



Lower Mersey  
Catchment Partnership

**NATURAL**  
OUR WATER. OUR FUTURE  
**COURSE**



Van Rhijn Aerial Photography

Photo: Mersey Estuary

# Lower Mersey Catchment Plan

## Catchment Partners working together

This Catchment Plan captures the aspirations of the Lower Mersey Catchment Partnership for a better water environment in the Lower Mersey and beyond

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Our vision.....

Is of a catchment with a healthy water environment that everyone will be proud of, and which contributes fully to economic and social well-being

## Introduction

### The Catchment Based Approach

The Lower Mersey Catchment Partnership is part of the [Catchment-Based Approach \(CaBA\)](#), an inclusive civil society-led initiative that works in partnership with national and local government, water companies and other businesses, agriculture, and communities to support the management of the water environment in England and deliver more integrated water management. There are CaBA partnerships in all the river catchments across England, and cross-border with Wales.

Due to its crosscutting and integrated nature, CaBA provides an ideal framework to support delivery of the government's water management objectives, directly supporting key targets, including:

- Using and managing land sustainably
- Recovering nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes
- Connecting people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing
- Increasing resource efficiency, and reducing pollution and waste
- Enabling the delivery of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS)
- Clean and plentiful water
- Thriving plants and wildlife
- A reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as flooding and drought
- Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently
- Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.
- The national target, known as 30 by 30, a worldwide initiative for governments to designate 30% of Earth's land and ocean area as protected areas by 2030.

As a catchment partnership, our action planning is working to a shorter time-scale than the national targets, and having an awareness of projections of local sea level rise in the associated with climate change will be important to consider for the Mersey Estuary.

Other government targets include:

- Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)
- Water Framework Directive (WFD) target of achieving Good Ecological Status or Good Ecological Potential for water environments
- The Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS).

This Catchment Plan has been agreed by the members of the Lower Mersey Catchment Partnership including the Environment Agency, Natural England, United Utilities, Liverpool John Moores University, Groundwork CLM, Mersey Forest, The Mersey Gateway Environmental Trust, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Lancashire Wildlife Trust, the National Farmers Union, The Conservation Volunteers, Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service, Merseyside Biobank, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, local authorities and Mersey Rivers Trust. The Partnership reports to Defra (through Mersey Rivers Trust).

### **Catchment characteristics and challenges**

The Lower Mersey Catchment has a diversity of landscapes across a wide area. It covers the Wirral peninsular to the south of the River Mersey and from Warrington to Crosby to the north of the River. The catchment includes the Mersey Estuary and is split into five operational sub-catchments, which are Ditton, Sankey, Glaze, Mersey Estuary and Wirral.

The key challenge for the Lower Mersey Catchment is the amount of urban and suburban area within the catchment. Unlike many river catchments, its landscape is approximately 50% urban. To fulfil our vision and the objectives above, partners need to pay special attention to urban issues such as surface water flooding, road run-off, leachate from industrial/contaminated land and the highly modified nature of our waterbodies. The type and reason for their past modification are many, ranging from culverting of watercourses, artificial straightening of river channels or placing watercourses into underground tunnels. Whilst many of these modifications are still required to enable productive land use and the management of flood risk, some can be improved to achieve a healthier water environment.

The other half of the catchment's landscape is a combination of agriculture and public green-spaces.

Many of the catchment's streams and rivers flow through farmland, towns and industrial areas, which has resulted in a combination of agricultural and urban pollution affecting river and estuary water quality across the catchment.

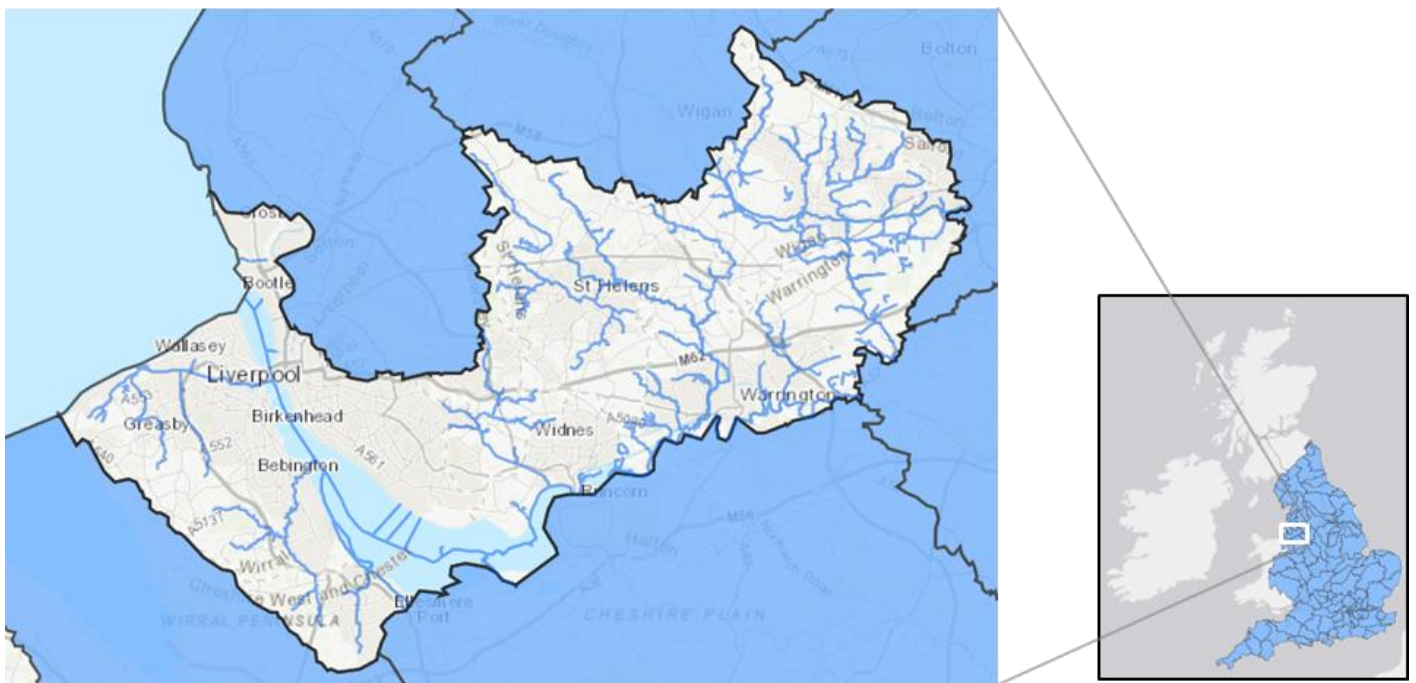
The challenges the catchment faces include:

- the combination of agricultural, industrial, and urban pollution affecting water quality

- the heavily modified nature of many of the watercourses carried out to support historic industrial development and agriculture. Many of the streams are culverted, restrained, and built over. There are also many barriers to fish passage
- urban issues such as wrongly connected drainage systems, road run-off and leachate from industrial/contaminated land
- Surface water flooding is an issue with from run-off from hard urban surfaces as well as flooding from rivers.

The partnership has developed a set of objectives to overcome these challenges and improve the potential of our waterbodies (see page 6).

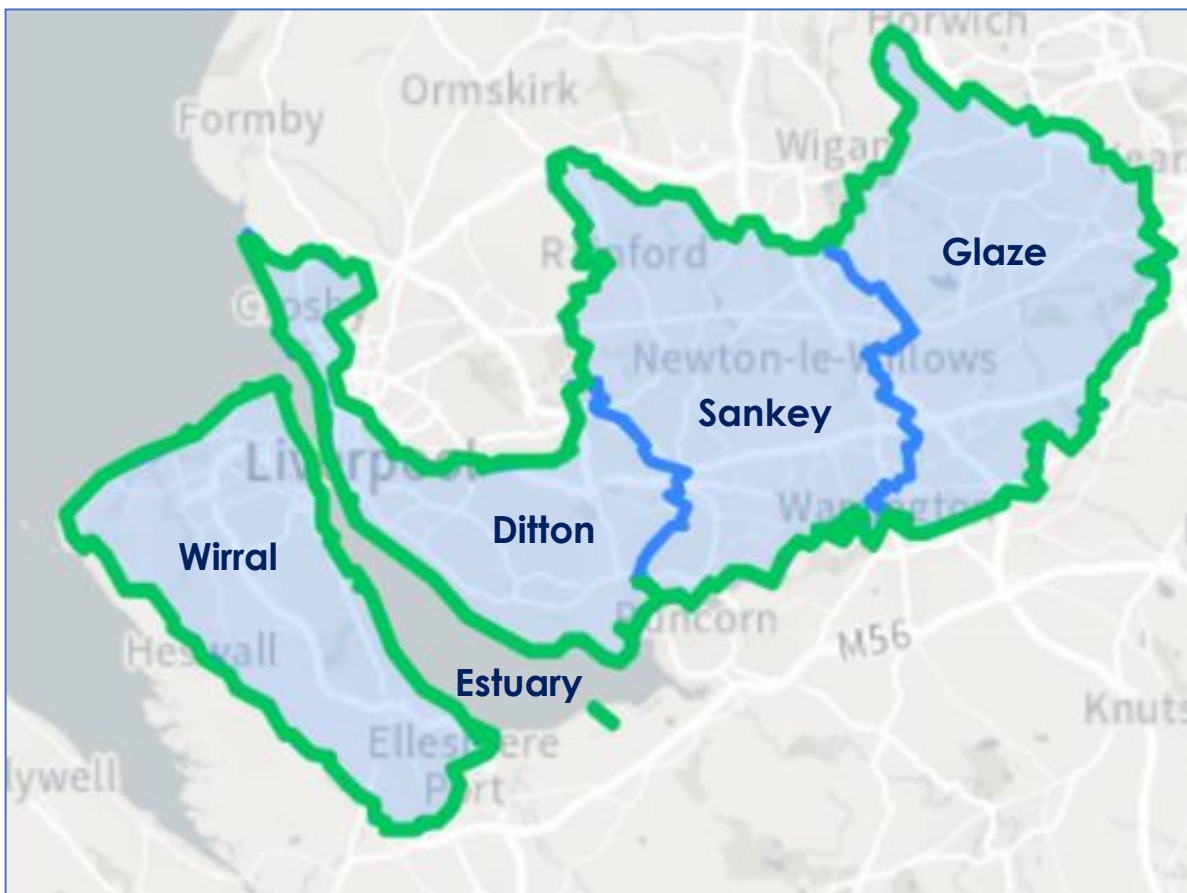
## 2. Catchment maps



**Fig. 1. Map of the Lower Mersey Catchment.**

The Lower Mersey catchment covers the Wirral peninsular to the south of the River Mersey and from Warrington to Crosby to the north of the Mersey.

The Catchment is split into five operational sub-catchments, which are Ditton, Sankey, Glaze, Mersey Estuary and Wirral.



**Fig. 2 Operational catchments in the Lower Mersey Catchment**

Catchment management nationally is divided into River Basin Districts. One of these is the North West River Basin District within which sits the Lower Mersey Catchment.

The Catchment Partnership is aligned to delivering the Environment Agency's North West River Basin Management Plan in the Lower Mersey Catchment.



**Fig 3. River Basin Districts**

### 3. Vision for the Lower Mersey Catchment

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*“Our vision is of a catchment with a healthy water environment that everyone will be proud of, and which contributes fully to economic and social well-being”*

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Together we can create, protect and improve the water environment within the Lower Mersey Catchment so that it becomes a flourishing, productive catchment that meets all our communities' needs and future challenges and brings sustainable multi-functional economic, social and bio-diverse benefits for all. In order to **deliver cooperative and considerate water management**, the following principles will flow through everything we do:



**Fig. 4. Catchment Partnership Principles**

## Natural Capital

“the elements of nature that produce value or benefits to people (directly and indirectly), such as the stock of forests, rivers, land, minerals and oceans, as well as the natural processes and functions that underpin their operation” (NCC, 2013)

## 4. Objectives

Our objectives set out what we will do to deliver our vision.

The objectives of the partnership are to:

1. Create cleaner and healthier water bodies
2. Protect and enhance the natural aspects of our catchment
3. Develop resilience to the effects of climate change

To enable us to deliver our objectives we will also:

- develop and use a robust evidence base to inform our decisions
- engage and support communities across the catchment so that they understand and, in turn, support the delivery of the partnership's objectives
- strengthen the processes of running the Catchment Partnership to build collaboration and inclusivity to support delivery.

## **Objective 1 – Create cleaner and healthier water bodies**

A healthy waterbody is one which is free from pollution and able to support a thriving ecosystem, rich in biodiversity.

The aims of the Water Framework Directive are for all waterbodies to reach 'Good Ecological Status' (GES). As many of the waterbodies in this catchment are classed as Heavily Modified, the partnership will also work towards 'Good Ecological Potential' (GEP), which will enable our modified catchment to achieve as natural an ecosystem as possible. A heavily modified waterbody cannot achieve GES because of substantial changes to its physical character, resulting from physical alterations caused by human use.

The challenges in the Lower Mersey Catchment are varied and include industrial discharges, sewage effluent and misconnections, soil loss, leaching from historic landfill sites and diffuse and point source pollution. Many of the water bodies have also been heavily modified to be used in industry for power or water supplies, to enable development, or to facilitate drainage. For each WFD waterbody, the partnership aims to take action to address the reasons for not achieving good status. As a partnership, we will aim to make improvements to water quality and the physical environment to create as natural an ecosystem as possible, enabling invertebrates, fish and other wildlife to flourish in our waterbodies and native plants to thrive. Our partnership collaboration will help us identify issues, needs and priority areas and therefore drive opportunities for improvements which deliver multiple benefits.

As the public perception of a healthy watercourse is often based on the amount of litter, the partnership will also include consideration of litter reduction.

Where possible our approach will include:

- Identifying, tackling and raising awareness of misconnections and illegal discharges
- Working with farmers and landowners to improve agricultural practices in relation to soil, nutrient and pesticide management
- Influencing and investing in better drainage and sewage treatment infrastructure
- Improving discharges from industrial and landfill sites through regulation and collaboration
- Working alongside volunteers to enable river clean ups and litter picks
- Creating and promoting educational material about the harm litter can do to our water environment
- Mapping and controlling the spread of INNS
- Re-naturalising river channels where possible, including removing barriers to fish passage
- Improving river corridors to support wildlife and enable public access
- De-culverting watercourses to improve morphology, reduce flood risk and enable people to see and appreciate them
- Supporting the delivery of green infrastructure and sustainable drainage systems (SuDS)
- Promotion of nature-based solutions, such as developing or restoring wetlands.

As a Catchment Partnership, we will integrate water quality management and flood risk management and consider both together in our activities. The partnership will develop schemes to address climate change, create enjoyable and habitable places, promote healthy lifestyles, design multi-functional and inter-connected green infrastructure, reduce flood risk and maximise multiple benefits. In particular, we will look to deliver flood risk management schemes using nature-based solutions (natural flood management).

The Partnership recognises the need for development and liaises with the various planning authorities within and beyond the boundaries of the catchment. Local Authorities are an important part of the catchment partnership which has particularly close working relations with the Lead Local Flood Authorities through the Merseyside Flood partnership. Improved water quality will be delivered as a result of reductions in the frequency and magnitude of flooding.

The partnership will continue its work to support the government's water management objectives, the Merseyside Flood Partnership's Business Plan and United Utilities' long term Asset Management Plans as well as the North West RBMP and the emerging LNRS in order to maximise opportunity for river and habitat restoration.

### **Objective 2 - Protect and enhance the natural aspects of our catchment**

The key challenge for the Lower Mersey Catchment is the highly modified nature of our waterbodies. The type and reason for their past modification are many and range from culverting (piping a watercourse), restraining and building over watercourses in our urban areas, to re-naturalisation of our rivers in our farmed catchments.

Whilst many of these modifications are still required to enable productive land use and management of flood risk, some can be improved to achieve a healthier water environment. We will use the following techniques to move towards a more natural catchment:

- Re-naturalising and restoring river channels where possible
- Removing barriers to fish passage
- Improving the ecology and amenity value of the river corridor
- Enhancing and creating habitats in and around watercourses to benefit water invertebrates and fish
- De-culverting and daylighting water courses to improve morphology, reduce flood risk and enable people to see and appreciate them
- Influencing land managers to install buffer zones where possible
- Supporting the delivery of green infrastructure, nature-based solutions and sustainable drainage systems (SuDS)

### **Objective 3 - Develop resilience to the effects of climate change**

Climate change affects the Lower Mersey Catchment in a number of ways:

- Extreme rainfall events, including unseasonal heavy rainfall in summer, causes flash flooding.

- Increasing number and length of spells of prolonged dry weather, and stresses on supply and demand, could lead to a greater risk of water shortages
- Lower water levels and unnatural flow conditions in rivers and other water bodies threaten the viability of habitats and capacity of wildlife to thrive.

We will work to increase the resilience of our catchment by:

- Better managing flood risk, particularly through natural flood management processes wherever possible
- Increasing public awareness of the actions they can take to reduce their contribution to flood risk (e.g. through de-paving)
- Increasing public awareness of the actions they can take to mitigate the impact of flooding through making their properties more resilient
- Helping the public, agriculture and industry better manage their water use
- Creating and maintaining water and wetland habitats that support the associated ecology
- Increasing resilience in the face of rainfall events by encouraging everyone, including the public, to work together across the catchment and at all levels, to enhance the management of rainwater.

## 5. Enabling activities

To support the delivery of our objectives we will undertake the following enabling activities:

- Use an evidence based approach
- Promote and support cooperation
- Engage communities

### **Use an evidence based approach.**

We will develop and use an evidence base to inform our decisions. Taking an evidence-based approach, we will seek to establish what and where the issues are, and use this knowledge to determine what the needs of the catchment are. Based on the evidence, we will seek to protect and enhance the waterbodies in the catchment. In this way, needs will be identified, prioritised and addressed.

In order to create and maintain a strong evidence base, the Catchment Partnership will collect, collate, and present information to support decision-making and action. The partnership will continue to develop its evidence base by monitoring of the water environment in a scientific and robust way wherever possible, and where resources are available to do so. We will strengthen our evidence base by monitoring the projects we deliver in order to evaluate their effectiveness and help us refine the techniques we use.

We will engage, develop, and support citizen scientists to enable ongoing monitoring on a regular basis. Examples of monitoring techniques include invertebrate kick sampling, chemical testing and aquatic mammal surveys. We will collaborate with other organisations and partnerships to share data to develop our evidence base. We will identify gaps in our data and evidence and strive to fill those gaps by various means including seeking input from academics and seeking data and research from others.

We recognise that multiple issues may be present at one location which will highlight the need for an integrated approach providing the opportunity to deliver multiple-benefits with a single project.

Actions we will take and tools we will use to develop our evidence base will include:

- Setting objectives with measurable outputs
- Developing and using measures of outcomes
- Including monitoring and evaluation measures in all our projects
- Establishing baseline data at the start of a project
- Using citizen science to support our activities and to engage communities
- Ground-truthing models to test their validity in specific situations.

### **Promote and support cooperation**

To deliver our plan we need to collaborate effectively. Actions we will take to support collaboration include:

- Use a shared data hub as a single point of access and repository for partners to contribute towards and utilise key data, which can also act as a signposting hub to data stored elsewhere
- Sharing information between meetings via the Catchment host to ensure it reaches all partners
- Utilise research from universities to fill gaps in data and collaborate with research organisations
- Having working groups in place for locations and topics to increase focus and enable swift action, including:
  - Sankey Catchment
  - Glaze Catchment
  - Mersey Estuary.

The working groups will support this Catchment Plan with action plans for the specific sub-catchments.

## Engage communities

People are not always aware of their local watercourses and/or do not appreciate them. We will raise awareness and encourage communities such as residents, farmers and businesses to value their local water environment and appreciate it more by

- Providing volunteer opportunities e.g. River Guardians and 'Friends of' groups
- Promoting and using The Flood Hub and other online resources
- Publicising our work through our Catchment Partnership and through our partners
- Designing and delivering educational programmes for schools and youth groups
- Running campaigns for the general public and specific targeted groups e.g. Water Friendly Farming; What Not to Flush
- Identifying and engaging communities in our projects, making a particular effort to identify and engage hard to reach communities
- Encouraging and enabling peoples' access to nature.

## 6. Action Planning

Our action plan lists the activities partners plan to carry out to support the achievement of our vision. As partners we agree to work together, where possible, on developing and delivering projects in support of delivery of the Lower Mersey Catchment Partnership Action Plan.

The Catchment Partnership works closely with other initiatives in the catchment, specifically:

- The Mersey Gateway Environmental Trust's work programme
- The North West Coastal Forum
- The Merseyside Flood Partnership
- The Mersey Mid Cheshire Flood Partnership
- The Great Manchester Wetlands Partnership and the Glaze Task Force
- The Sankey Catchment Steering Group
- North Merseyside Local Sites Partnership
- Mersey Estuary Conservation Group.

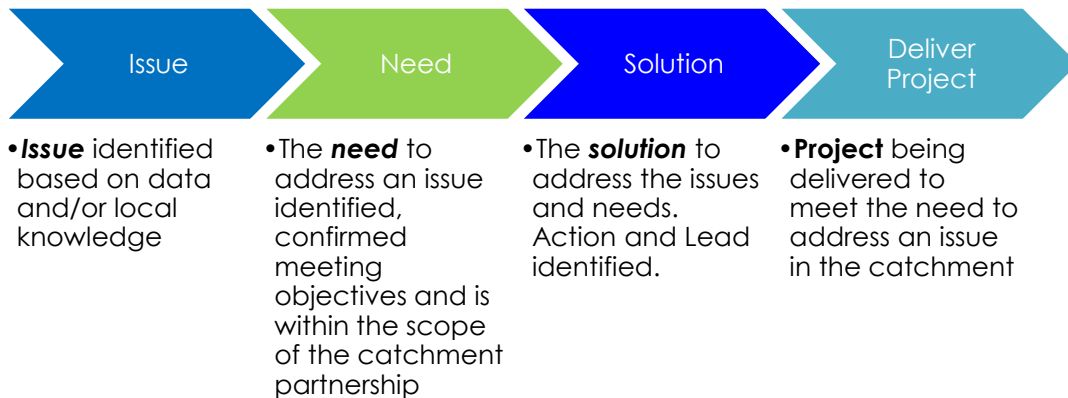
Through a planning process and a review of priorities, the Partnership has decided to currently focus on the Glaze and Sankey sub-catchments and has working groups in place to develop operational plans for activities in these operational catchments.

The Glaze is an operational catchment within Greater Manchester and Warrington. The Glaze Task Force has been set up as a subgroup. The Glaze sits within the Great Manchester Wetland Partnership area and there is very close working between the Catchment Partnership, the GM Wetlands Partnership and the Glaze Task Force.

The Sankey is another operational catchment within the Lower Mersey. The Catchment Partnership has worked closely with all relevant partners on the development of the Sankey Catchment Action Plan. The Catchment Partnership is taking forward the aims and objectives set out in the Sankey Catchment Action Plan and includes delivering its projects alongside those highlighted in the Lower Mersey Catchment Action Plan. The catchment partnership is developing a programme for the Sankey Catchment and is exploring delivery funding options.

Action planning for working groups will be monitored and the action plans will link the sub-groups to this catchment plan. Through our Catchment Partnership meetings, we will monitor and report on delivering our action plans.

Through collaboration working across partners, the needs of the Lower Mersey Catchment can be identified and prioritised to establish solutions and improvements.



**Fig. 5. Process for identifying issues, needs and solutions in the Lower Mersey**

Examples of solutions and improvements include:

- Working with local planning authorities to influence development of local plans for a better water environment
- Promoting more natural solutions, e.g. sustainable drainage and natural flood managements schemes
- Identifying where and how the Lower Mersey Catchment Partnership can restore or create new habitats
- Re-naturalising and restoring river channels where appropriate within a managed environment.

The partnership has also set up working groups to examine issues which have an impact across the catchment (and into other catchments). Currently, these are:

- Working with golf courses
- Improving equality, diversity and inclusion.

The Partnership also recognises wider challenges for the catchment and has agreed to work to:

- Support the Nature Recovery Network and Local Nature Recovery Strategies for Liverpool City Region, Cheshire/Warrington and Greater Manchester as the catchment is under significant pressure from urban development and agricultural production



- Reduce storm overflows and drainage system incidents, as activities by all partners can contribute to achieving this objective
- Build environmental resilience and adaptation to climate change, as resilience is vital to managing the challenges arising from climate change
- Protect and restore healthy soils and nutrient balance, as good farming practices benefit the whole of the catchment
- Removing plastics/litter from the water environment, as we need to reduce the impact of plastics on biodiversity and the food chain
- Connecting communities with nature, as people living in the many areas of deprivation in our catchment would benefit from connecting with nature.




**Fig 6.  
New wetland created  
at Court Hey Park**

With thanks to the following partners:

	<p>Merseyside BioBank</p> <p><a href="http://www.merseysidebiobank.org.uk">www.merseysidebiobank.org.uk</a></p>
	<p>Cheshire West and Chester Council</p> <p><a href="http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk">www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk</a></p>
	<p>Cheshire Wildlife Trust</p> <p><a href="http://www.cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk">www.cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk</a></p>
	<p>Environment Agency (EA)</p> <p><a href="http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency">www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency</a></p>
	<p>Groundwork</p> <p><a href="http://www.groundwork.org.uk">www.groundwork.org.uk</a></p>
	<p>Halton Borough Council</p> <p><a href="http://www.halton.gov.uk">www.halton.gov.uk</a></p>
	<p>The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester &amp; North Merseyside</p> <p><a href="http://www.lancswt.org.uk">www.lancswt.org.uk</a></p>
	<p>Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service</p> <p><a href="http://www.meas.org.uk">www.meas.org.uk</a></p>

	<p>The Mersey Forest</p> <p><a href="http://www.merseyforest.org.uk">www.merseyforest.org.uk</a></p>
<p>MERSEY GATEWAY <b>ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST</b></p>	<p>The Mersey Gateway Environmental Trust</p> <p><a href="http://www.mget.org.uk">www.mget.org.uk</a></p>
	<p>Mersey Rivers Trust: Host</p> <p><a href="http://www.merseyriverstrust.org">www.merseyriverstrust.org</a></p>
	<p>National Farmers Union (NFU)</p> <p><a href="http://www.nfuonline.com">www.nfuonline.com</a></p>
	<p>The Conservation Volunteers</p> <p><a href="http://www.tcv.org.uk/">www.tcv.org.uk/</a></p>
	<p>St Helens Council</p> <p><a href="http://www.sthelens.gov.uk">www.sthelens.gov.uk</a></p>
	<p>United Utilities (UU)</p> <p><a href="http://www.unitedutilities.com">www.unitedutilities.com</a></p>
	<p>Warrington Borough Council</p> <p><a href="http://www.warrington.gov.uk">www.warrington.gov.uk</a></p>
	<p>Wigan Council</p> <p><a href="http://www.wigan.gov.uk">www.wigan.gov.uk</a></p>

	<p>Wirral Council</p> <p><a href="http://www.wirral.gov.uk">www.wirral.gov.uk</a></p>
	<p>Nature Connected</p> <p>The Local Nature Partnership for Liverpool City Region</p> <p><a href="http://www.natureconnected.org">www.natureconnected.org</a></p>

To find out more, or if you are interested in getting involved with the Lower Mersey Catchment Partnership, please contact the host, [Mersey Rivers Trust](#).

### Catchment Partnership revisions of the Lower Mersey Catchment Plan

Date	Revision
10/09/2024	2024 v.19
28/03/2023	2023 v.18
11/07/2022	2022 v.17
15/04/2021	2021 v.16
31/03/2021	v.15
06/11/2019	v.14
15/05/2019	v.13
27/03/2019	v.12