

REPORT TO: Executive Board Sub-Committee

DATE: 1st April 2010

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director - Environment and Economy

SUBJECT: Renewal of The Mersey Forest Agreement

WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Members that the original agreement with Mersey Forest has expired and request their support for a further agreement.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That;-

The existing Mersey Forest Agreement be renewed and the Strategic Director – Environment and Economy be authorised to determine the terms of the new Agreement following the principles outlined in this report.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Mersey Forest is the biggest of the UK's 12 Community Forests. It covers 420 square miles (1,082 km²) and is part of a 30-year plan to transform the landscape across Merseyside and North Cheshire. The regeneration of The Mersey Forest is being achieved by a partnership comprising the Forestry Commission, Natural England, nine local authorities, The Mersey Forest Team and various other organisations and individuals who share the vision for creating The Forest.
- 3.2 In the 19 years since it was established, over 3,750 hectares of new habitat have been created in the Mersey Forest, and around 10 million new trees planted. In Halton itself during this period, there have been 110 hectares of new woodland planted, 45 hectares of non-woodland habitat created, £2.9 million additional funding brought in, and over two thousand community events organised.
- 3.3 Halton Borough Council has been a partner in the Mersey Forest since its inception, and the current Agreement is now due for renewal. The new Agreement will run from the 1st April 2010 until the 31st March 2015.
- 3.4 The Agreement empowers the nine local authorities to work together to support the work of the Mersey Forest. The new Agreement is very similar to the previous one, with changes being made to reflect the local government re-organisation that took place in Cheshire in April 2009.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Halton Unitary Development Plan Policy No. GE28 supports the work and aims of the Mersey Forest.
- 4.2 The Mersey Forest helps to achieve several of the objectives in the Corporate Plan, particularly those connected with 'A Healthy Halton' and 'Urban Renewal'.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Financial: An annual sum of £18,200 is allocated within the Council's Revenue budget, as a contribution towards the Mersey Forest. The proposed agreement would commit the Council to this annual contribution until 2015. It is likely that over the next few years funding in excess of £18,200 will be brought into Halton through Mersey Forest.
- 5.2 Sustainability: The Mersey Forest helps to achieve several objectives of the Local Agenda 21 Strategy and A Local Compact for Halton.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The above proposals will deliver improvements that will directly impact on the lives of local children and young people who will have access to the woodland areas within public open spaces and within school grounds.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Creation of woodland areas will create more jobs directly and indirectly. Staff with a high level of arboricultural skills will be required to maintain sites.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Improvement of the Borough's Green Infrastructure and increased patronage will make a beneficial contribution to the health of the Borough's citizens. Woodland areas have the ability to fix carbon thereby reducing carbon emissions. Trees also have a beneficial effect in a warmer climate by providing cooler sheltered areas.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Attractive woodland areas increase patronage, which in turn has been proven to reduce crime and anti social behaviour.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Improvements to the Borough's Green Infrastructure will further improve the image of the Borough and contribute directly to its Urban Renewal.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

6.1 No significant risks have been identified.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 No significant Equality and Diversity Issue have been identified.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Mersey Forest Agreement 2010/11 to 20/14/15.	Picow Farm Depot	Paul Wright