

Leading Local Rewilding by Reinterpreting Visually Mundane Green Spaces

Mike Cockburn

Assistant Director – Parks & Environment

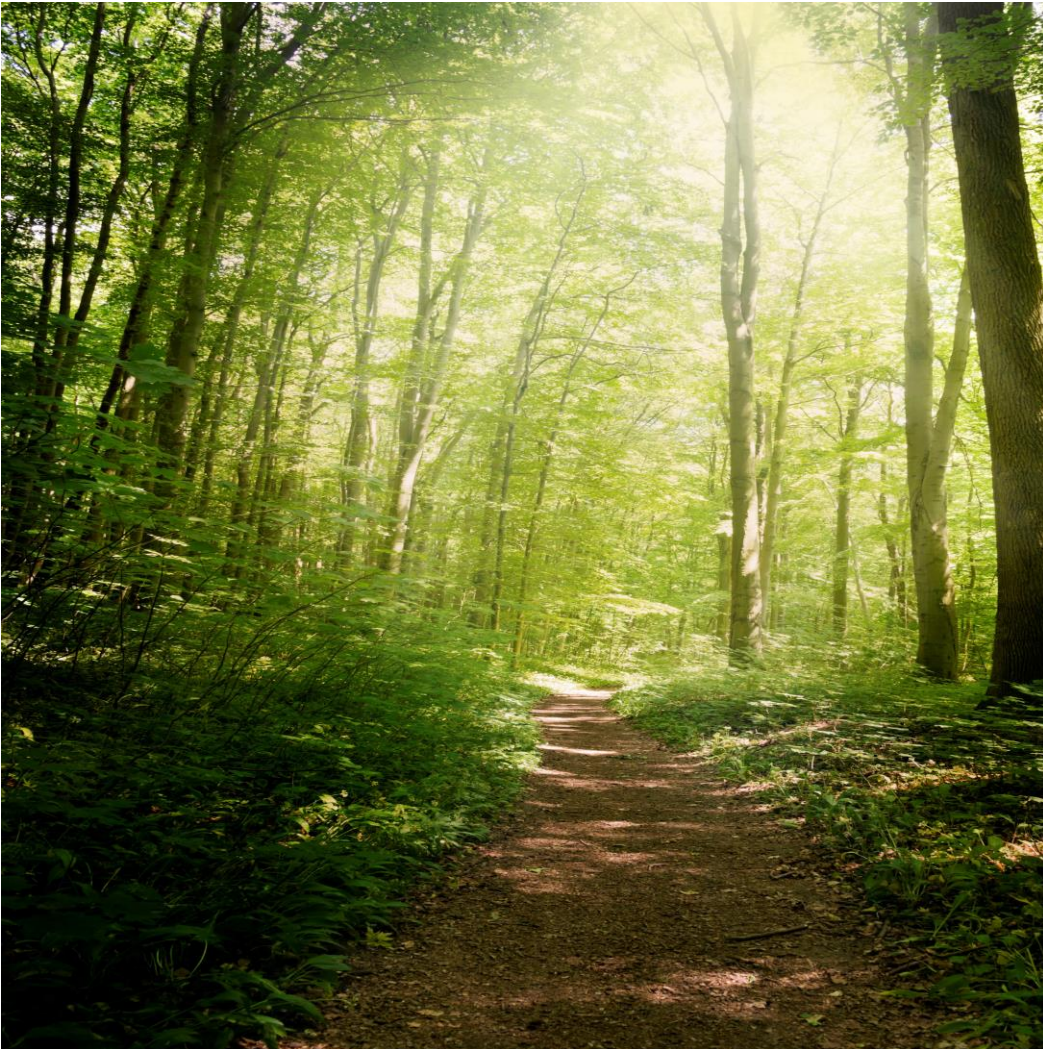


Where is Wirral?

- Northwest England, Liverpool City Region
- A peninsula, boarded by sea on 3 sides
- Population approx. 320k
- Overall administrative area: 25, 110 hectares
- A place of many contrasts – deprivation/wealth, urban density/open land



'Perfect storm' of issues



- Wirral Council declared an all-party environment and climate emergency, creating a corporate priority and commitment to be net carbon neutral by 2030.
- 'Locally determined contribution' to Wirral's target of net zero by 2041, as set out in the 'Cool Wirral Strategy.'
- Environment and Climate Emergency Policy launched in March this year, with action plan and dedicated resources, to set the framework for delivery.
- Diminishing funding envelope pushing the need for new approaches to land management and use.
- Demand for land and its repurposing critical for several issues including housing development.



Tree planting

- Ten-year Tree, Woodland and Hedgerow Strategy launched in July 2020 to support the Environment and Climate Emergency Policy.
- Commitment to plant over 21,000 new trees annually for the next 10 years to increase tree canopy and plant hedgerows in rural and urban landscapes. First year target exceeded, second planting season now underway.
- Tree Landscape Manager recruited, joining established Tree Management Team, to coordinate planting.
- Identification of available land and land for repurposing, critical to tree and hedgerow planting targets.





Biodiversity

- Opportunities provided by the development of Wirral's Local Plan for biodiversity through significant regeneration programmes and neighbourhood redesign.
- Protection of the greenbelt and focus on brown field sites for building.
- Recruitment of ecologists to coordinate biodiversity net gain and provide advice on green infrastructure.
- Habitat baseline studies to be undertaken, along with other wild life analysis.
- Use of natural flood management and sustainable urban drainage systems.
- Focus on reducing use of pesticides and traditional maintenance regimes.





Rewilding and repurposing open space

- ‘Open Space Repurposing Strategy’ and ‘Pollinators Plan’ have been developed to allocate land for tree planting, allotments, community meanwhile use and rewilding.
- Maintenance cessation and pollinator location pilots have run during the year, concluding this autumn with lessons taken on board.
- Supporting Council Members through the journey of changing landscape has been crucial and challenging.
- Land in urban & country parks, open space and highway verges were built into the pilot programme.
- Diminishing financial envelope remains a challenge going forward.
- The Pollinator Plan will be expanded for 2022/23 with more sites identified and further reductions to maintenance regimes/frequencies.



Rewilding and repurposing open space continued

- New approach to grass management, employee training and investment in new machinery and technology. Parks following an emissions reduction plan.
- Community engagement and communication plans are essential to promote the objectives of the approach.
- Thriving environmental volunteers' network to be utilised and in some cases lead work.
- Protect and uphold public amenity space, sports facilities and coastal visitor strategies.
- Proactive wild flower planting and tree/hedgerow planting will be part of the plan.
- Use of habitat baseline studies to measure impact on diversity of wildlife.

Thank You

