



ISSUE 4 · JAN 2026

ALT CROSSENS NEWS

Official Newsletter of the Mersey Rivers Trust

Happy New Year! As we step into a new year, we're looking forward to continuing our work to protect and restore rivers across the Mersey catchment – for wildlife, communities and future generations. Thank you to everyone who supports, volunteers and works with us. Here's to another year of healthier rivers and stronger connections with nature.

Let's take a look back at the great work that has been delivered in the Alt Crossens catchment over the past 12 months and the exciting new projects we will be delivering in 2026.



Mersey Rivers Trust

Healthy rivers for people and wildlife

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Meet our new CEO - Clare Bullen



Exciting times for Mersey Rivers Trust as we welcome our new Chief Executive Officer, Clare to the team!

Clare has a background in catchment management and 19 years of experience in the water industry. She joined the Mersey Rivers Trust in 2024, initially as assistant director, stepping into the role of CEO in September 2025 as part of a leadership succession plan with current directors Paul and John.

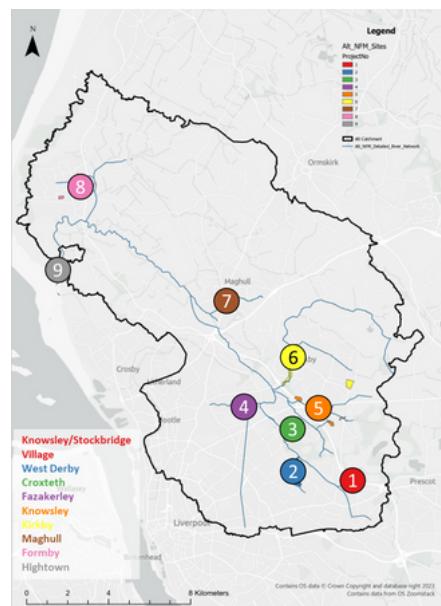
The role involves collaborating with directors, project teams, and external partners to develop and deliver the Trust's objectives. Clare enjoys the varied nature of her role and the opportunity to work with all the teams and partners across the Mersey catchment.

“ *I am delighted to step into the role as CEO at Mersey Rivers Trust. It's an honour to lead an organisation so deeply committed to protecting and restoring our rivers and catchments. I am really looking forward to seeing this programme of work continue and provide valuable learning for future projects.* **”**

ALT NFM PROJECT IN FULL FLOW!

The River Alt Natural Flood Management (NFM) Programme is a £2.1m partnership project, led by Mersey Rivers Trust, funded by the Environment Agency. It brings together partners from the Alt Crossens Catchment Partnership to deliver a range of NFM measures throughout the whole of the River Alt catchment, from the source at Huyton to the sea at Hightown.

The delivery phase of this project is now well under way, with 13 schemes delivered over 9 sites in 2025! Mersey Rivers Trust delivered 6 of these schemes which included wetland creation and building leaky dams. See pages 3-7 to find out more about the NFM projects that MRT has delivered.



More NFM works will take place in 2026 across 13 sites in the River Alt Catchment.



Oak Plantation - leaky dams

As you make your way along Knowsley Lane, Knowsley, you may notice an unassuming woodland, wedged between you and the M57. This woodland, formally known as Oak Plantation, is, in fact, a historic, mature broadleaf woodland with surrounding meadowland. Oak Plantation was originally part of Lord Derby's Knowsley Hall estate and now adjoins the Lord Derby memorial playing fields. Comprising 2.78 hectares of lush woodland, grassland, and ponds, it is also home to an often-overlooked watercourse that runs along the western periphery of the site and feeds into the River Alt.

Whilst an idyllic pocket of historic urban green space, much of the site and the adjacent housing is at risk of surface water flooding. Through the NFM programme, interventions such as leaky dam creation (Mersey Rivers Trust) and woodland management (Knowsley Council) have been undertaken. This site is the recent recipient of brand-new footpaths thanks to its landowner, Knowsley Council.

In February 2025, over two volunteer sessions, 8 leaky dams were installed in the watercourse, helping to increase its capacity to hold floodwater. We had the help of several individuals (who luckily didn't mind getting a bit muddy) from both the local area, the University of Liverpool and United Utilities. These wooden dams were made of three logs all sourced from trees removed as part of Knowsley's woodland management in an effort to use local, sustainable resources. We were fortunate enough to have witnessed them in action immediately after the building was completed, as shown above. Make sure to pop down to Oak plantation for a pleasant stroll and see the hard work!



Dam Wood - leaky dams

Dam Wood is a historic woodland, originally part of the grounds of Croxteth Hall. A series of ditches flow through the site, fed by surface water outfalls from the adjacent housing estates. The ditches flow to the northwest of the site where they join the River Alt. Much of this area is at risk of both fluvial and surface water flooding.

In February 2025, MRT staff were joined by volunteers from the Croxteth Park Volunteer Group (CPVG) to build 11 leaky dams in the main ditch flowing through Dam Wood. The dams will increase attenuation during high flows helping to slow the flow into the River Alt and contribute to a reduction in downstream flooding. They will also help to trap sediment and provide habitat to a variety of birds and insects. The dams were built of brashy material which was sourced on site, providing some additional woodland management benefits.

In 2026, we will be back at this site creating some wetland scrapes. See page 7 for more info.



Willowbed Plantation - leaky dams

Tucked away on the edge of Knowsley, Willowbed Plantation—better known to locals as Bluebell Woods—spans 1.69 hectares of woodland split by the fast-flowing Knowsley Brook. Sitting just metres from the M57, the site plays an unsung but vital role: acting as a natural buffer that captures motorway runoff. The brook itself cuts a straight, steep-banked channel through the woodland, sending water surging through at speed.

In March 2025, that dynamic landscape became the focus of a major restoration effort. Staff from across the Mersey Rivers Trust converged on the brook to construct six large woody-debris dams—an ambitious, physically demanding project made tougher by stubborn bedrock and the sheer size of the timber required to build such substantial structures. Working alongside Knowsley Council's Woodland Management team, trees growing close to the watercourse were felled and live-hinged, allowing them to remain connected to their stumps. Trenches were dug along both banks to partially bury the timber, giving it the best possible chance of surviving and continuing to grow.

A year on, those efforts are paying off. Inspections show that most of the felled material is still alive, with several dams even sprouting fresh leaves. The impact on the brook has been equally striking. The dams have slowed water flow across roughly 0.2 hectares of the channel on-site, as well as downstream. Their effectiveness was demonstrated during a heavy rainfall event on 22 March 2025, when gauge boards recorded a downstream water level of around 0.5 metres at 19:29, compared with 0.7 metres upstream. The difference revealed exactly what the project set out to achieve: water being held back, stored safely, and released more slowly through the newly dammed system.



Dumbreeze & Clint East Wood - leaky dams

Dumbreeze wood is located in Knowsley and comprises a 0.28 hectare woodland with a watercourse running through the site, part of the Knowsley/Croxteth Brook waterbody. The site is bound by residential housing and roads which are known to flood during high rainfall events. Frequent flooding on Mill Lane, adjacent to Dumbreeze wood, feeds into the channel and contributes to downstream flooding. The watercourse flows from Dumbreeze Wood, under Knowsley Lane and into Clint East Wood, which comprises 1.76 hectares of riparian woodland. The site is bound by an industrial estate to the north, which is at high risk of surface water flooding.

In October 2025, during Flood Action Week, MRT staff, volunteers from the Croxteth Park Volunteer Group (CPVG) and local residents built 9 leaky dams in Dumbreeze (4) and Clint East Wood (5). The construction of the 10th and final leaky dam was delayed due to the presence of a wasps nest! But MRT staff were back at Clint East Wood in December 2025 to finish the job.



The leaky dams were constructed using woody material that had been felled by Knowsley Council through their woodland management project. The dams were raised from the river bed, allowing normal flow and the movement of sediment and fish, but slowing river flow and increasing attenuation within the channel when water levels are higher.

The dams were soon put to work, holding back plenty of flood water. The photo to the right shows the dam holding back water behind it and a small amount flowing through the gaps and over the top.

BIG thank you to the volunteers who helped us build these dams!



Valley Park - wetland creation

Downstream of Millbrook Millennium Green, just before Simonswood Brook meets the River Alt, lies Valley Park. Simonswood Brook is notorious for its “flashy” behaviour, with water levels rising rapidly after rainfall. Valley Road, which borders the park, is no stranger to surface-water flooding either. During heavy downpours, road and surface-runoff outfalls release large volumes of water into the brook, greatly increasing downstream flow rates.

To tackle these pressures, Valley Park became the focus of a major natural flood-management project. The plan centred on restoring an ancient paleo-channel and creating new online wetlands just below the surface-water outfalls. Work began on Monday, 17 November 2025, led by contractors from Wildbanks Conservation Ltd. Over the course of a week, excavators carved out an impressive 500 cubic metres of extra storage capacity—space that will hold back water during intense rainfall events. Positioning the interventions directly downstream of the outfalls has already begun to reshape the brook’s behaviour. The newly restored secondary channel acts as a buffer, absorbing the force of fast-moving water discharged from the outflow. This slows the brook, reduces erosion on the banks, and provides additional protection for properties further downstream that are at risk of flooding. Meanwhile, the emerging wetland habitat is adding ecological value to the site, offering refuge for nesting birds and supporting species such as the protected water vole, which is known to inhabit the wider River Alt catchment.

And the transformation isn’t finished yet. Come spring 2026, the site will be planted with a rich mix of native, wildlife-friendly grassland and wetland species—ushering in the next chapter of Valley Park’s restoration.



Hall Brook - wetland creation

Hall Brook is situated within Croxteth Country Park and flows between a field for livestock grazing and a housing estate. The site is at high risk of both fluvial (river) and surface water flooding. NFM works at this site will include reconnecting the floodplain to increase flood water storage capacity and slow the flow into the River Alt. An additional offline wetland will be dug in the northeast corner of the field to attenuate overland and groundwater run off. This will provide additional freshwater habitat and storage capacity, and reduce ground water flowing into Hall Brook in events of high rainfall.



Dam Wood - wetland creation

In addition to the leaky dams we installed in 2025, this project will also create a series of wetland scrapes in the adjacent field to provide additional flood water storage capacity during high rainfall events. The wetland scrapes will help to slow the flow to the River Alt and also help to protect the main footpath through the site which is currently being eroded by overland run-off.



Fazakerley WwTW - wetland enhancements

Tue Brook wetlands are situated along the western boundary of the United Utilities (UU) site for wastewater treatment, within the shallow valleys of Fazakerley Brook and the River Alt. The wetlands were created in 1999-2000 as a method of treating highly polluted water from Tue Brook due to industrial estate drainage, urban drainage and combined sewer overflows, before it met Fazakerley Brook. After liaison with UU and a site visit, it is evident the site has not been managed since it was first created over 20 years ago. Our proposal for this site includes full restoration of the wetland, including woodland management, re-digging of the wetlands, sediment buildup removal, channel widening and floodplain restoration. Restoration and increased storage capacity of the wetland will improve attenuation during heavy rainfall and flood events, improve water quality and flow dynamics, and help to reduce local and downstream flooding.



Millbrook Millennium Green - wetland creation

Millbrook Millennium Green is a Local Wildlife Site situated in Knowsley and comprises woodland, grassland, ponds and a watercourse (Simonswood Brook) that runs through the centre of the site. Much of the site sits within flood zone 3 and many of the adjacent housing estates are at risk of surface water flooding due to outfalls becoming inundated at high river flows. A series of in channel scallops, berms and wetlands at the site are proposed to increase storage capacity, attenuation and reduce rate of flow. A series of on-line attenuation wetlands will be created at the downstream end of the site, alongside existing ponds to provide extra filtration, habitat and capacity during peak flows.



Acornfield Plantation - gully stuffing

Acornfield plantation is a Local Nature Reserve located in Knowsley and comprises mature woodland, ponds, ditches and peatland habitat. To the north of the site is an industrial estate and to the south are residential properties, both of which are at risk of surface water flooding. The ditch system, fed by rainwater, flows into a culvert before joining Simonswood Brook in a high flood risk area from both fluvial and surface water sources. Bundles of brashy material will be placed in the ditches to slow the flow by increasing channel 'roughness', improve ditch geomorphology and create habitat for species. This technique is known as 'gully stuffing'.



Old Hall Road Park - leaky dams

An overflow channel from the Leeds and Liverpool canal flows along the northern edge of Old Hall Road Park. The channel flows into Whinny Brook, which feeds into the River Alt. This site is in flood risk zone 3, meaning properties in this area and those downstream in Maghull are at high risk of flooding. Maghull has experienced severe flooding historically and is particularly susceptible to surface water flooding due to the low-lying nature of the district. Leaky dams in the canal overflow channel will help to increase attenuation of flows within the channel during high rainfall events, slowing the flows that ultimately feed into Whinny Brook, and eventually the River Alt.



Monitoring of Natural Flood Management measures is a key aim of the NFM Programme. Much of the available evidence of the effectiveness of NFM is based on anecdote, rather than data. This lack of evidence has largely been due to the 'quick-win' focus of grants, with funds only provided for installation of measures, rather than the thorough feasibility, design and pre/post-monitoring of rivers and interventions.

The EA's £2.5 million NFM Programme allowed Mersey Rivers Trust, and partners, to collect pre and post project data for the first time, to assess...

- Are the interventions working?
- Is the chosen site/intervention the most suitable?
- Is taxpayers money being used in the most effective way?

As benefits often take several years to appear, long term monitoring is important to fully understand the impacts of NFM measures. Although the EA's NFM Programme is a step in the right direction, longer term funding is still required.

Monitoring techniques

The following parameters are being measured before, during and after installation of the NFM interventions, and upstream and downstream of the interventions. This will allow us to compare data to evaluate the effectiveness of the NFM techniques used. Evidence that the interventions aren't working is just as important as evidence that they are!

Water level – changes in the height/depth of the water

Flow – how fast the water is moving

Rainfall – DEFRA 15 min rainfall data

River MoRPh – citizen science technique to record river bed and bank natural features and human pressures

Water quality – citizen science-level testing of phosphates, water temp, pH, turbidity, and invertebrate 'kick' sampling

Coastal vegetation & zonation surveys – Dynamic Dunescape citizen science methodology to monitor changes to dune systems and abundance of plant species. You can read our 2025 report here: <https://tinyurl.com/bdt3ur2w>



Spot flow monitoring using a Valeport current meter



Invertebrate sample full of Freshwater Shrimp



Phosphate test

Lower Alt Water Quality Improvements - Feasibility Study

As the Alt NFM programme continues to successfully progress, we have started to cast one eye towards the future. The philosophy of the programme has been to adopt a catchment-based approach, implementing lots of small projects across the Alt's drainage basin to create meaningful benefits to communities downstream. We are now beginning to reflect, asking ourselves, are there any areas of the Alt catchment that have been going under our radar. The answer... Yes, the Lower Alt!

Unlike most rivers the lower region of the Alt is largely agricultural. Historically the area was largely moss land, basically a giant wetland! By enhancing subtle changes in elevation on aerial images we are able to see what the river system previously would have looked like.



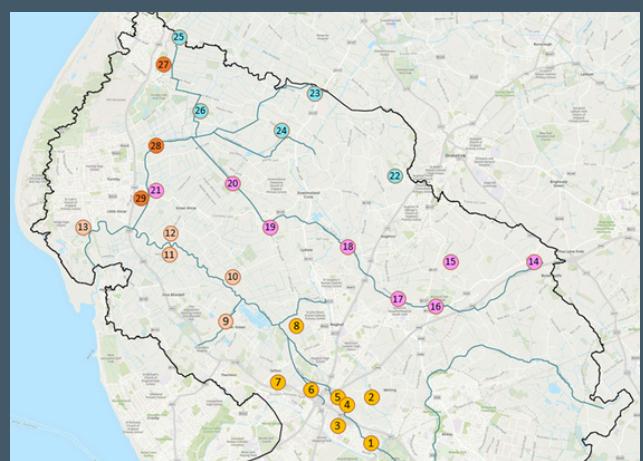
Aerial vs LiDAR images. LiDAR shows lots of small channels and low areas in fields which may be historic wetlands

In the 16th and 17th centuries attempts were made by Thomas Fleetwood and Thomas Eccleston to begin reclaiming the land. This land reclamation was later accelerated by the invention of steam powered drainage pumps. Due to the fertile nature of the peat soils that were uncovered, throughout the industrial revolution the land-use was never urbanised and it has remained a vital area of crop production for our country.

As a price for our food, the lower Alt and its brooks' water quality has suffered. Fertiliser and pesticide inputs alongside landfill leachate, invasive species, and urban pollution from upstream have resulted in the Environment Agency scoring the water quality low across the board.

...Until now! Using inspiration from what the landscape once was, we are looking for areas to re-create some of these lost wetlands, which will in-turn increase water quality, reduce the flood risk in surrounding fields, and provide habitat for protected species.

So far, we have been working hard on creating a long-list of options which we aim to deliver over the coming years. Additionally, the Alt NFM programme has enabled us to show to funders how important pre-project monitoring can be, and we have carried over the techniques being used into this new chapter. The project will bring about exciting new opportunities to work with large estate landowners, who we can help us (pun intended) to pump life back into the Lower Alt!



Map of the lower Alt with long-list of project ideas



Flooded field at one of our monitoring sites

LOWLAND PEAT & GROUNDWATER PROJECT

The Crossens catchment is home to dozens of farms on Grade 1 agricultural land which is being utilised for arable crop production, making the region a high priority for England's food security. The fertility within the landscape is facilitated by the presence of large areas of peatland soils which are rich in organic matter. Despite its agricultural productivity much of the land within the area is categorised as Zone 3 for flood risk, which refers to land with the highest possibility of flooding.

The Project started in 2024; the Mersey Rivers Trust were awarded a grant by the Environment Agency as part of the Lowland Agricultural Peat Water Discovery Pilot (LAPWDP). This funding is being used to develop a solid baseline of the current condition of the peat, as well as looking at groundwater levels, focusing on wetter, less productive areas of the farmland.



As part of this project MRT have been collaborating with local farmers, Lancashire Wildlife Trust and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. In year 1 of the Project, Martin Mere was used as a control site to compare its peat condition and groundwater levels with the surrounding farmland. In Year 2 of the Project, the methodology developed in Year 1 has been rolled out across the wider area of lowland peat deposits. The project is working with more farms and has set up Lunt Meadows as a comparative site at the southern end of the lowland peat. Ultimately the knowledge gained will provide insight into whether alternatives such as wetter farming or water storage are viable options within the catchment. With the data gathered, the trust will provide information in the form of Water-level Management Plans to local farmers with the aim of reducing the current rate of peat loss, improving the overall soil and water quality locally, whilst lowering the impacts of flood events.

What is wetter farming?

Wetter Farming, also known as Paludiculture, is the practice of growing crops on land that has had its water table permanently raised. Setting land aside for paludiculture to grow crops such as Sphagnum Moss or Typha not only brings environmental benefits, but it can also provide landowners a more economical way of farming areas that are typically less productive.



WATER POLLUTION

Unfortunately, we reported several pollution incidents to the Environment Agency last year, including this particularly nasty pollution in Knowsley that we spotted while out doing some water quality testing for our River Alt NFM project. White film on the water, detergent smell, sewage fungus covering the stones...not nice!



Our tests confirmed this was a nasty pollution incident - Phosphate reading was 500ppb upstream of the outfall and then 2,500ppb downstream! We caught shrimp and various fly larvae in our upstream invertebrate kick sample, but no life at all downstream of the outfall. Unfortunately we spotted several hundred dead shrimp on the river bed.



Phosphate test



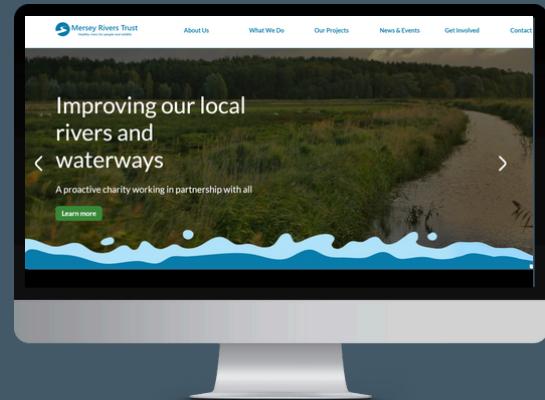
Dead Freshwater Shrimp on river bed

The incident was reported to the Environment Agency hotline straight away and someone attended the site later that day.

**JUST A REMINDER THAT IT'S SO IMPORTANT
TO REPORT ANY SUSPECTED POLLUTION
INCIDENTS TO THE EA HOTLINE:**

0800 80 70 60

New MRT Website!



Our new-look website is now live!
Same web address but a more modern design...

General



www.merseyrivers.org



Mersey Rivers Trust



@MerseyRivers



mersey_rivers_trust



info@merseyrivers.org

Farming



Farming Hub



farming@merseyrivers.org

Natural Flood Management



NFM Hub



Community Events 2025



Lunt Meadows Bioblitz

In May, we joined Lancashire Wildlife Trust and partners for a Bioblitz at Lunt Meadows. Lots of interesting river and pond invertebrates recorded including stickleback, smooth newt, frog tadpoles, water scorpion, mayfly, dragonfly nymph, damselfly nymph, and lots more!



Croxteth Park Bioblitz



We had a fantastic day at Croxteth Park in June 2025 for our annual Bioblitz. Lots of wildlife recorded, crafts made and freebies given out! It was great to see so many people engaging with nature. Big thanks to Croxteth Park Volunteer Group, Merseyside BioBank, Liverpool City Council and Liverpool Parks for supporting the event. This event was part of our River Alt Natural Flood Management Programme, funded by the Environment Agency.





Croxteth Park Balsam Bash

In July, we returned to the Croxteth Wetland for a spot of Balsam Bashing. This is the 5th year we've been controlling this invasive species here and it doesn't get any easier! However, it's so important that we keep doing it to give native plants a chance and keep the wetland a diverse habitat. We'll be back next year!

Knowsley Flower Show

On a classically cloudy English summer's day in August 2025, three of the Mersey Rivers Trust team set up camp and river samples at the infamous Knowsley Flower Show. Gazing at the microscopic delights of shrimp, visitors enjoyed IDing species in the local river samples. Young and parental attendees alike got to enjoy their own bug hunts across the park using our Treasure hunt map, whilst the team thoroughly enjoyed talking to curious folk about NFM. It was a delight to update and inform people about the NFM projects taking place throughout the catchment and hear about areas of flood concern for local residents.



BioBlitz - Old Hall Rd Park, Maghull

In August 2025, MRT and Merseyside Biobank ran a community BioBlitz and NFM engagement event in Maghull. Lots of wildlife spotted, crafts made and prizes won!



Maghull suffers from regular flooding and so the local community were keen to hear about the NFM ideas we have for the local area, both as part of our River Alt NFM Programme and potential future works.



Mersey Rivers Week 2025!

From 14th to 19th July, communities across the Mersey region came together to celebrate and explore our local rivers. From guided walks, to a bioblitz with family activities, there was something for everyone.

Diving straight into the week, our Team and Trustees all got out on the River Mersey in style on Day 1 of Mersey Rivers Week, Kayaking from Northenden to Jackson's boat in Chorlton. A fantastic way to explore the river and what perfect weather for it!



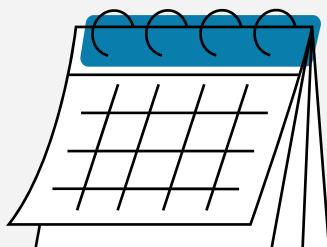
Days 2-5 involved a range of activities across Manchester and Cheshire, including a WaterBlitz, meadow management and the launch of our new Mersey Rivers Youth Forum for 11 -17 year olds.

For the 6th and final day of Mersey Rivers Week, we held a bioblitz in Millbrook Millennium Green, Kirkby in Merseyside. Lots of happy faces helped us identify river species such as case caddis fly larvae, pea mussels and leeches. Lots of butterfly feeders made and lots of great chats about the NFM we're doing at the Park.



Huge thank you to everyone who attended our events and supported us in 2025!

Key dates for 2026



Mersey Rivers Week
29th June - 5th July 2026

2nd February	World Wetlands Day
3rd March	World Wildlife Day
14th March	International Day of Action for Rivers
22nd March	World Water Day
22nd April	Earth Day
24th - 27 th April	City Nature Challenge
23rd May	World Fish Migration Day
5th June	World Environment Day
8th June	World Oceans Day
22nd - 28 th June	Invasive Species Week
28th July	World Nature Conservation Day
27th September	World Rivers Day
5th December	International Volunteer Day