 On sites identified as of significant archeological 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 in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning (Department of the Environment, 1990), and reiterated in the Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (NWR, 2001).

10.3 Where protected areas or specific archeological 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 PPG16 (Department of the Environment 1990) and the Ancient Monuments and Archeological Areas Act 1979.

10.4 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.

R33 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.

10.5 The opportunity to discover and explore a site's archeological 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 archeological remains will therefore be promoted by the Forest partners.

10.6 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 archeological features in ancient or semi-natural ancient woodlands, such as hedge banks, should be protected during management and felling operations.

11. Education

11.1 Education is an agenda at the core of most national and regional strategies, whether they be economic, social or environmental. The England's North West Strategy (NWDA, 1999), the Merseyside Regional Competitiveness Strategy (Government Office for Merseyside, 1999) and the Action for Sustainability Strategy (NWRA, 2000) all identify sustainable education as the key to the future success of the region. 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 in environmental agendas. The Mersey Forest will offer a rich and varied resource for environmental education.



R34 The partners will work closely with education bodies to develop a wide range of suitable facilities and opportunities within the Forest for environmental education and skills development.

11.2 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.

11.3 An example of The Mersey Forest supporting leading edge research in collaboration with further education institutions has been realised through the 'Mersey Forest Brownfield Land Project', where The Mersey Forest has facilitated opportunities for Liverpool University and Liverpool John Moores University to establish the suitability of pioneering species to grow under severe ground contamination conditions. These ongoing PhD projects, which began in 2000, will provide valuable information regarding the establishment of forestry on contaminated brownfield land.

11.4 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.

R35 The partner authorities will continue to encourage the development and management of school grounds as attractive environments for learning and play.

11.5 Many schools have undertaken projects to plant trees and carry out other improvements in their own grounds and surrounding areas. Building on the work of Cheshire County Council's holistic approach to school grounds development, the forest team has been keen to advocate quality of life and behavioural issues in the design of school grounds whilst at the same time creating new forests habitats in the heart of our urban areas. Community woodlands offer much more than an outdoor classroom.

11.6 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.

12. The Arts

12.1 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.

12.2 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.

R36 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

12.4 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.

12.5 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.

12.6 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.

12.7 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.

R37 The partner authorities will give consideration to the application of a 'per cent for art' principle, where this is appropriate.



13. Mature Woodland

13.1 One of the key actions highlighted in the England Forestry Strategy is to 'protect existing woodlands'. The Forestry Commission will seek to establish the effectiveness of existing protection measures, and will introduce new measures where appropriate, in order to support the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (Forestry Commission, 1998).

13.2 The mature woodland cover within The Mersey Forest area is an important, but scarce, resource that is in decline. It is very important that this situation is reversed 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.

13.3 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 continue to be investigated.

R38 The partners will support the management and regeneration of mature woodlands by developing mechanisms for the:

- Dissemination of advice and information;
- promotion of 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 Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme and sourcing of additional assistance;
- sourcing of support for businesses desiring to use locally produced timber.

R39 Access into existing woodlands will be encouraged, where appropriate, and supported through the use of grants from the Countryside Agency, Forestry Commission and other bodies.

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

R40 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.



13.5 Ancient and semi-natural ancient woodlands are an irreplaceable resource that merits early action by identification, targeting and special management practices. The NCC Inventory of Ancient Woodlands locates many of the fragments of ancient woodland in The Forest. 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 re-colonise new woodlands or act as a resource for seed. 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. Guidance from the Forestry Commission in "Creating New Native Woodlands" includes recommended species mixes for a range of different native woodland planting. Many ancient woodlands were felled and replanted during the 20th Century. In many situations the ground flora seed bank and the sensitive soil invertebrates remain in situ, and it is desirable to manage these woods towards a more native tree canopy.

R41 Ancient and semi-natural ancient woodlands should be assessed through ecological survey and managed to protect and perpetuate the particular ecological value of each woodland.

13.6 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 with reference to other publications such as Restoring and Managing Riparian Woodlands (Scottish Native Woodlands, 2000) and the draft "Restoration of Native Woodlands on Ancient Woodland Sites" (Forestry Commission, 2000). 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.

14. Woodland Products and Industries

14.1 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. 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.

R42 Woodlands within The Mersey Forest should be designed and managed to produce high quality timber, other management objectives and site conditions permitting.

14.2 At present, actual timber production in the Forest area is very low. The annual sustainable yield from all woodlands in The Forest is 11,000 m³/yr. However, much of this is not actually harvested (Tilhill Economic Forestry, 1995). 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.

R43 The partners will support local growers to access existing timber markets and will investigate new mechanisms for marketing local timber.

14.3 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.

14.4 The UK woodland industry is meeting the challenges of promoting its timber in an increasingly global and competitive marketplace. At the level of The Mersey Forest, it is unlikely that local timber can ever compete directly with low-cost, high-value imports. Nevertheless, there is scope for promoting the special features of local timber - sustainability and proximity.

14.5 The Liverpool and Manchester urban regeneration has brought an increased investment in high-quality timber products for interior design, flooring and furniture. Together with The Red Rose Forest and ELWOOD, The Mersey Forest has organised a series of events to support businesses working with local timber and selling into these markets supported by Littlewoods.

R44 The partners will join with The Red Rose Forest team and ELWOOD to promote north-western wood produce, and set up support networks for wood-using businesses in the area.

14.6 Landlife has had good success in producing and marketing seed of wild flowers, many of them woodland species, and has piloted with the Forest Partnership a bluebell project to provide a sustainable source of native bulbs in the long term.

R45 Traditional and innovative wood-using products and business opportunities will be encouraged to develop in the Forest area.

14.7 Finally, there is growing support for the development of energy forestry 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.

R46 The partners will closely monitor the development of wood-based energy systems and, where appropriate, encourage their adoption by energy users and potential growers alike.



15. Design

15.1 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.



15.2 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.

R47 Design proposals for The Mersey Forest should demonstrate an understanding of long-term management principles and costs.

15.3 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.

15.4 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 re-assessment 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 archeological value.

15.5 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.

R48 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), local landscape character assessments and other guidance issued by the partner authorities. The UK Forestry Standard (Forestry Commission, 1998) and the forthcoming Mersey Forest Biodiversity Action Plan should also be considered during the formulation of design proposals.

15.6 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, and native species in woodland planting is a further aspect of design, which should be promoted.

15.7 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), 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. A birch-pine mix has 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.

15.8 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 Croxeth, Ince Blundell and Knowsley have a particular character relating to their size, shape and frequency in the landscape.

15.9 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.

15.10 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. Pine woodlands also support the red squirrel, a species of particular conservation concern, and may therefore provide valuable habitats in areas of known populations (Forestry Commission, 1998).

15.11 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

15.12 The landscape assessment was described in Chapter 3 (paragraphs 3.60 to 3.69). 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.

15.13 The strategy (see Appendix A 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.

15.14 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.

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

- Create and restore.
- Maintain and restore.
- Maintain and create.

15.16 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 A.



*“Cross-
boundary links,
projects and
policies are an
essential
component of
The Mersey
Forest concept.”*



16. Forest Districts

- Sefton
- Liverpool
- Knowsley
- St. Helens
- Halton
- Warrington
- Vale Royal
- Ellesmere Port & Neston





FOREST

strategies

Forest Strategies

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, although strategies must be conducive to the policies contained within local authority development plans. 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 Mersey Forest Landscape Assessment has also guided the proposals for appropriate woodland cover, depending on the identified strategy for each area.

These in turn are based upon the 'Strategies in landscape planning and management' matrix devised by Warnock and Brown (2000) and shown below.

CONDITION	good	RESTORE	maintain and strengthen	MAINTAIN
	declining	strengthen and restore	restore and enhance	maintain and restore
	poor	CREATE	restore and enhance	RESTORE
		weak	moderate	strong
		CHARACTER		

Enhancement potential:

- High
- Moderate
- Low

Adapted from Warnock & Brown, 2000

The proposed woodland cover categories are:

- **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. 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.

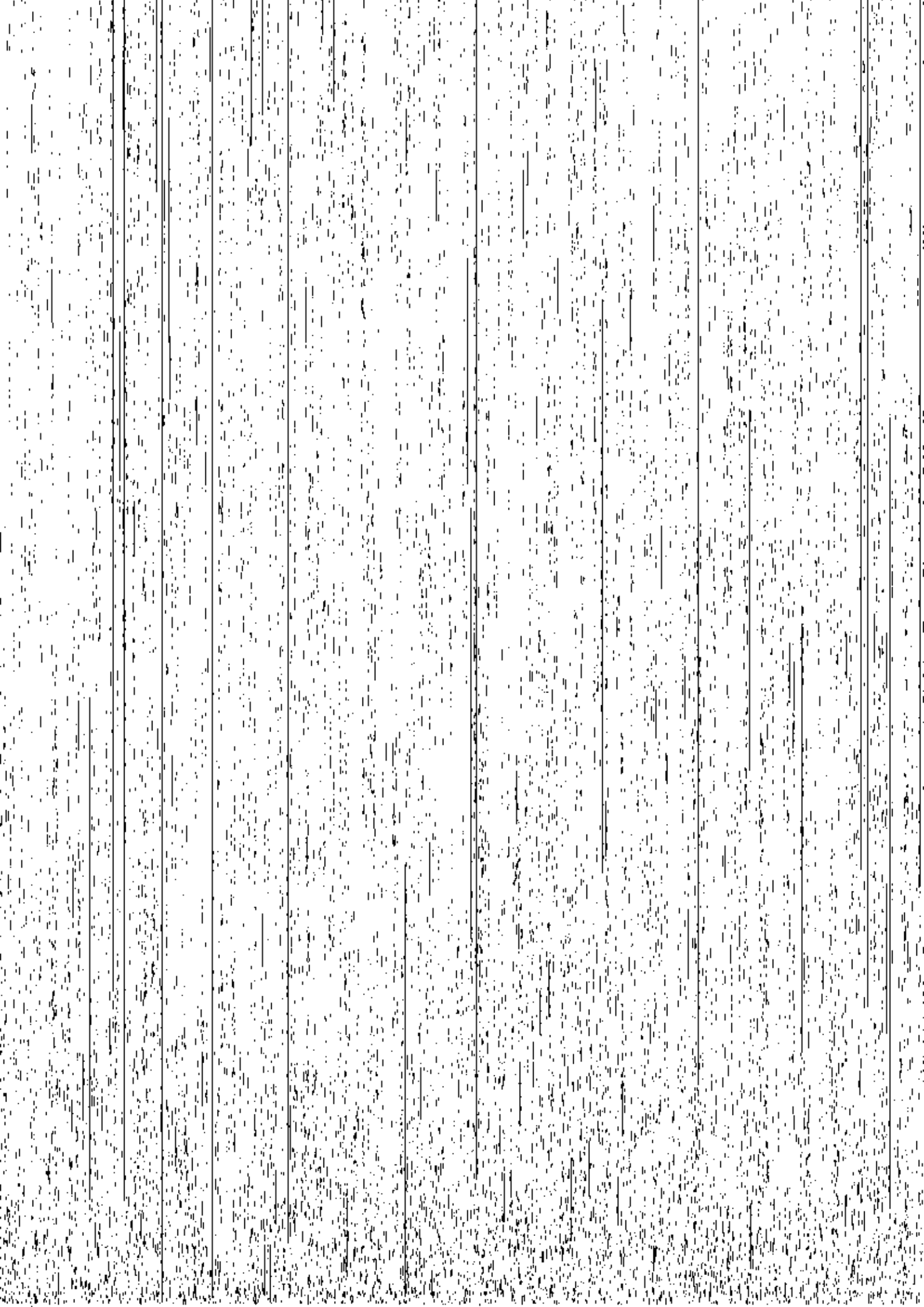
Each local planting strategy also contains other information relevant to the location of trees and woodlands. Transport routes targeted for tree planting, heritage landscapes, areas of high landscape value, Knowsley's landscape opportunity areas and the Sefton Coast planning zone are all shown.

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.

There are several cross cutting policies that should precede the individual local authority strategies.

- Sustainable management of trees, woodland and non-woodland habitats is critical for the long term success of The Mersey Forest.
- Links between the urban and rural areas of the forest should be developed. These links include physical links such as greenways and green wildlife corridors as well as the less tangible links such as educational and emotional links.
- The planning system can be a delivery mechanism for The Mersey Forest. The opportunities for further work with all those involved in the planning system will be explored.
- At the heart of The Mersey Forest is the principle of community involvement. In implementing the strategies set out for each local authority area it is essential that the Forest Partnership engages local people.

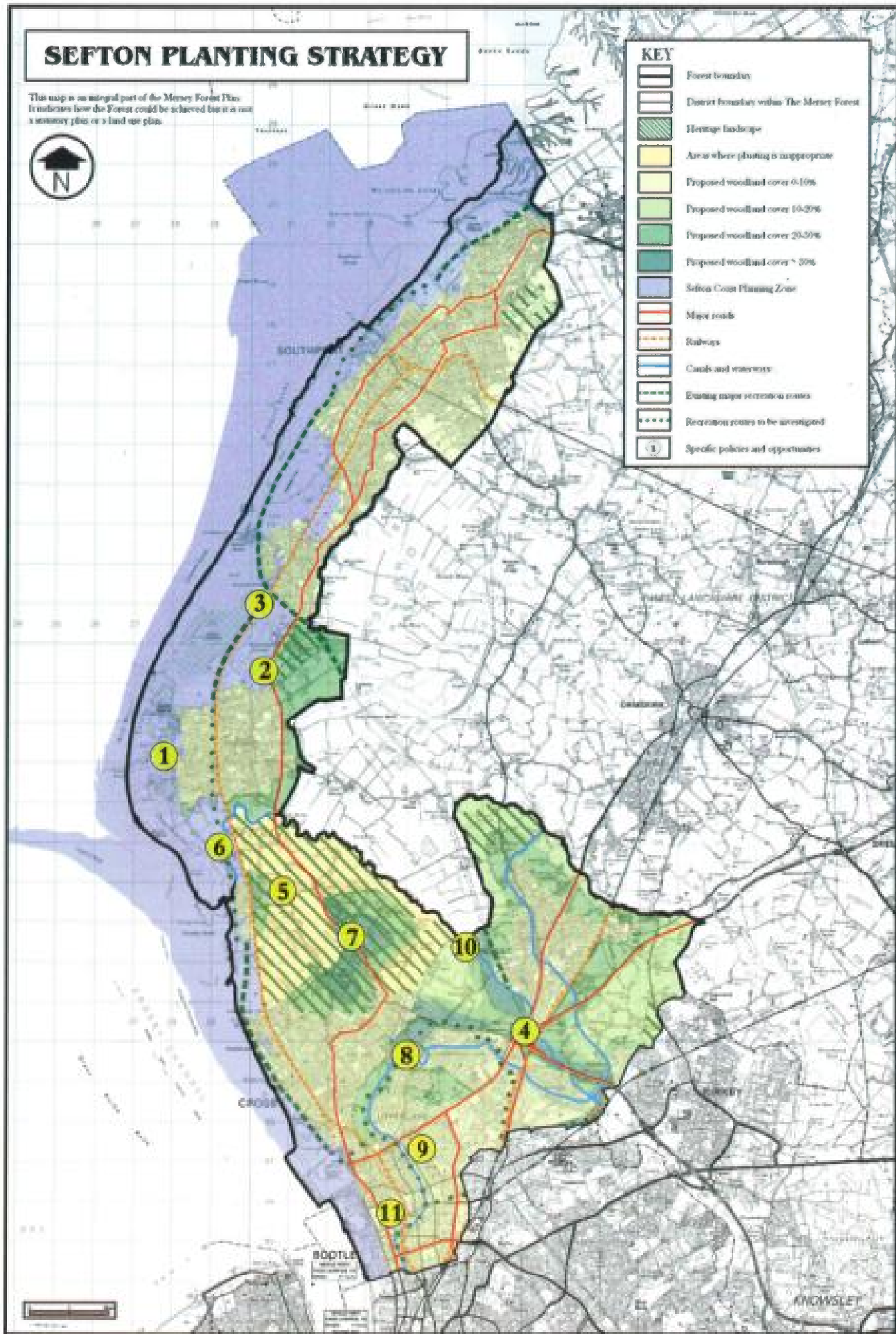


SEFTON PLANTING STRATEGY

This map is an integral part of the Mersey Forest Plan. It indicates how the Forest could be achieved by using a strategy plan or a land use plan.



KEY	
	Forest boundary
	District boundary within The Mersey Forest
	Heritage landscape
	Area where planting is appropriate
	Proposed woodland cover 0-10%
	Proposed woodland cover 10-20%
	Proposed woodland cover 20-30%
	Proposed woodland cover > 30%
	Sefton Coast Planning Zone
	Major roads
	Roadways
	Canals and waterways
	Existing major recreation routes
	Recreation routes to be investigated
	Specific policies and opportunities



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S3. The landscape character around Formby Hall and Birkdale Golf Course has become fragmented and degraded. In the context of the SLCA and the SHLCP, restore and manage existing hedges and woodlands, carry out new planting to create a wooded landscape: possible species are pine, willow and alder.

S4. In the context of the SLCA and the SHLCP, carry out structural environmental regeneration, including habitat creation, tree planting and associated landscape works, as part of all strategic transport projects and along all strategic transport routes, greenways and other designated environmental improvement corridors throughout the borough – in particular Southport Eastern Park & Ride, Switch Island, the M57, M58, A565, A5036, A59, A570, Merseyrail Northern Lines, the Leeds to Liverpool Canal and the Trans Pennine Trail.

S5. In the context of the SLCA and the SHLCP, carry out tree planting around the periphery of Hightown, especially on the landward edge. Protect the open dune system.

S6. In the context of the SLCA and the SHLCP, it is inappropriate to carry out large-scale tree planting within the Dune Backland and Carr Farmland areas east of Hightown and along the River Alt. Manage existing woodlands. Support small-scale tree planting (in accordance with Environment Agency guidelines) adjacent to the Alt to identify its line in the landscape. Do not carry out further tree planting along the A565. Biomass cropping may be appropriate in this area.

S7. In the context of the SLCA and the SHLCP, conserve the landscape character of the Estate Farmland around Crosby, Ince Blundell and Meols Hall. Support management and phased replacement of existing woodlands and carry out new planting.

S8. In the context of the SLCA, the SHLCP and the Rimrose Valley Masterplan, realise opportunities for environmental regeneration, including habitat creation, tree planting and associated landscape works, in those areas where the landscape character of the district has been severely damaged – in particular Sefton Meadows and surrounding area, Maghull, Town Lane and Foul Lane, Southport, and Rimrose Valley, Litherland.

S9. Support the creation of new habitats and the planting of trees on appropriate and available sites throughout Sefton urban areas, to bring the forest into the community. Realise the opportunities for habitat creation, urban woodland and woodland links to strategic routes and greenways – in particular at Netherton, Aintree Racecourse, Town Lane Recreational Area, Crosby Coastal Park and Southport Marine Park.

S10. In the context of the SLCA and the SHLCP, enhance the landscape character of the Settled Farmland surrounding Maghull, Lydiat and Melling. Restore and manage existing hedges and woodlands, carrying out new planting to create a wooded landscape.

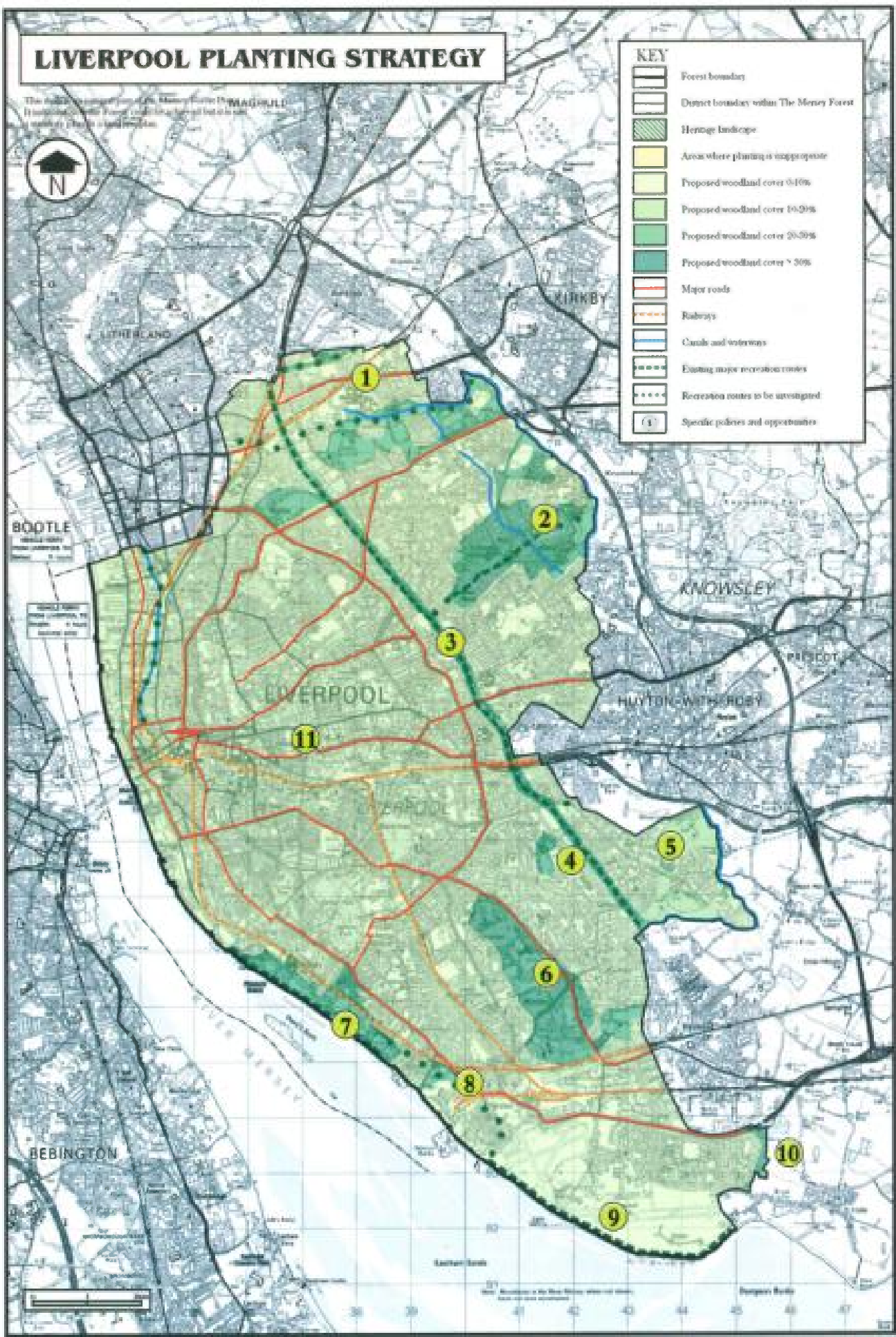
S11. Carry out the planting of individual trees, groups of trees and small woodlands on any available and appropriate sites, such as school playing fields, public open spaces, transport corridors, and the grounds of large institutions and organisations. Support the incorporation of new habitats and tree planting in new development as part of the statutory planning process.

LIVERPOOL PLANTING STRATEGY

The Liverpool City Region Mersey Forest Programme is a partnership between Liverpool City Council, Merseyside Council, Knowsley Council, Sefton Council and Wirral Council. It is a partnership of local authorities and the Mersey Forest Trust.



KEY	
	Forest boundary
	District boundaries within The Mersey Forest
	Heritage landscape
	Areas where planting is inappropriate
	Proposed woodland cover 0-10%
	Proposed woodland cover 10-20%
	Proposed woodland cover 20-30%
	Proposed woodland cover > 30%
	Major roads
	Roadways
	Canals and waterways
	Existing major recreation routes
	Recreation routes to be investigated
	Specific policies and opportunities



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LIVERPOOL

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 the former site of the Festival Gardens, Otterspool Park, the former northern airfield between the Estuary Commerce Park and the Mersey, Speke Hall, Liverpool Airport and adjacent farmland. Fazakerley Ecology Park and Croxteth Country Park both have scope for further planting and habitat creation. 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.

The city's five major road corridors (Eastern, Riverside North, Riverside South, North East and City Orbital) would benefit from appropriate planting to improve both image of the city for visitors, residents and potential investors and also the environment for people living and working there.

The main areas of open land are Victorian parks whose landscapes are of historic value. However, the continuing regeneration 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 creating new habitats and planting trees 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 Support the development of the Fazakerley Ecology Park as a major area of open space with a variety of habitat types including substantial areas of woodland planting.

L2 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.

L3 Integrate and create woodlands and wooded parklands at all appropriate sites adjacent to the Liverpool Loop Line. **68**



L4 Support the management of existing woodlands and grassland areas at Childwall and where appropriate, extend the woodland planting.

L5 Promote tree planting on the two golf courses and any other open land at Netherly. Work together with Knowsley Borough Council to create a well-wooded landscape on the urban edge.

L6 Support the management of existing woodlands and increase woodland cover, as appropriate, on the parkland and other open space at Calderstones and Allerton.

L7 Support the management of existing woodland and grassland areas at Otterspool and the former Garden Festival Site. Where appropriate, carry out new planting.

L8 Protect appropriate areas of existing woodland in future redevelopment at Garston Dock and create a woodland framework as a new setting for development.

L9 Support the development of new habitats and improved access along the Speke Coast to form a coastal reserve between Garston and the city boundary.

L10 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.

L11 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.

KNOWSLEY

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 Prescot 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 and areas of valuable younger amenity planting and important street trees. 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 Prescot. 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 Prescot 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.

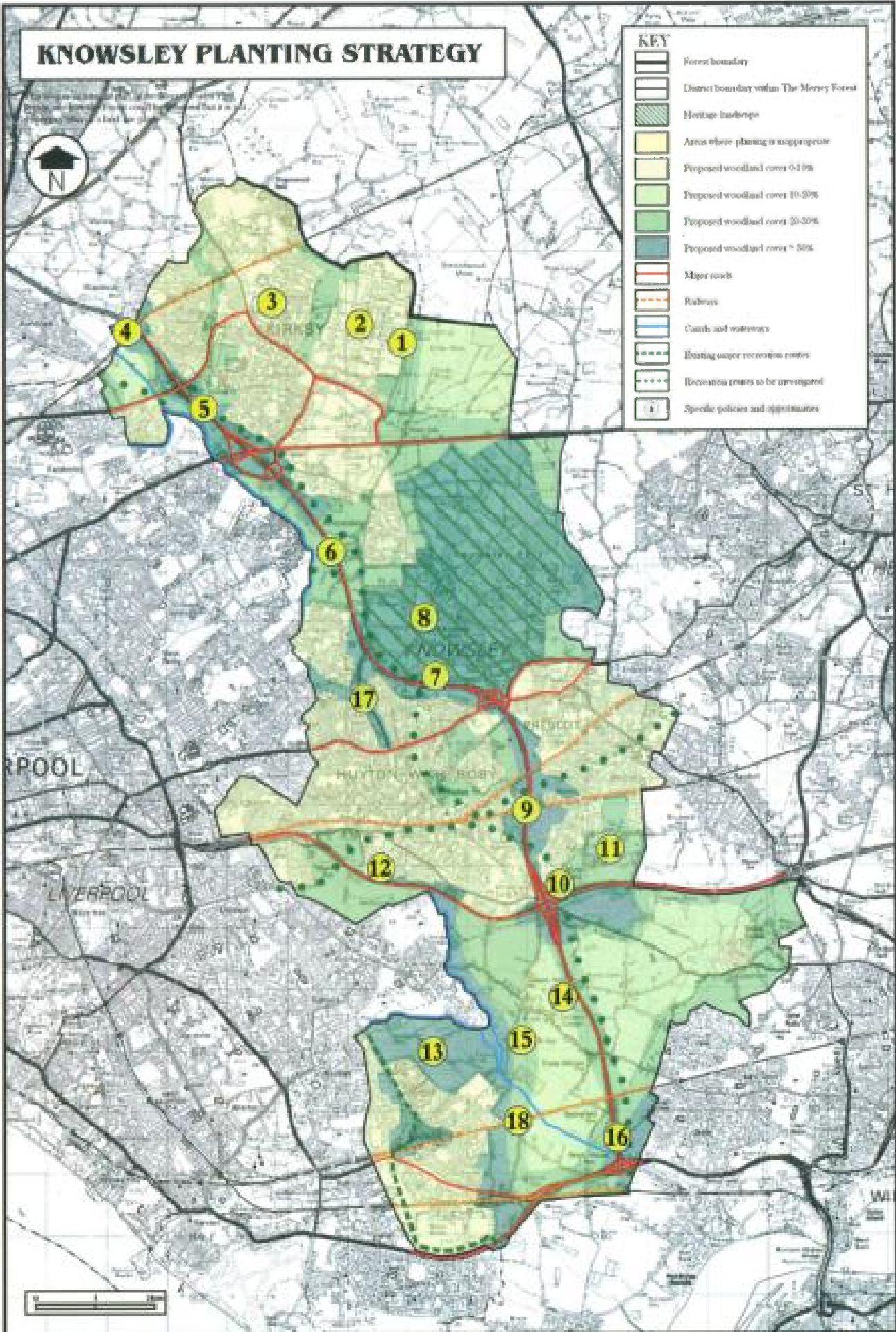


Guiding principles

- 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

KEY	
	Forest boundary
	District boundary within The Mersey Forest
	Heritage landscape
	Areas where planting is inappropriate
	Proposed woodland cover 0-10%
	Proposed woodland cover 10-50%
	Proposed woodland cover 50-50%
	Proposed woodland cover > 50%
	Major roads
	Roadways
	Canal and waterways
	Existing major recreation routes
	Recreation routes to be investigated
	Specific policies and opportunities



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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. 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 to support the NUVIL project on the Knowsley Industrial Park and extend to other industrial areas. Continue to 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 Gilmoss.

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 to 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.

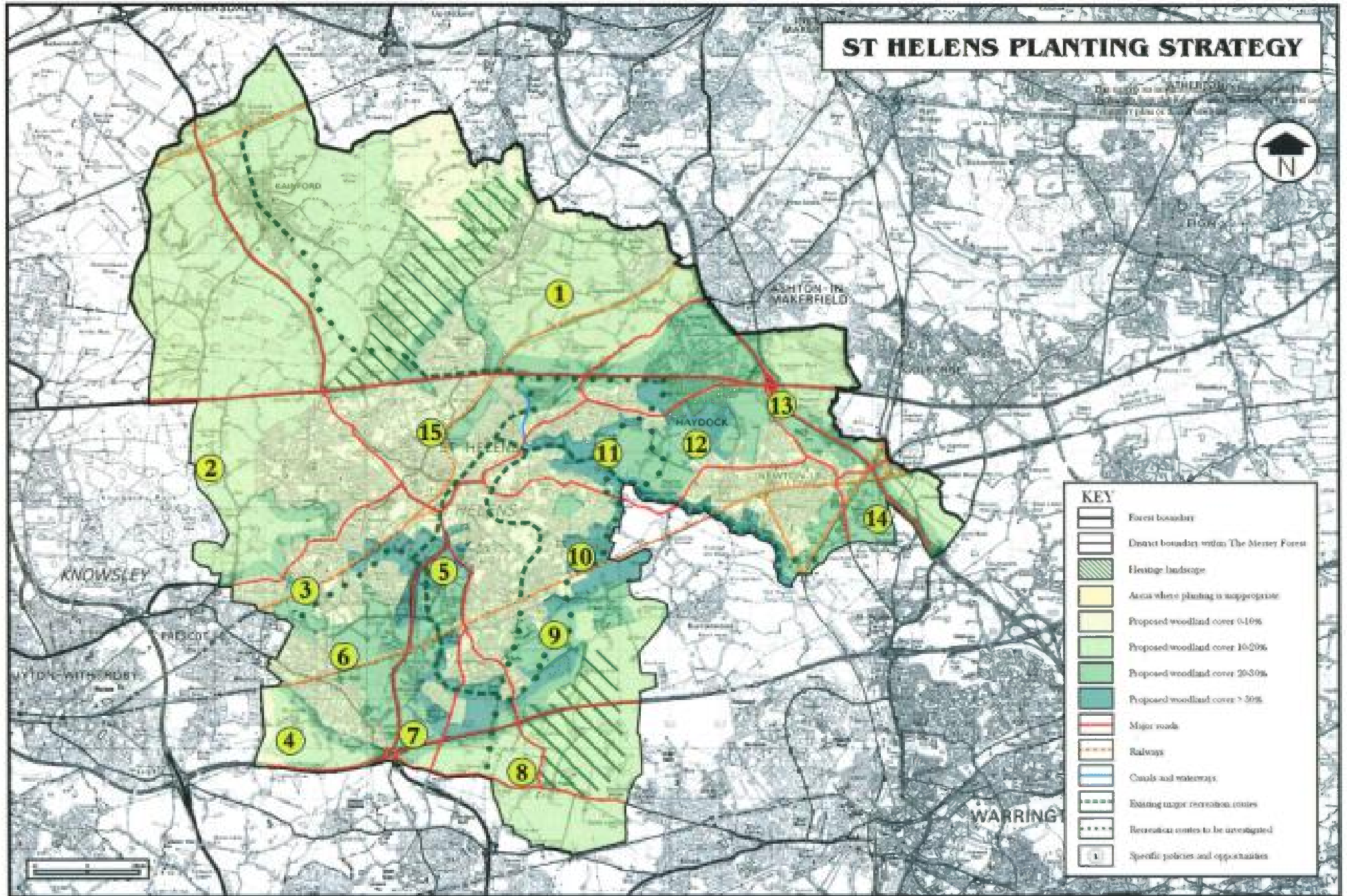
K14 Carry out structural tree planting to further integrate the Knowsley Expressway into the surrounding landscape.

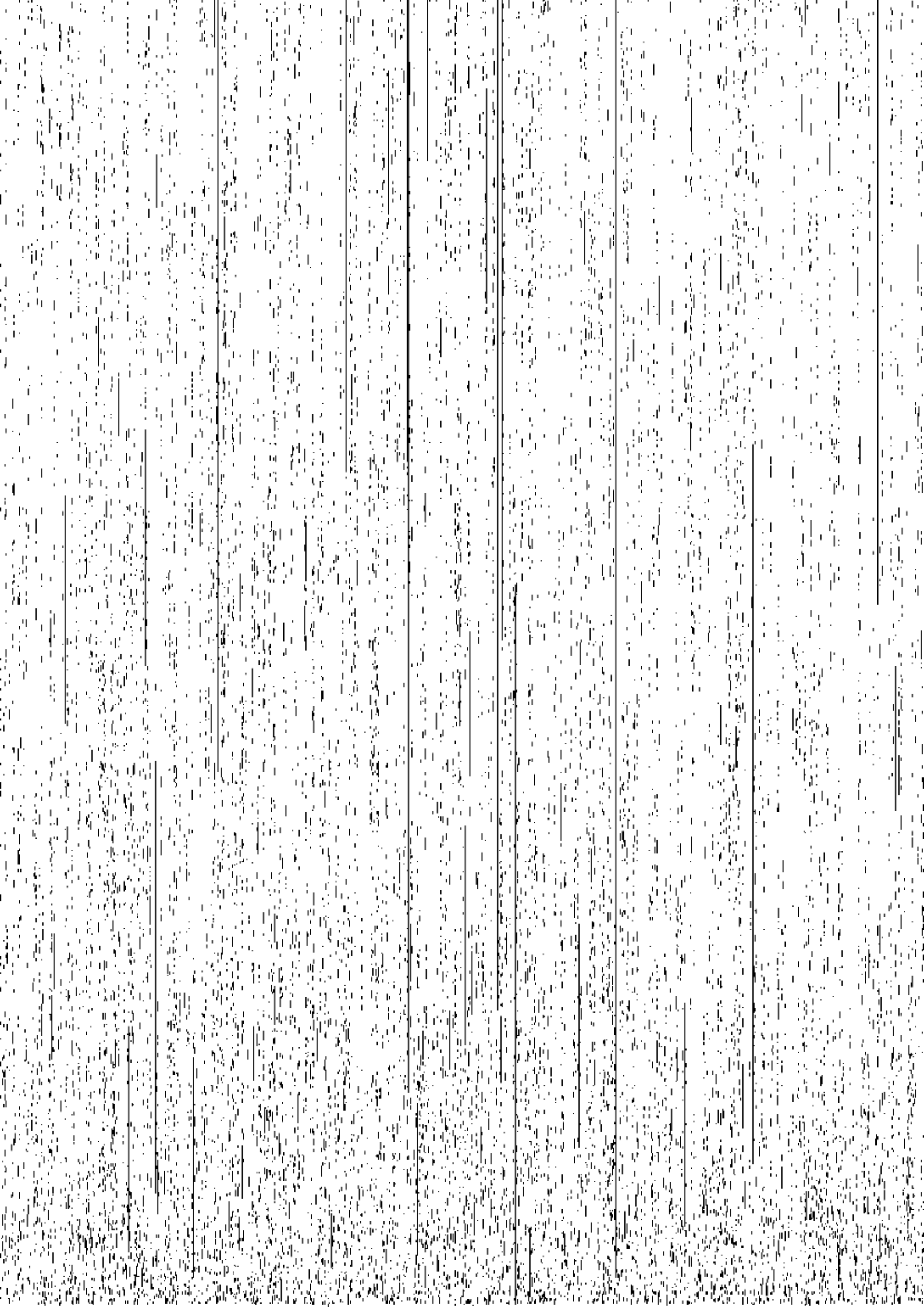
K15 Plant small to medium-scale woodlands and restore the hedgerow structure to the agricultural area around Tarbock and Cronton, especially around Pex Hill Country Park.

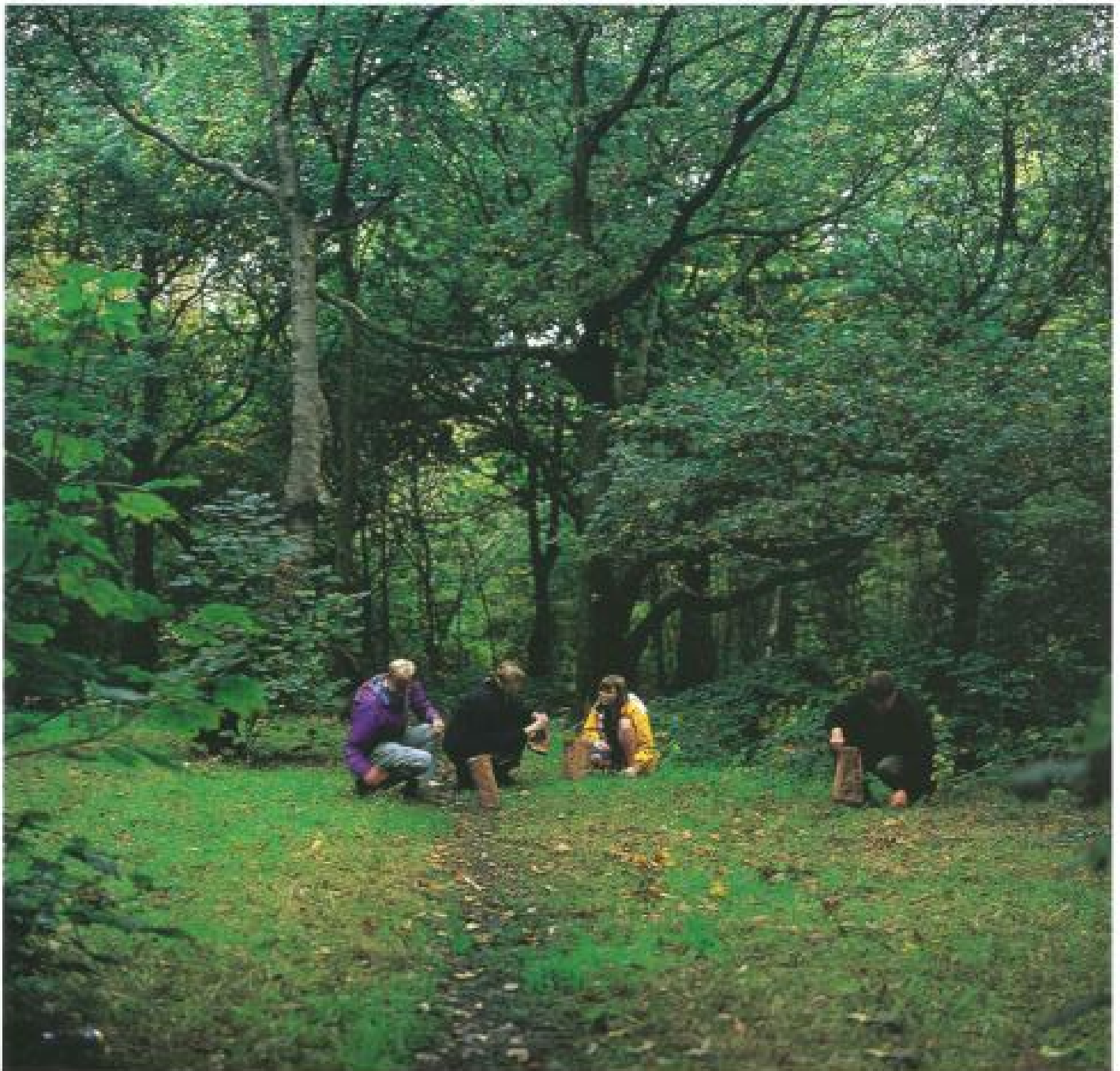
K16 Create a well-wooded area at the A5300-A562 intersection and extend north and south along the borough boundary.

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

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







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 re-development of derelict or vacant sites. Continue work on the developing greenway network.

HALTON

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.
- Protect and manage the existing resource of urban trees and woodlands in a sustainable manner.

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.

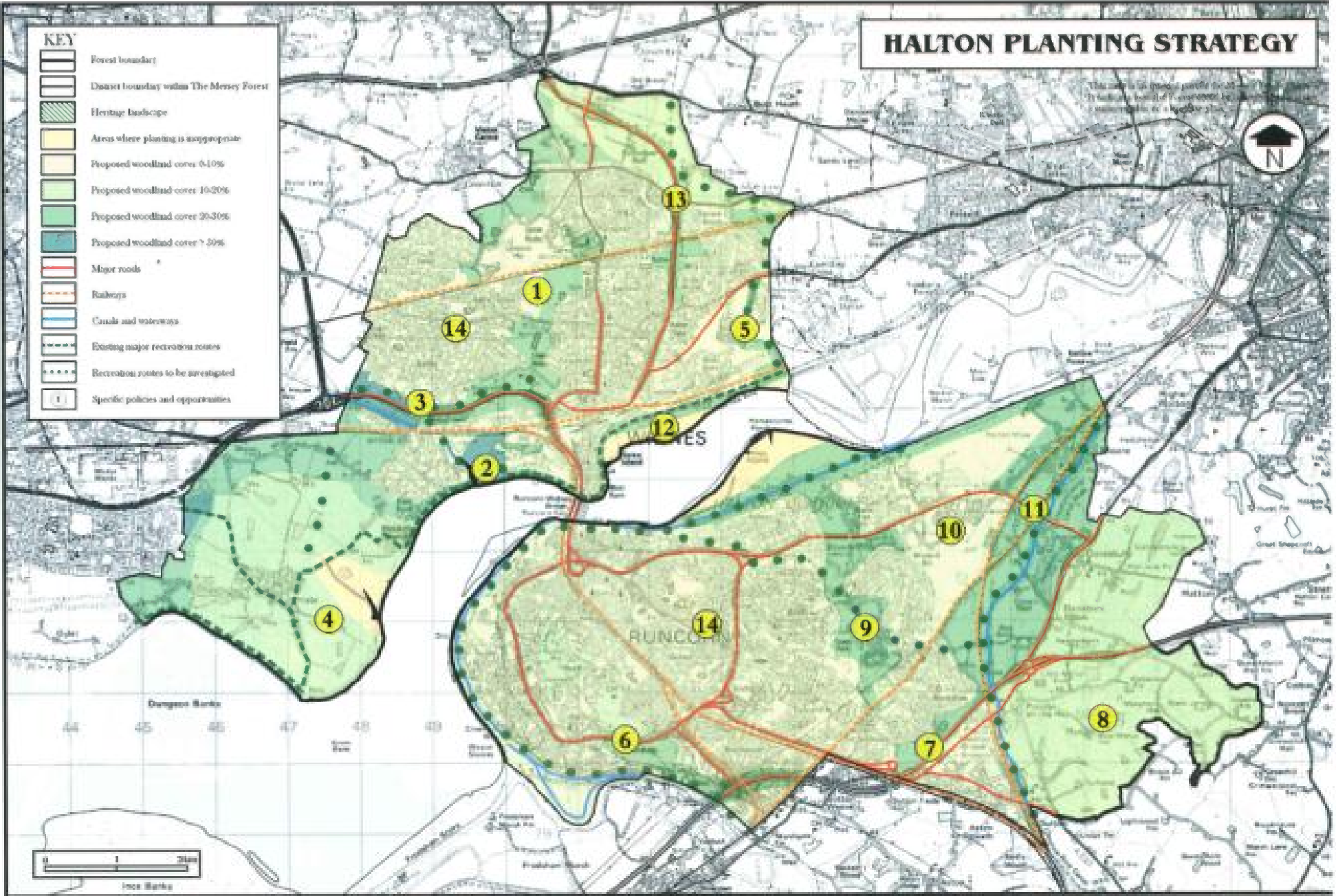
H3 Create a woodland corridor along the A562 extending into Knowsley Borough.

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.

HALTON PLANTING STRATEGY

KEY

-  Forest boundary
-  District boundary within The Mersey Forest
-  Heritage landscape
-  Areas where planting is inappropriate
-  Proposed woodland cover 0-10%
-  Proposed woodland cover 10-20%
-  Proposed woodland cover 20-30%
-  Proposed woodland cover > 30%
-  Major roads
-  Railways
-  Canals and waterways
-  Existing major recreation routes
-  Recreation routes to be investigated
-  Specific policies and opportunities





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.

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 In the urban areas, manage existing trees in accordance with good arboricultural practice. Carry out planting of individual trees, groups of trees or small woodlands on any available and appropriate sites, such as school playing fields, public open spaces, highway verges and development sites.

WARRINGTON

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.

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 Cuedley 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



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.

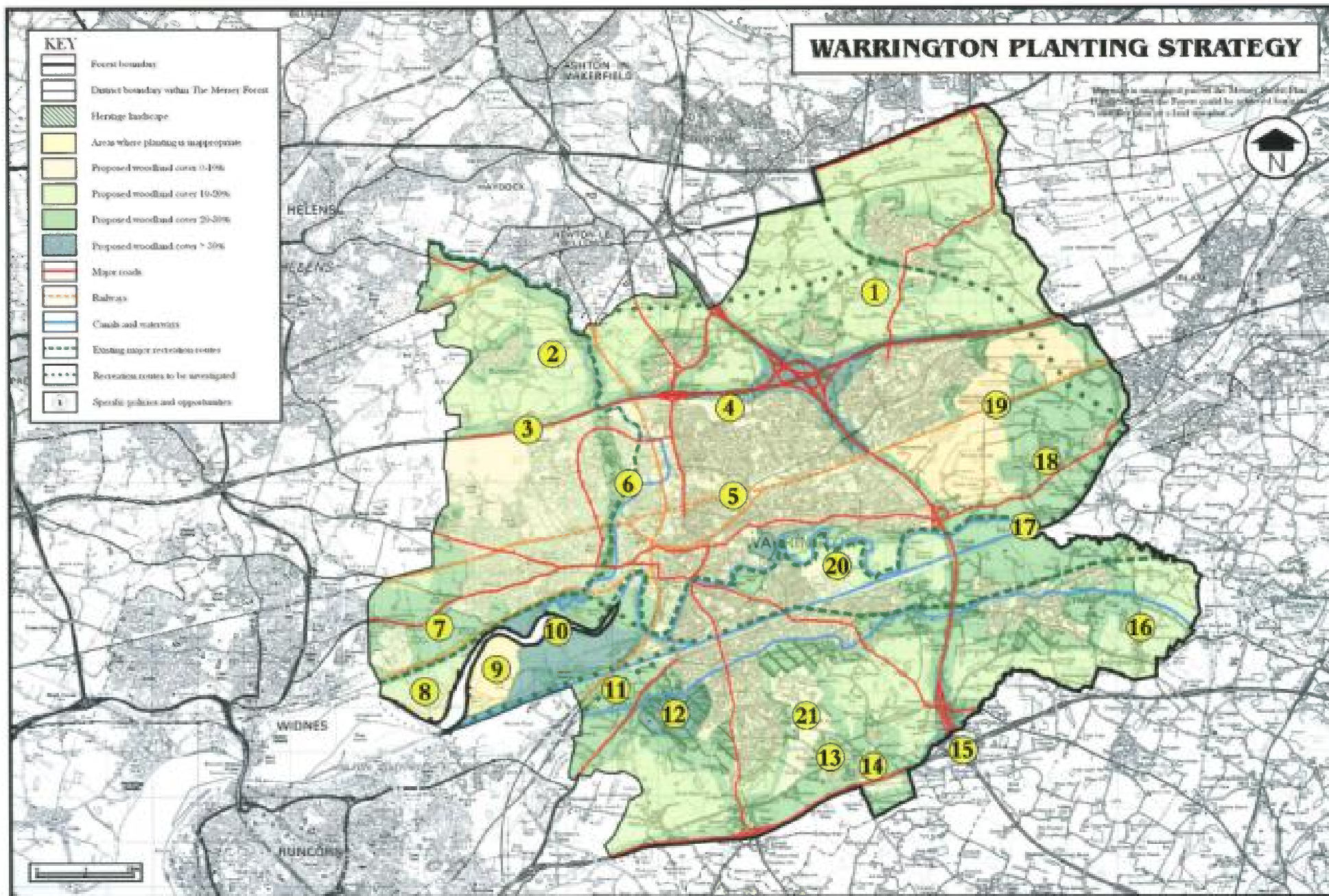
Communication routes have a dominant effect on the landscape: the M6 motorway runs north-south, the M62 motorway east-west to the north, the M56 motorway east-west to the south; the west-coast main railway line and Manchester Ship Canal both run through the centre of Warrington.

the 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 and the creation of linear woodlands along highways and rights of way.

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

W3 Create a well-wooded landscape along all motorway corridors in the borough, in particular the proposed new Junction 8 of the M62.

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

W5 Extend the Forest within the urban area by peripheral planting on appropriate public open space, extending areas of existing trees and woodland and linking sites together

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

W7 Create significant areas of native woodland 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.

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. Create linear woodlands along highways and rights of way.

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.

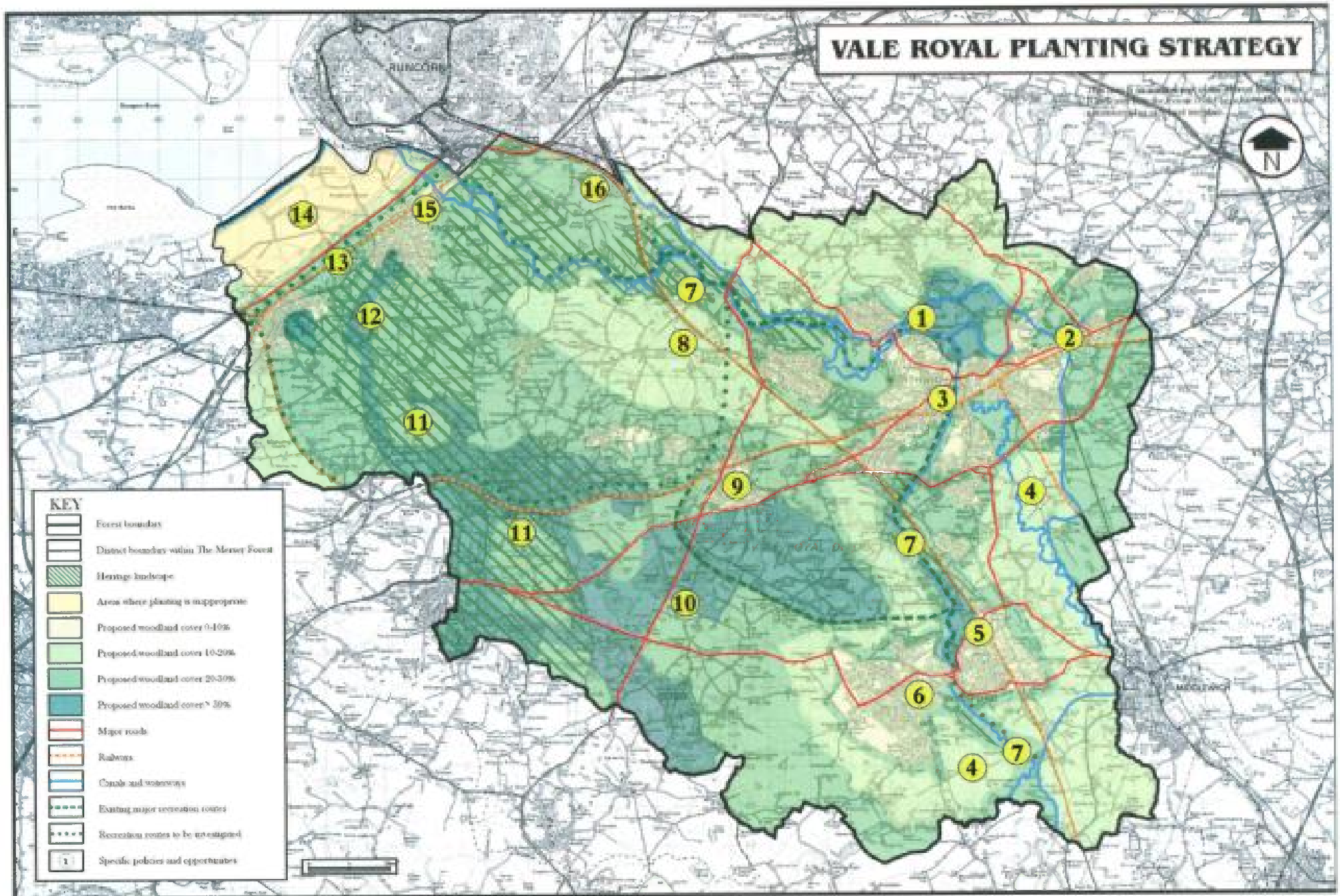
W17 In the area north of Lymm and south of the A57 east of the M56, restore hedges and hedgerow trees and plant small copses and linear woodlands along highways and rights of way. Introduce large scale planting on disturbed land and within the large-scale agricultural areas, but keeping a significant area of 'valley bottom' land open.

W18 At Rixton, carry out significant woodland planting around the brick works and on the edge of the mossland around the urban fringe.

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 Significant areas of native woodland should be created as part of the development package, should the Bridgewater East Housing Area be approved in the Draft Local Plan.



VALE ROYAL

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 community forest, a mixture of wooded areas and other habitats at Northwich (particularly north of Northwich, the area identified as Northwich Community Woodland) 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 Delamere area to create a well-wooded landscape, and extend Delamere Forest in order to provide additional tourism/visitor destinations.
- Provide access to non-car users through a network of multi-user routes.
- Involve and engage the community in the enhancement, management, promotion and maintenance of Vale Royal's Countryside Sites in The Mersey Forest
- Provide multi-user routes along the Weaver Valley, between Frodsham and Delamere and linking to other parts of The Mersey Forest

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.

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 and restore and create Cheshire orchards (this last point also is relevant to Halton, Warrington and Ellesmere Port). 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 and create and restore Cheshire Orchards. 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).

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. Pursue sustainable tourism objectives, particularly the encouragement of access to the area by alternative methods than car.

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. Encourage the use of this area by walkers, cyclists and horseriders whilst safeguarding the nature conservation interest.

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

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, this area includes large amounts of brownfield land as a result of contraction of the refinery and associated industries. 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, Rivacre Valley, Stanney Wood, woodland sites adjacent the Shropshire Union Canal, other sites along the M53 and the rail corridor through Stanlow. These offer an important opportunity for extending the countryside into the developed area and creating a much needed new landscape structure.

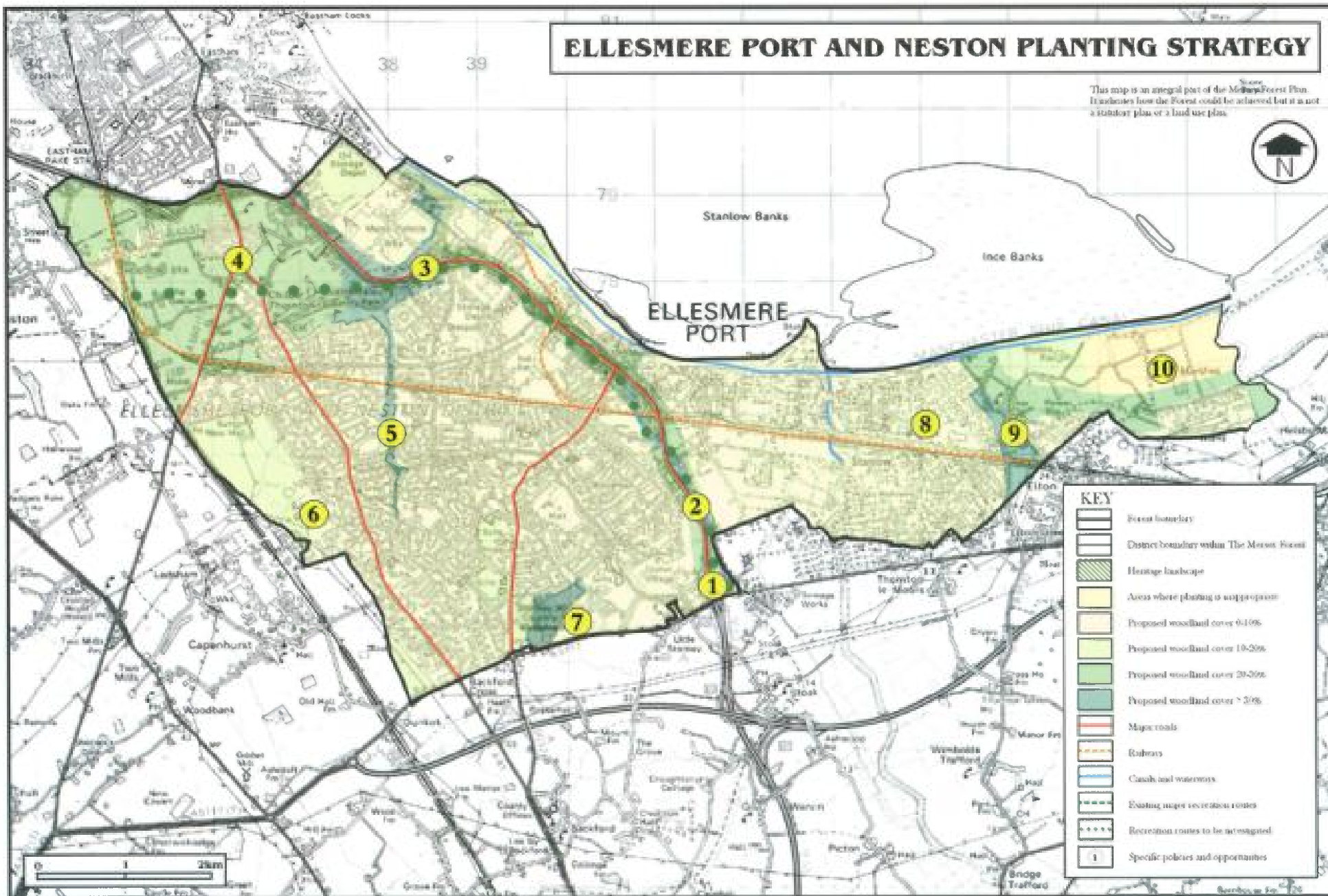
Guiding principles:

- Enhance the large areas of brownfield land in and around Stanlow through appropriate woodland planting.
- Strengthen and develop planting along the Western fringes of Ellesmere Port.
- Create a wooded corridor running from the north-west to the south-east along the M53/ Shropshire Union Canal Corridor.
- 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.
- Develop recreational routes into established and developing woodlands, where possible linking up woodlands and connecting routes. This will create good access for the local community to the woodlands and associated habitats in the Borough.



ELLESMERE PORT AND NESTON PLANTING STRATEGY

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



Policies and opportunities

Numbers refer to the 'Ellesmere Port & Neston Planting Strategy' map.

E1 Discuss and implement with appropriate landowners and authorities any opportunities for tree planting and other habitat improvements within the North West Cheshire Forestry Strategy Area.

E2 Continue to seek opportunities to plant new woodland on appropriate sites within the M53/Shropshire Union Canal Corridor from the Borough boundary to the Boat Museum.

E3 Continue to seek opportunities to plant appropriate sites along the M53 Corridor from the Borough boundary to the Boat Museum, continue to link planting to 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 Valley, so that it becomes identifiable as a linear woodland feature extending into the urban area.

E6 Support the creation of small woodlands and structural planting in the West of Ellesmere Port in association with the development of new residential areas.

E7 Support the management of Stanney Wood. Extend woodland to the north and east by fringe planting around the playing fields and sports clubs.

E8 Promote and support the planting of interim and long term woodland on brownfield sites in and around Stanlow.

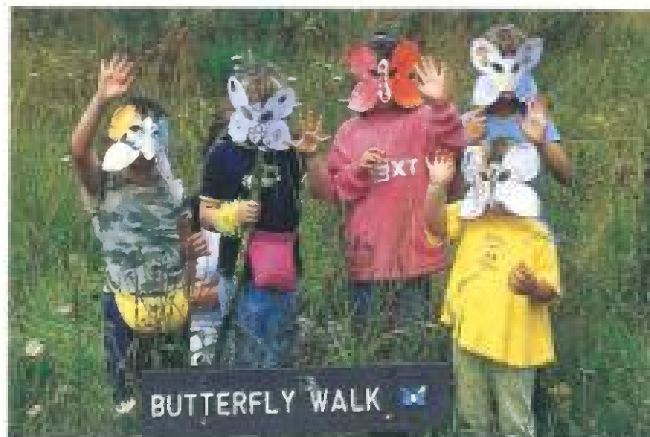
E9 Promote the creation of a significant woodland area on the eastern periphery of Stanlow refinery adjacent to Ince and Elton. Plant small woodlands and copses within a restored pattern of hedgerows and hedgerow trees on the higher land north of Ince.

E10 Ince Marshes are an important area of estuary grassland, which should be conserved and therefore it is not appropriate to carry out woodland planting here. Industrial land around the former Ince Power Station site and the Kemira factory should be screened by woodlands. Hedgerow and management, maintenance of field structure and ditches will be supported.

E11 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 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.”



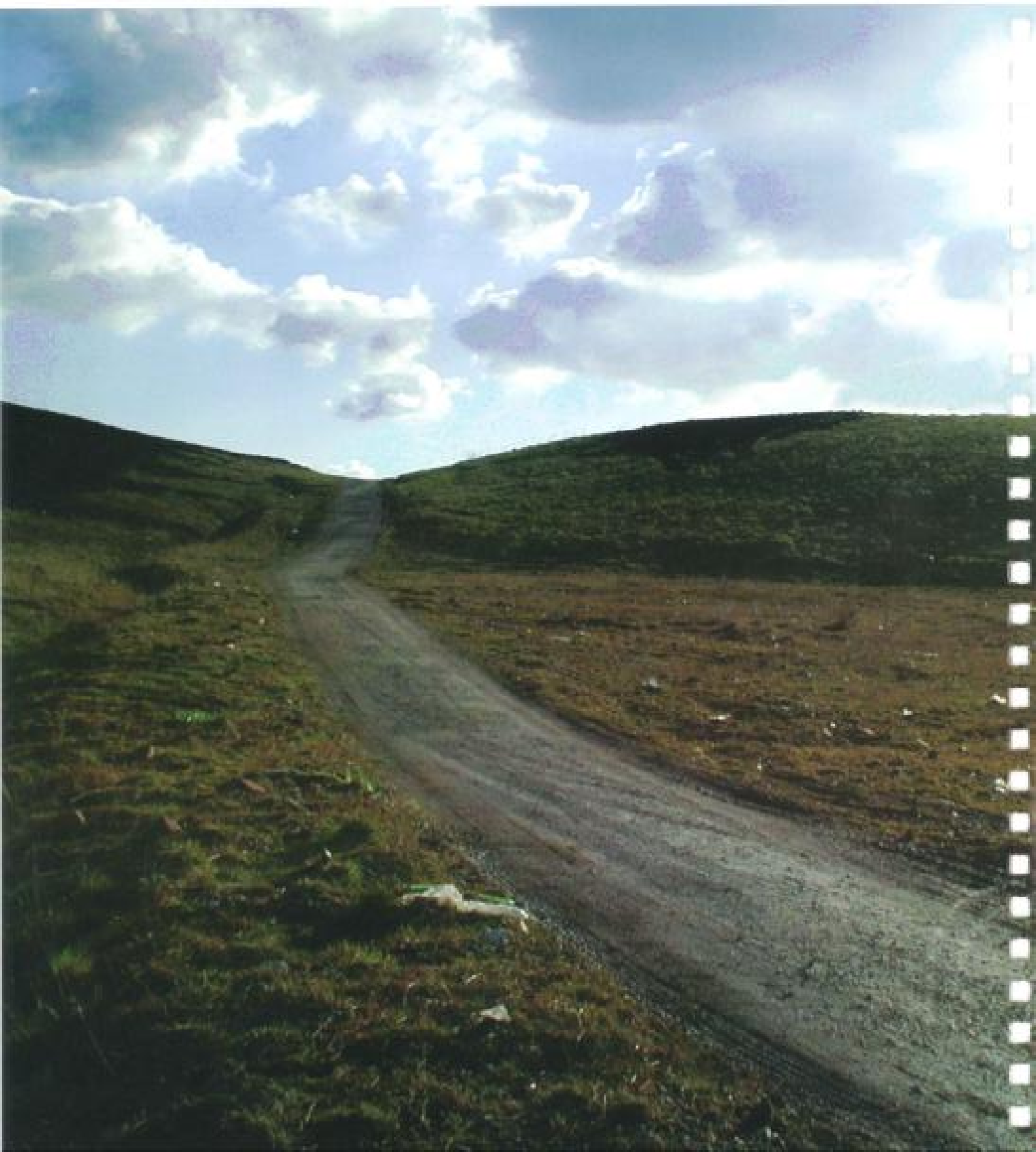
- 17. Achieving change in land use
- 18. Resources
- 19. Planting targets and costs
- 20. Monitoring and evaluation





Implementation

Chapters 5-16 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 section starts by considering how this might be done.



17. Achieving change in land use

Farmland

17.1 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. Community 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.

R49 The partners will seek to integrate farming and forestry to maintain viable farming units and ensure that the new and existing woodlands are well managed.

17.2 Over the course of The Mersey Forest's life, 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 10% of existing farmland within the Forest boundary being turned 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 and Farm Woodland Premium Schemes, which are aimed at achieving environmental gains and public benefit rather than food production per se.

17.3 The reluctance by farmers and landowners to take advantage of the grant schemes for woodland creation traditionally on offer has its roots in a variety of complex factors, which have recently been addressed at both European and national levels through the Agenda 2000 negotiations established at the Berlin European Council in 1999 and the government response strategy, the Rural Development Regulation (MAFF, 2000).

17.4 Previous agri-environment forestry grant packages, namely the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme and the Woodland Grant Scheme did not match the financial return that would otherwise have been realised through livestock and arable enterprises. The demand for woodland planting on farmland was therefore not great as a result of the limited financial return between the planting period, and the time at which woodlands would have matured to provide a harvestable timber crop (a period of around 20-40 years).

17.5 The nature of farm ownership, and especially agricultural tenancy, is an additional complication. Within the Forest area, 54% of farmland is tenanted (see Table 3.2, Page 29). 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 are sometimes seen to be threats arising from increased tree cover.

17.6 The recent reform of agricultural policy has however, designated increased funds for the woodland planting of agricultural land, in a government bid to effectively support farm diversification in light of revised European legislation. Rural Development Regulation (RDR) Funds will become available through the existing Woodland Premium Scheme, which is regulated by the Forestry Commission, a supporting Partner of the Community Forestry Programme. Opportunities for woodland planting on farmland for environmental and public benefits are therefore likely to increase, and The Mersey Forest will seek to take advantage of the reformed grant schemes to promote agri-forestry uptake.

17.7 There have however, been a number of successful schemes by which local farmers have enhanced the landscape of their holdings while benefiting from grant funds brokered by The Mersey Forest Team. The Forest has also facilitated purchase of farms and local land by bodies such as The Woodland Trust and the Forestry Commission.



R50 The partners will actively market the existing grants to farmers and this encompasses three areas of work:

- Research to identify different sectors of the farming community, their objectives and constraints.
- Promotion of grant packages backed up by information dissemination and advice.
- Additional work with representative farms to provide model examples of grant packages, diversification options and farm woodland demonstration sites, particularly in light of CAP reform through the Rural Development Regulation.

R51 The partner authorities support the Countryside Agency's policy statement advocating the targeting of agricultural support so that profitable rural enterprises, especially farming and forestry, will enhance countryside quality and biodiversity.

17.8 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.

17.9 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.

R52 The partners, working with other organisations, will explore methods of making community forestry more farm friendly.

17.10 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.

17.11 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.

R53 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, preventative design.

Derelict, Under-utilised and Neglected land

17.12 The treatment of derelict land and disturbed land such as landfill sites is a major objective of the England Forestry Strategy. Furthermore, it 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 new woodland would have a greatly beneficial 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 to local communities and wildlife, whilst significantly improving the image of the Region, a target of the Regional Economic Strategy (NWDA, 1999).

17.13 There are a number of good reasons for restoring a site to community woodland. 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.

17.14 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. The Mersey Forest has joined with the Forestry Commission Research Agency to promote guidance on restoration of closed landfill and brownfield sites to community woodland (The Mersey Forest & The Red Rose Forest, 1999). The actual techniques of restoration, preparation of site for tree planting and choice of species will depend on the site and its growing medium. Research 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.

R54 The partners will continue to promote the latest techniques for woodland establishment on restored sites in order to create successful woodlands for the minimum cost.

17.15 Major initiatives to tackle derelict land are taking place within The Mersey Forest area supported by the North West Development Agency, English Partnerships, Forestry Commission and the European Regional Development Fund. These schemes include the Northwich Community Woodland 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. More recently, the Forestry Commission and The Mersey and Red Rose Forest has secured £7.5 million funding from the Treasury and NWDA to acquire and remediate derelict land for community use.

17.16 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.

R55 The partners will target appropriate derelict land and support existing reclamation projects for community forest uses.



Public open space

17.17 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.

17.18 Whilst open space is an essential part of the Forest, creating woodlands within the 'green deserts' and increased woodland cover on other areas offers 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.

17.19 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. 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.

17.20 Much of the early planting in The Forest has been on public open space and most has been successful. Major incidents of vandalism are infrequent and there is often significant community interest in new woodlands.

R56 The partner authorities will continue to 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

17.21 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.

17.22 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. The use of Section 106 Agreements (or planning obligations) has led to significant schemes of new planting in Runcorn, Northwich and Ellesmere Port.

R57 The partner authorities will ensure that planning policies local plans and unitary development plans provide a mechanism to deliver substantial contributions to The Mersey Forest where appropriate.

R58 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.

17.23 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.

17.24 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.

17.25 The Mersey Forest Plan 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

17.26 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.

R59 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

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

17.28 The large landowners include Railtrack, Ford UK, General Motors (Vauxhall), INEOS Chlor Limited (formerly ICI), the Manchester Ship Canal Company, United Utilities, 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.

17.29 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 large private companies have strong environmental policies and improvements to the external appearance of their landholdings 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.

17.30 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.



17.31 There are also practical problems. Many companies 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.

17.32 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.

17.33 Fortunately, there are already several agencies in the Forest area who can offer these services, including the

Groundwork Trusts, and the local authorities. These successful models can be developed throughout the Forest area.

R60 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.

R61 Partner authorities will seek to continue to raise the image of The Mersey Forest, through the erection of Mersey Forest site boards in areas of community woodland, through the use of appropriate planning control measures.

17.34 There are many other ways in which companies can become involved in The Mersey Forest, apart from using their landholdings.

Management and training

17.35 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. 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 have been wasted.

17.36 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.

R62 Woodlands within The Mersey Forest should not be planted unless the necessary resources for establishment are available.

16.37 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.

R63 Management plans should be prepared for all woodlands and used to secure Forestry Commission management grants.

17.38 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.

R64 Provision should be made for the long-term management and maintenance of Mersey Forest sites.

17.39 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.
- Work with a site, using existing features as the framework for the Community woodland.
- 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.



- Avoid complexity. The diversity of the Forest will be achieved by a wide variety of sites across the whole Forest not within individual sites.

17.40 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 Groundwork. 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 Annual Management Grants, and the DEFRA Countryside Stewardship grants. Where woodland is created through the planning system, provision for recreation management should be considered.

R65 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.

17.41 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.

R66 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.

18. Resources

18.1 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

18.2 The Countryside Agency 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 12 Community Forests and its nine local authority partners will require ongoing support and encouragement. This will mean that:



R67 The Countryside Agency 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 rural business development, community involvement, the arts and environmental education in community forests.

18.3 The Forestry Commission guides and controls forestry in England, providing research and financial support.

Its separate functions of management of the publicly owned forests achieved through Forest Enterprise.

R68 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 publications;
- 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 land acquisition and the management and development of Forest Enterprise forests at Delamere Forest Park and elsewhere throughout the Forest area.

18.4 The local authority partners 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.

R69 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 and development plans;
- develop the role of their representatives in promoting and coordinating the aims of The Mersey Forest;
- ensure that appropriate staff have the necessary skills required to achieve a successful community Forest and to liaise effectively with the Forest Team.

18.5 The continuing support of local authority agencies such as the Environmental Advisory Service is vital if the community forest is to be successfully promoted, designed and managed.

Other national agencies

18.6 Several national agencies have been involved in the preparation of this Plan. In particular, English Nature supported the project through its position on the 1991 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, specifically the Mersey Forest Biodiversity Action Plan;
- continue to support existing sites and approve further Local Nature Reserves;
- provide support for ecological surveys and research within The Mersey Forest.

18.7 The North West Development Agency has provided significant financial and advisory support to The Forest in land reclamation funds, along with assistance to the Forestry Commission to purchase and remediate derelict and contaminated land. It will continue to contribute through its ongoing commitment to land reclamation, often for community and woodland uses (NWDA, 1999).

Voluntary sector

18.8 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 Forest.



18.9 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 Team;
- 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.

18.10 The newly formed Mersey Forest Trust Co Ltd, a charitable trust will:

- Seek to provide funds for Mersey Forest activity;
- support land acquisition as a mechanism for delivery;
- support community involvement as a fundamental requirement of the success of The Mersey Forest.

18.11 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 Forestp;
- promote and expand its volunteer network within the Forest area;
- work with The Mersey Forest partners to implement the Forest Plan.

18.12 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.



They 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 and the Forest's Biodiversity Action Plan within the Forest area.

18.13 Most of The Mersey Forest area is covered by the remits of a number of Groundwork Trusts, including the former Mersey Valley Partnership, which has also become a part of the Groundwork Foundation. Groundwork St. Helens was the first of the Groundwork Foundation, which now includes over 40 Trusts nationwide, and has been a particularly important ally of the Mersey Forest since the Forest's inception in the early 1990's. The Mersey Forest will continue to work in partnership with the range of Groundwork

Trusts in the area, to deliver the following:

- The continuing development of important reclamation, recreation and regeneration projects implementing and complementing The Mersey Forest Plan;
- working closely with The Mersey Forest partners to promote good and innovative means of liaising with community stakeholders.

18.14 Local organisations, such as the Cheshire Landscape Trust, and local conservation or action groups, 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

18.15 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.

18.16 A number of companies have been able to channel funds into community woodland projects by means of 'Landfill Tax' contributions to appropriate environmental bodies regulated by ENTRUST. This will continue to be an important source of funding to implement The Forest.

18.17 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.

18.18 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.

Marketing and promotion

18.19 It is essential that The Mersey Forest has a clear and separate identity which people recognise and relate to. The first six years of The Forest have seen a great increase in awareness. Now that this identity is established in the eyes of the landowners, companies and communities, it may 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

18.20 Nevertheless, this clear identity must be maintained 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 partners' activities. Across the Forest area, there must be consistency of message, balance in advice and support, and focus of effort.

Training and advice

18.21 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 and voluntary bodies, 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 Commission and Countryside Agency. Best practice, particularly in technical areas of woodland establishment and brownfield regeneration will continue to be made available to private landowners in The Mersey Forest.

Project initiation and coordination

18.22 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, multi-functional projects, often linking with private-sector organisations to complement the resources of the public sector, and probably requiring centralised project management.

18.23 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.



19. Woodland Planting Targets

19.1 To create The Mersey Forest it is proposed that 8140 ha of woodland will be planted over 30 years. In addition a wide range of other habitats will also be created in line with the emerging Mersey Forest biodiversity action plan. 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 19.1.

Table 19.1 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	

19.2 This shows the number of hectares targeted to be created 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 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 changes in government policy. It is unlikely that higher rates of planting on farmland will be achieved unless there are changes to the existing support mechanisms.



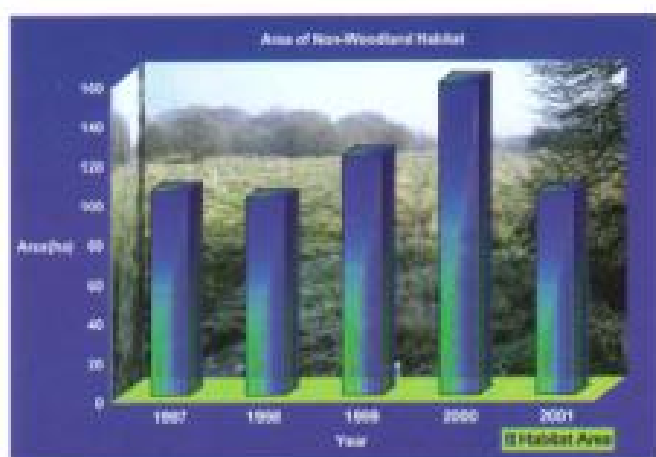
20. Monitoring and Evaluation

20.1 The Mersey Forest is 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. An annual business plan provides details of budgets, achievements and targets.

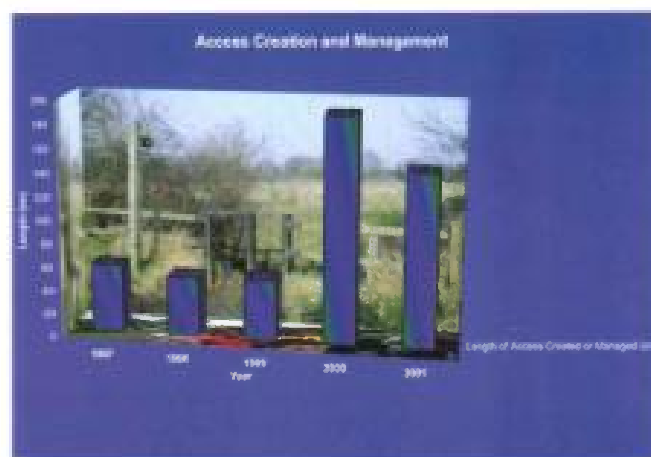
Techniques for the evaluation of progress have been investigated as part of the process of producing this business plan, performance indicators against the following objectives have been developed:

- 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.

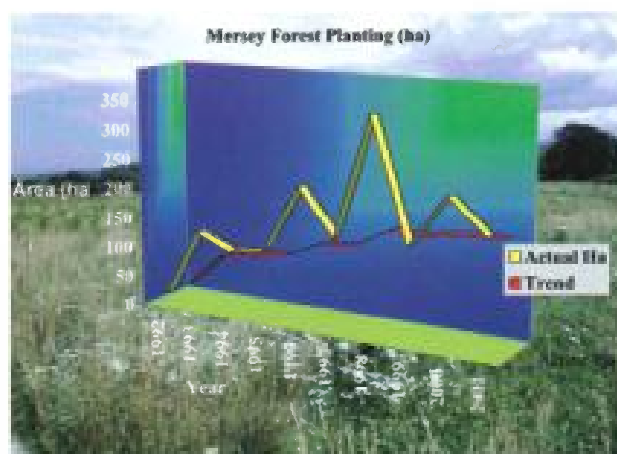
The graphs below highlight progress to date on some aspects of The Mersey Forest. This information is updated annually on the website www.merseyforest.org.uk.



Progress to date in creating non-woodland habitats.



Progress to date in creating new access.



Progress to date in creating new community woodlands.

“The aim in these areas should be to maintain and support the existing character.”



A. Landscape assessment
and strategy





Appendix A

Landscape Assessment And Strategy

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

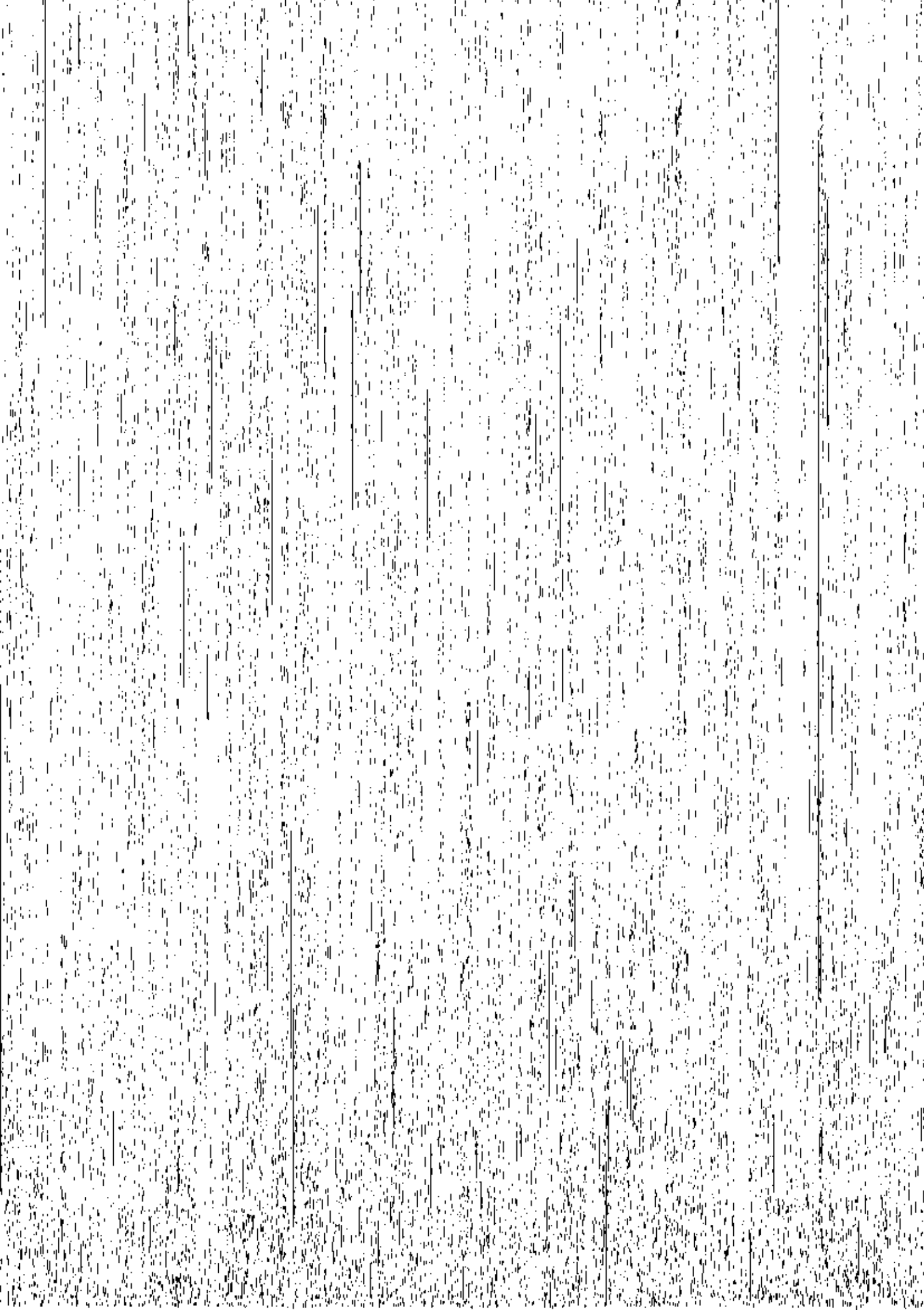
There are seven landscape regions within the Forest area. None is wholly contained within the Forest and some regions (such as the Lancashire Plain and Cheshire Plain) are only partly included in the Forest

The regions are as follows:

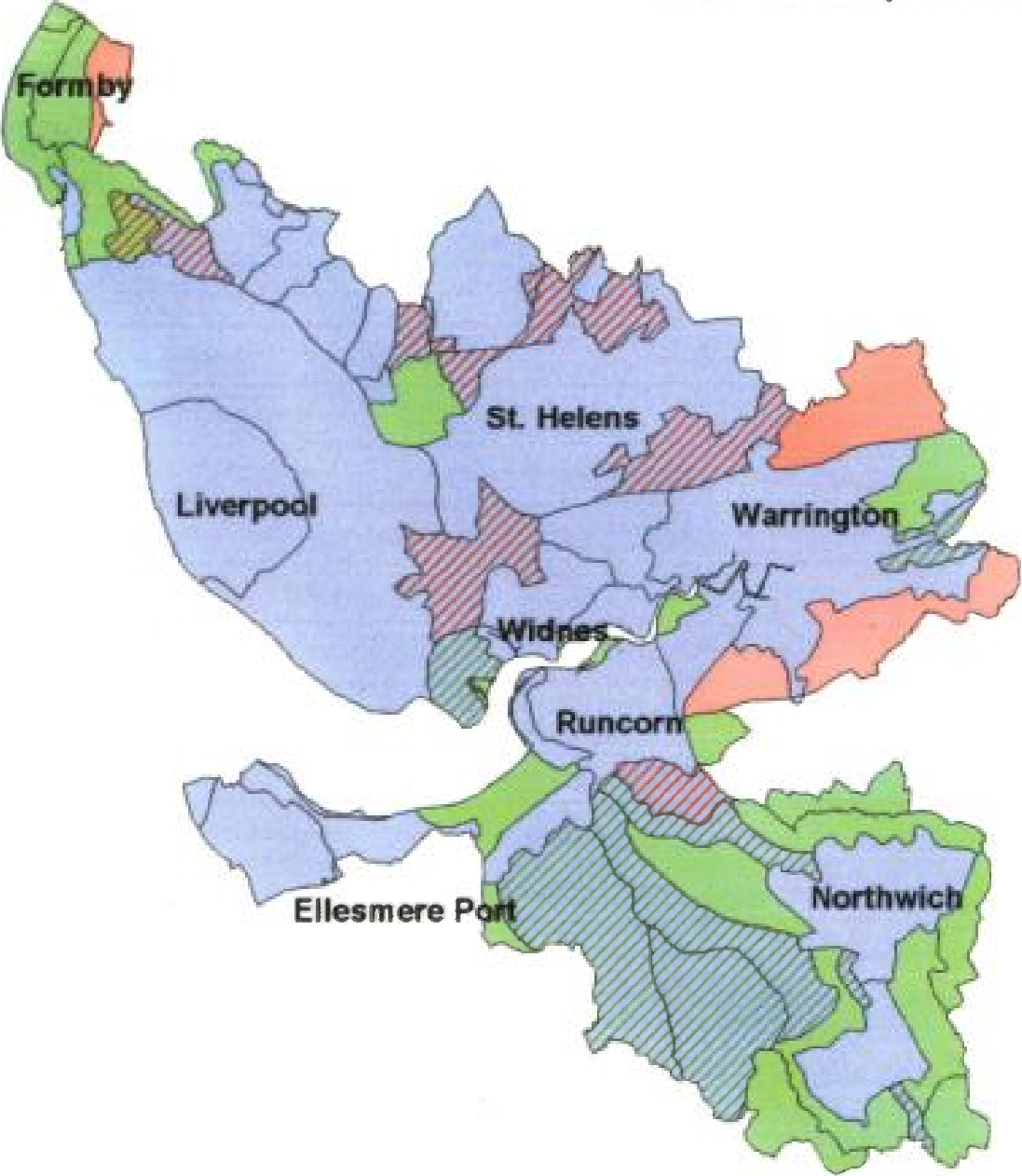
- **Sefton coastline** A coastal fringe to the Lancashire Plain, formed by an extensive sand dune system. Within the Forest area the region is divided equally between open poor quality farmland and urban development. Pine woodland occurs around Formby.









- **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.
- **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.



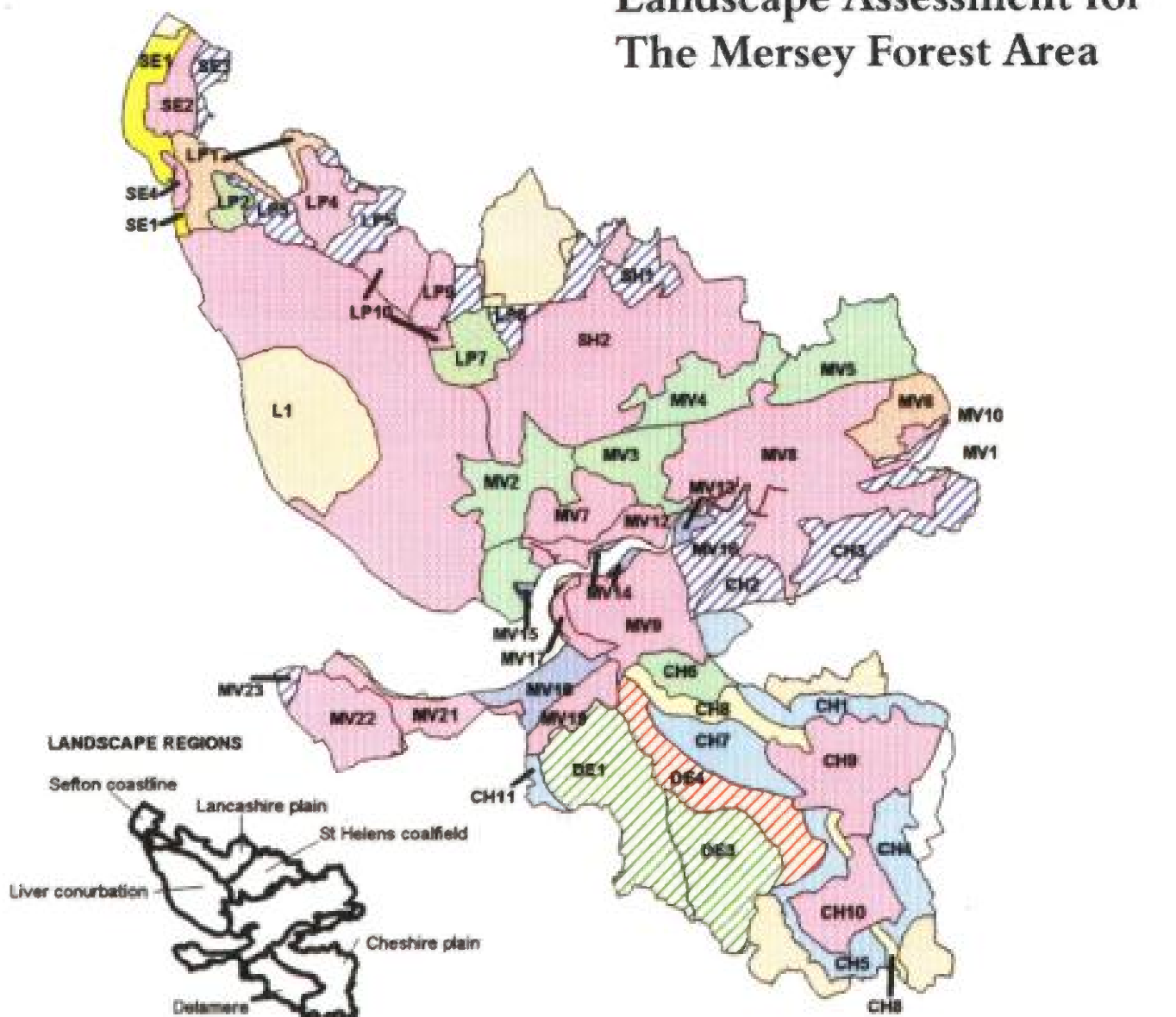
Landscape Strategy for The Mersey Forest Area



-  Maintain existing character
-  Restore existing character
-  Create new character

-  Careful balance of creation and restoration
-  Careful balance of maintenance and restoration
-  Careful balance of maintenance and creation

Landscape Assessment for The Mersey 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 Mellington
- 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 Runcom
- MV10 Hollin
- MV11 Warburton
- MV12 Ditton Ferry
- MV13 Norton
- MV14 Halton Marshes
- MV15 Hale Marshes
- MV16 Moore
- MV17 Weston
- MV18 Frodsham Marshes
- MV19 Helsby-Frodsham
- MV21 Booston-Starlow
- MV22 Ellesmere
- MV23 Hooton

Cheshire plain

- CH1 Frandley
- CH2 Halton
- CH3 Bradey
- 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



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

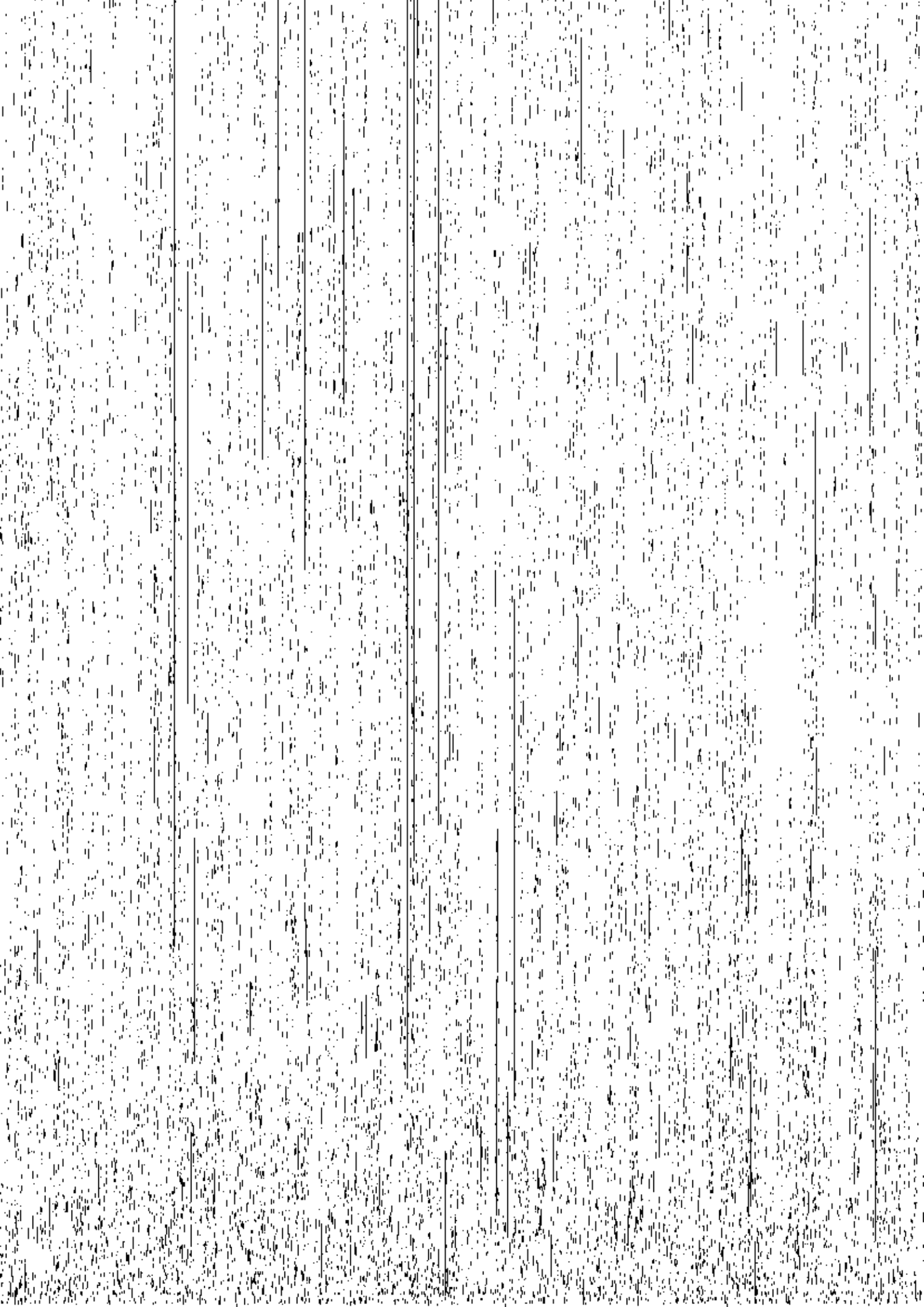
In these mainly agricultural landscapes, agricultural intensification and urban influences have reduced landscape character, but the character is still apparent and can be salvaged. Only 6.6% of the Forest area is suitable for this option, including the Formby Hall area in Sefton, the northern edge of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



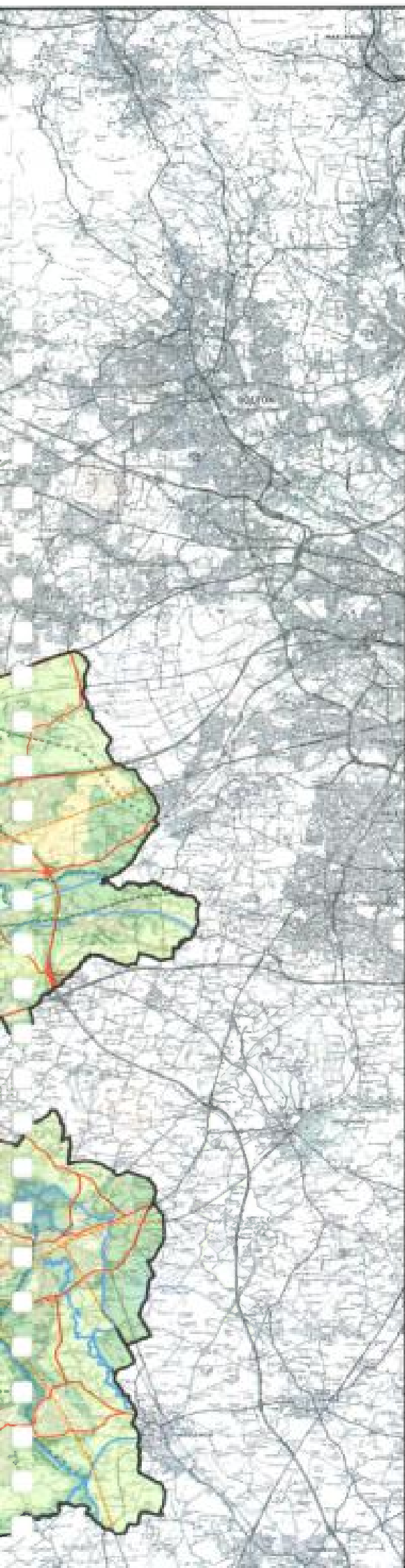




FOREST STRATEGY MAP

KEY

	Forest boundary
	District boundary within The Mersey Forest
	Heritage landscape/Area of high landscape value
	Areas where planting is inappropriate
	Proposed woodland cover 0-10%
	Proposed woodland cover 10-20%
	Proposed woodland cover 20-30%
	Proposed woodland cover > 30%
	Sefton Coast Planning Zone
	Major roads
	Railways
	Canals and waterways
	Existing major recreation routes
	Recreation routes to be investigated



This map is an integral part of The Mersey Forest Plan. It is for information. The Forest could be set back for a range of reasons. This is a risk assessment. The finer management of individual woodlands is essential to ensure the success of the strategy. This map is a guide to the general and state of woodland cover which should be encouraged. Forest creation proposals may be required.

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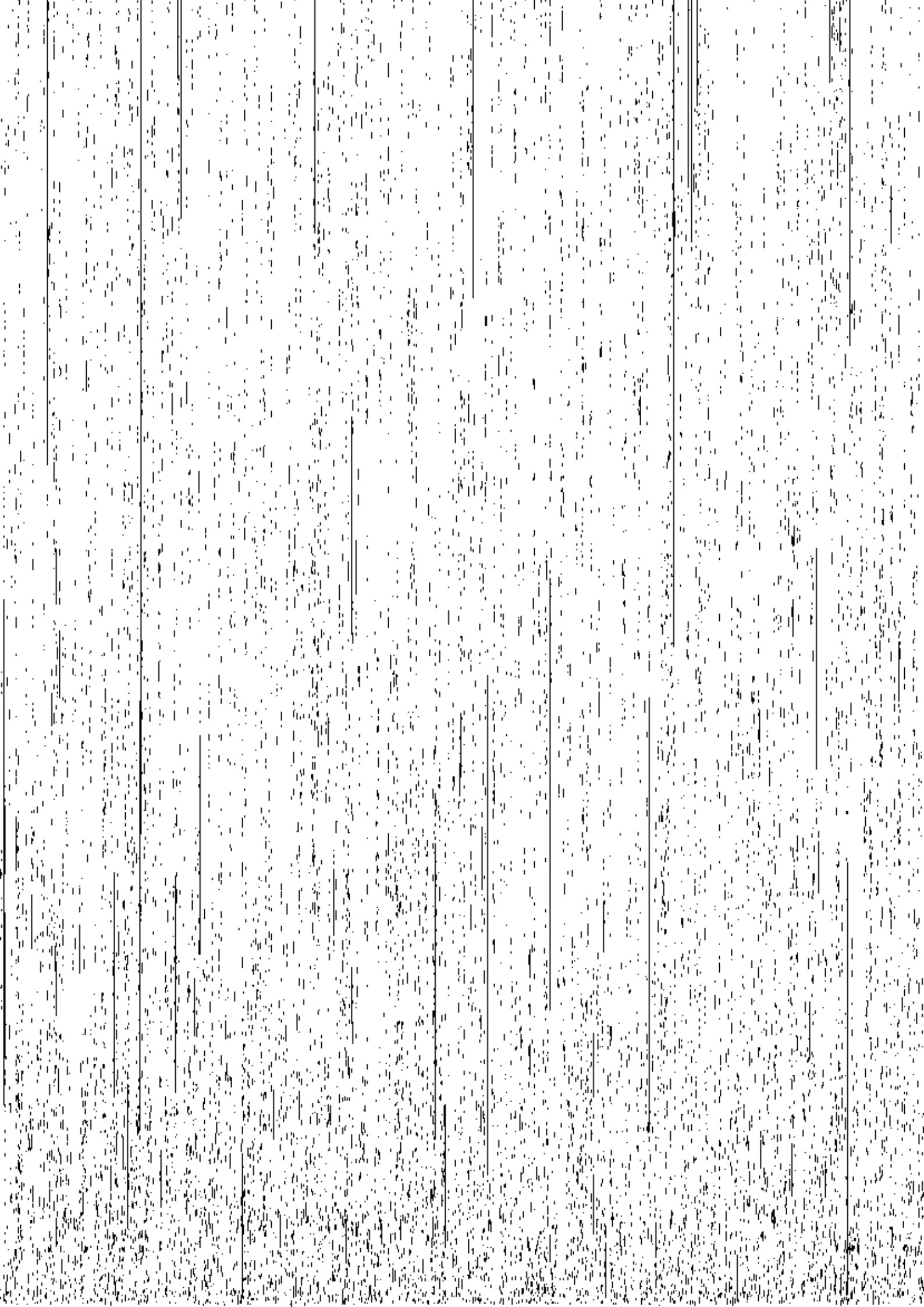
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PLANT DREAMS

*We are planting dreams.
It is best to plant dreams.
Some people think we are
planting trees.
But mostly we are
planting dreams.
Because if you plant
dreams
Who knows what
They will one day become.*

A poem by Kevin Cadwallender,
poet in residence with the
Great North Forest 1999
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