

Response to Cranage Neighbourhood Plan

The Mersey Forest Team welcomes the opportunity to comment on Cranage Neighbourhood Plan. Our feedback is within the context of The Mersey Forest Plan (<https://merseyforest.org.uk/our-plan/>) and the Tree Atlas, its associated online mapping tool (<https://merseyforest.org.uk/tree-atlas/>).

The Mersey Forest is Cheshire and Merseyside's Community Forest, established in the early 1990s. We work with trees for the benefit of people, nature, and climate. For the past 30 years, we have been growing the network of well looked after trees and woods, as well as other habitats, and encouraging people to get involved. As a result, more than 10 million new trees have been established, or 4 trees for every person living here. We work with lots of people and organisations to make this happen – partners, landowners, managers, and farmers, and local communities, businesses and schools. Together, we are bringing change for the benefit of all. We are one of England's 15 Community Forests and part of the Northern Forest initiative.

The Mersey Forest Plan is the long-term and strategic guide to the work of The Mersey Forest team and partners, extending to 2050 and beyond. It has recently been refreshed with input from all local authority partners. Cheshire East Council is a core Partner in The Mersey Forest.

Under paragraph 152 of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#): “Community Forests offer valuable opportunities for improving the environment around towns and cities, by upgrading the landscape and providing for recreation and wildlife... An approved Community Forest Plan may be a material consideration in preparing development plans and in deciding planning applications. Any development proposals within... Community Forests in the Green Belt should be subject to the normal policies for controlling development in Green Belts”.

The Mersey Forest Plan can contribute to neighbourhood planning, setting out and supporting local priorities and aspirations.

Key point for this neighbourhood plan: We would welcome the strengthening of connections between this Neighbourhood Plan and The Mersey Forest Plan, so aspirations in the Neighbourhood Plan area, and any development coming forward in the area, also help to deliver key aspects of The Mersey Forest, bringing benefits for people, nature, and climate.

The Mersey Forest Plan vision

“More with Trees

Acting together to grow and care for trees and woods, as part of a thriving mosaic of habitats in and around Cheshire and Merseyside's cities, towns and villages.

Intertwining cherished trees with people's lives and livelihoods, flourishing nature, and strengthened climate resilience.

Inspiring action and spreading hope for our future.”

Key point for this neighbourhood plan: We would welcome reference to The Mersey Forest Plan in Cranage Neighbourhood Plan.

The Plan also contains a number of key principles that are of relevance to this neighbourhood plan (there will be other relevant principles too):

The Mersey Forest Plan principle 4. Establish trees, woods, and other habitats

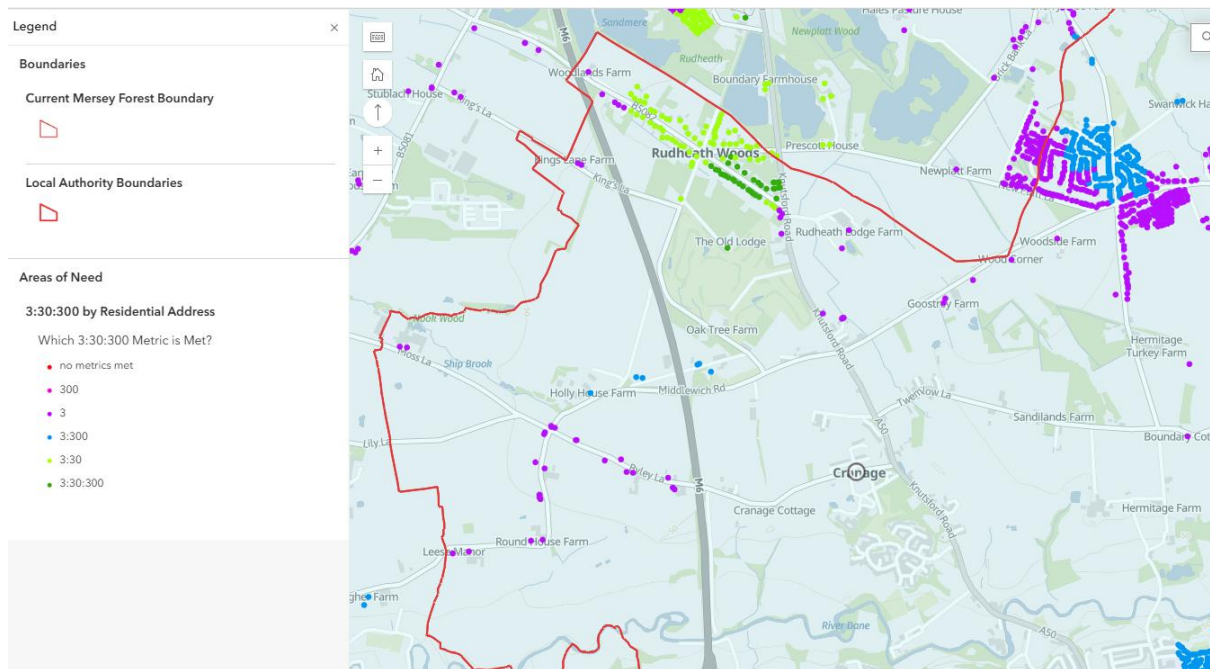
4.1 Aim to reach 15% tree cover across Cheshire and Merseyside by 2050 (from a 2025 baseline of 13.7%), pushing beyond this if possible towards our long-term ambition of 30% tree cover. Our "[Where principles](#)" map how this longer-term 30% tree cover ambition might look across The Mersey Forest (see principle 16 below).

Key point for this neighbourhood plan: The neighbourhood plan includes an objective "To protect and enhance the biodiversity of the natural environment, including trees, hedgerows and watercourses", which we welcome. We suggest that a tree cover ambition could be set for the Neighbourhood Plan area. Increasing tree cover is vital in so many ways, bringing benefits for people's lives and livelihoods, nature, and climate. An increase in tree cover would contribute to the delivery of the wider ambitions set out in The Mersey Forest Plan.

4.2 Aspire to meet the 3+30+300 ambition, within our urban areas in particular. Where every home can see 3 trees, every neighbourhood has 30% tree cover, and everyone lives within 300m of an accessible green space with trees. Individual local authorities have their own adopted accessible greenspace standards, so this aspiration does not override these. Tree cover ambitions also vary across our area.

Key point for this neighbourhood plan: We would encourage the neighbourhood plan to aspire to this 3:30:300 ambition. Often plans focus on the 300 part, considering proximity of green spaces. But research has demonstrated how vital the 3 and 30 aspects are for our mental health and wellbeing (recent research as part of the GroundsWell project by the University of Liverpool), regulating heat (and thereby heat stress, very important with climate change), air pollution removal etc.

Our Tree Atlas (<https://merseyforest.org.uk/tree-atlas/>) includes a 3:30:300 map layer showing that some residential addresses in the Neighbourhood Plan area (around Rudheath Woods) achieve all three elements of 3:30:300. Many meet the 3 and 300 elements, whilst some meet 3 and 30 elements, and some meet only the 3 element. Tree planting could be targeted to improve on these metrics. Please see screenshot below of this layer for part of the Neighbourhood Plan area.



The Mersey Forest Plan principle 7. The Mersey Forest team and partners

7.3 Work with a wide range of public, private, research, charitable, and community organisations, from local to national and international levels, and from delivery, to knowledge, strategy, and funding.

The Mersey Forest Plan principle 8. Communities

8.1 Work alongside people to help them achieve what is needed in their local communities.

Key point for this neighbourhood plan: We would welcome the opportunity to work with you on this to ensure support for The Mersey Forest Plan and to enable delivery. Our Tree Atlas, detailed in principle 16 below, can be used to help prioritise where increased tree cover may be most needed within the local area.

The Mersey Forest Plan principle 12. Strategy and policy

12.4 Contribute to neighbourhood planning, setting out and supporting local priorities and aspirations.

Key points for this neighbourhood plan: We see neighbourhood plans as a key opportunity to set out local aspiration with regard to the establishment and management of trees, woods, and other habitats. Regard to The Mersey Forest Plan and associated Tree Atlas can help to frame and provide context for some of these aspirations.

12.3 Contribute to place making, new development, regeneration and restructuring, by securing recognition to it within Local Plans.

- Paragraph 152 of the National Planning Policy Framework says “Community Forests offer valuable opportunities for improving the environment around towns and cities, by upgrading the landscape and providing for recreation and wildlife... An approved Community Forest Plan may be a material consideration in preparing development plans and in deciding planning applications. Any development proposals within...

Community Forests in the Green Belt should be subject to the normal policies for controlling development in Green Belts”.

- Trees and woods should create the setting for, and be a key part of, new development, regeneration and restructuring.
- Existing irreplaceable and mature trees should be retained wherever possible, and appropriate replacement ratios developed for any trees lost.
- Trees should be incorporated as an effective and safe part of new street scenes and highways.
- Secure private sector conditional funding for this green infrastructure and its maintenance (principle 13.2 specifies that this includes funding secured through the planning system, such as section 106 agreements, Community Infrastructure Levies, and Biodiversity Net Gain).

Key point for this neighbourhood plan: Support for The Mersey Forest Plan in the neighbourhood plan can help to unlock funding through planning for delivery. The Mersey Forest Team can assist with advising on tree planting scheme designs and delivery. The Mersey Forest has a number of delivery programmes to facilitate tree planting and habitat establishment, such as Trees for Climate and Northern Forest. The Forest can also support delivery through Section 106 agreements or Community Infrastructure Levies where it can be shown that our funds provide additionality in terms of the delivery of The Mersey Forest Plan. This can support Cranage Neighbourhood Plan’s objective “To protect and enhance the biodiversity of the natural environment, including trees, hedgerows and watercourses”.

Recent tree planting in 2025 has taken place at Watermill Wood in Cranage Neighbourhood Plan area, with funding through our Trees for Climate scheme <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HT6QK4BukWg>.

The Mersey Forest Plan principle 16. Right tree, right place, right reason – area-specific principles

16.1 Use the area-specific principles, and their associated long term tree cover ambitions, to guide what our longer-term 30% tree cover ambition might look like across our area. They are not binding targets for each area, but they do help to guide our work. These area-specific principles are displayed in the map (at <https://merseyforest.org.uk/our-plan/principles-where/>), in our [Tree Atlas](#), and in a downloadable pdf. They:

- Use landscape character as their basis.
- Build on work from the original 1994 Mersey Forest Plan and subsequent development with our local authority partners.
- Take into account constraints to new trees and woodland, such as peatland, other habitats, high quality agricultural land, and urban areas.

This Neighbourhood Plan falls within the area specific principles CE01 Settlement, CE05 Lower Wooded Farmland, CE06 Woodland Heaths, Meres and Mosses, CE14 Cheshire Plain East, and CE17 River Valleys; although these principles cover areas larger than Cranage Neighbourhood Plan. These principles can be used to help guide tree establishment in specific areas.

CE01 Settlement: Has a long term tree cover ambition of 30%. Tree cover is currently 16%, of which 3% is woodlands and 13% is trees outside of woodlands. Its description is “Plant individual trees, groups of trees and small woodlands on appropriate and available urban areas, settlements and employment sites, such as school playing fields, open spaces,

streets, highway verges, in the grounds of large institutions, derelict land, and development sites. Target planting to meet identified needs.”

CE05 Lower Wooded Farmland: Has a long term tree cover ambition of 30%. Tree cover is currently 12%, of which 4% is woodlands and 8% is trees outside of woodlands. Its description is “Conserve the woodland and trees which create a wooded character. Manage deciduous woodland (including ancient woodland) and mature in-field and hedgerow trees. Retain historic field patterns and restore the hedgerows and walls forming field and estate boundaries. Protect and manage wetlands for flood alleviation, biodiversity and recreation. Reduce nutrient run off from adjacent agricultural lands. Enhance and link unimproved grassland and heathland. Conserve the historic designed landscapes and their features, and cultural heritage. Screen existing and new intrusive features, including suburbs and major transport corridors.”

CE06 Woodland Heaths, Meres and Mosses: Has a long term tree cover ambition of 40%. Tree cover is currently 20%, of which 13% is woodlands and 7% is trees outside of woodlands. Its description is “Protect the wooded character by managing mixed woodland (including ancient woodland), and replacing non-native with native broadleaved species. Create appropriately scaled new woodland, particularly linking woodlands. Maintain and replant hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Use planting to screen mineral extraction. Restore mineral extraction sites to heathland, wetland, scrub and woodland. Protect and restore wetlands, lowland heath and raised bog, including conifer removal. Reduce nutrient run off from agricultural land. Conserve the historic character of the relict estates, and manage and reinstate features such as veteran trees. Ensure any development meets Green Infrastructure objectives. Maintain the openness of the meres and views towards the Pennine Hills.”

CE14 Cheshire Plain East: Has a long term tree cover ambition of 30%. Tree cover is currently 8%, of which 2% is woodlands and 6% is trees outside of woodlands. Its description is “Retain the working agricultural landscape. Manage and link the small pockets of deciduous woodland (including ancient woodland) and mature in-field and hedgerow trees, maintaining a diverse age and species structure. Retain and reinstate historic field patterns, replacing hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Manage and link semi-natural habitats, particularly ponds, heath and grassland, including preventing agricultural run-off and managing scrub. Link rights of way including the South Cheshire Way, Crewe and Nantwich Circular Walk and canal towpaths. Screen suburban influences and intrusive features.”

CE17 River Valleys: Has a long term tree cover ambition of 40%. Tree cover is currently 23%, of which 13% is woodlands and 10% is trees outside of woodlands. Its description is “Manage ancient and semi-natural woodland, including preventative measures for tree pests and diseases. Replace non-native with native species. Retain historic field patterns and replace lost hedgerows to link habitats. Manage and enhance semi-natural habitats, particularly rivers, lowland meadows, fens and riparian vegetation. Reduce nutrient run off from agricultural land. Link habitats, particularly wetlands, woodlands and semi-natural grasslands. Enlarge or create new woodlands, particularly on steep slopes and linking existing woodlands. Maintain the North Cheshire Way, Dane Valley Way and Crewe and Nantwich Circular Walk and link rights of way. Use trees and woodland to screen intrusive infrastructure. Retain the sense of enclosure as a result of the landform and tree cover, and maintain the distinctive funnelled views.”

Key point for this neighbourhood plan: It would be welcome if the neighbourhood plan aspired to the tree cover ambitions set out for CE01, CE05, CE06, CE14, and CE17, and identified local areas where tree planting may be most appropriate/desirable. Please see

below points about constraints for tree planting, and areas where trees may be most needed.

16.2 Consider constraints for trees and woodland, as part of any tree and woodland establishment and management.

- Constraints have been built into our area-specific principles, and their associated long term tree cover ambitions.
- Further to this our team considers a full range of constraints for each potential establishment or management site. Some of these constraints are included in our Tree Atlas, but we consider a wider range including location of utilities, and using data that we are not licensed to display on the Tree Atlas.
- In some instances, a constraint will mean that trees and woodlands are not appropriate at a given location. In many, the constraint will influence the nature of the trees and woodlands that are appropriate.

Key point for this neighbourhood plan: Please refer to the [Tree Atlas](#) for constraints for the neighbourhood area. None of the area is mapped by the Forestry Commission as “low sensitivity to woodland creation”, which means that any tree planting needs careful consideration. There is a small pocket of peaty soils near Rudheath Woods.

Mapping currently in the Tree Atlas suggests that there are grade 2 and 3a agricultural lands; whilst the provisional agricultural land classification puts land in grades 2 and 3. The recent [Land Use Framework for England](#) includes updates to the mapping of agricultural land grades (see page 39). This mapping has not yet been released, but looking at the static map it appears that land in the area may be classed as “Best and Most Versatile” land category for agricultural production, consisting of grades 1-3a. We will update the Tree Atlas when this new mapping is made available. On the “Best and Most Versatile” agricultural land, it might be better to avoid significant woodland creation in favour of agricultural production. It is still possible to incorporate trees onto productive farmland, in boundaries and through agroforestry.

16.3 Consider what needs there are for trees and woodland, as part of any establishment and management.

- This can inform the nature of trees and woodland, and their management, as appropriate for each location.
- Some needs mapping has been included in our Tree Atlas, but it is not an exhaustive list.

Key points for this neighbourhood plan: Please refer to the [Tree Atlas](#) for needs mapping for the neighbourhood area. These include:

- Please see previous comment on principle 4 with regard to 3:30:300 mapping, showcasing where more tree planting could help to improve these metrics.
- Forestry Commission’s historic environment opportunity map for new woodland shows there are areas where woodland would be unsuitable from this perspective, but much of the area is “neutral”.
- The Environment Agency (EA) have mapped the southern part of the area as “medium” priority for using Natural Flood Management (NFM) interventions. The Mersey Forest is in the unique position of having in-house technical expertise on appraisal, design, project management of delivery and monitoring of NFM schemes through our NFM Manager, and we would welcome the opportunity to work with new

and existing partners to further reduce flood risk, improve water quality and enhance water resources in the area.

- The area is flagged as being exposed to increased heat with climate change, though not in the top 20% of socially vulnerable neighbourhoods. It may still be appropriate to target tree planting to areas where you will want to manage higher temperatures, with trees providing cooling through evapotranspiration and shading. This especially important in settlements and places where people will gather, including school grounds. But also in farmland to provide shade for livestock, and next to rivers and watercourses to keep water temperatures lower and benefit aquatic wildlife.
- Other priorities for tree planting, not currently in the Tree Atlas include:
 - Proximity to schools
 - In areas with poorer air quality, water quality, or in need of noise regulation.
 - Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) mapping <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/5356942a5aa54cb0a656379a65a25947/>. This mapping shows Core Nature Sites within the neighbourhood plan area, as well as opportunity areas for nature recovery. This includes significant mapped actions for trees, woodland and hedgerows. Buffering and connecting existing trees and woods should be a consideration. The LNRS mapping also maps actions for other habitats: grassland and heathland, watercourses, and for urban and nature based solutions. These should also be taken into consideration in the Neighbourhood Plan.
- Mapping suggests woodlands in the area are currently not accessible, with few rights of way in or by them.

The Mersey Forest Plan principle 20. Call for locations

20.1 Encourage people to use our Tree Atlas to suggest locations where they would like to see more trees and woods.

20.2 Follow up on suggested locations to see if there is potential to establish trees and woods there or nearby and, if possible, work with the people who suggested it to make it happen.

Key points for this neighbourhood plan: Our Tree Atlas includes locations where people would like to see more trees established. Whilst there are currently no locations included in the Neighbourhood Plan area, there is potential for the Neighbourhood Plan group to add other locations to this map.

Many thanks again for the opportunity to comment on the draft Neighbourhood Plan. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

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