

The Nantwich Riverside Project

Summary Report 2006

The Nantwich Riverside project is now reaching the end of its first year, following the appointment of a part time project officer in March 06. During 2006 efforts have focused heavily on community activities and engagement coupled with some significant physical improvements. Support for this project has gone from strength to strength with many partner organisations now on board, bringing with them a wealth of local knowledge and expertise.

Key Events and Achievements 2006:

Formation of friends group - April

'Riverside Concern' came together in April as a group of local residents wanting to get involved in improving the local environment. The group has representation from many local clubs including local angling and rambling associations and is working closely with the project officer providing assistance, ideas and local knowledge. To date, Riverside Concern has been heavily involved in clean up operations and other volunteer works. In 2007 they are taking steps to becoming a formally constituted group with more influence and the ability to attract funding for the area.

Photo: Members of Riverside Concern, assisting with clean up in 2006



Control of Invasive Species - June

Over recent years the Nantwich Riverside and the banks of the River Weaver have seen an increase in the presence of Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), an exotic invasive species originating from the Western Himalayas. Himalayan Balsam or "Touch-me-not" is able to produce over 800 seeds per plant, which are explosively spread for a distance of up to 7m away when seed pods come into contact with other plants and hard objects. Rivers and waterways are the main means for the distribution of the species whereby the floating seeds are carried on water and then deposited downstream.

The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers and local groups assisted in reducing the presence of Balsam during a Balsam Bashing session in June. This involved pulling up the plants by hand (prior to the formation of seed pods) and then crushing the hollow stems (bashing the balsam) before loading trailers for safe disposal.

Photo: The BTCV and local volunteers 'bashing the balsam'



Photo: Trailer full of 'touch me not'



Nantwich Lake Area Access Improvements – July to September

Funding secured from WREN (Waste Recycling Environmental Limited) and Cheshire Rural Enterprise saw the installation of 2 new footbridges and associated footpath improvements in the Nantwich Lake Area this summer. The bridges replace the old stepped concrete structures and now provide access for less able users and for pushchairs etc. Further access improvements are planned for this area in 2007.

Photo: One of the old bridges



Photo: One of the new bridges



BBC Autumnwatch Seed hunt – October

In conjunction with BBC Radio Stoke, the Nantwich Riverside hosted a Tree Seed Hunt as part of the BBC's Autumn Watch and Breathing Places campaign.

During MWH Mersey Basin Week, seventy people from as far away as Warrington and Newport, Shrops. joined a seed hunt at Nantwich Riverside on Sunday 8th October, as part of the BBC's Autumnwatch series and the Tree Council's Seed Gathering Season.

Following trailers by Bill Oddie on BBC2 and by BBC Radio Stoke, a huge amount of support was generated for the event which brought local people and those from further a field together in the search for seeds from six native trees. After a brief introduction to the aims of the day, volunteers were let loose with a seed hunting bag and a list of the trees to look for. These were Oak, Rowan, Scots Pine, Hazel, Silver Birch and Alder. The most enthusiastic participants found five of these, and several others, although only the native species will be used for future planting. Some of the families also got their five minutes of fame on air, as BBC Radio Stoke covered the event for the Sunday Morning and Sunday Midday shows.

Having found as many seeds as they could, volunteers were provided with a biodegradable carton to plant the seeds in. The resulting young trees, complete with the carton, will be planted on the Riverside during another event due to take place next autumn. Nantwich Riverside Officer, James Thompson and Cheshire County Council Ranger, Annmarie Belcher were on hand for help with identifying any seeds and leaves whilst also providing extra information about projects and wildlife on the Riverside.

Photo: Izzy Gascoigne, Action Upper Weaver Project Manager with a young enthusiast.



Photo: James Thompson, Nantwich Riverside Project Officer with Family



Photo: Seed Hunters Gathering



Willow Weaver Week – October

Willow Weaver Week became the collective name for a series of activities and events on the riverside in October all of which focussed on the River Weaver and it's bank side willows.

Willow Pollarding Works – Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council:

CNBC's direct services undertook pollarding work on several trees, in order to open up areas for footpath improvements and preserve the trees for the future. Many willows on the riverside have been historically managed in this way to protect them from livestock and prevent them from splitting and falling apart. In the recent past, many willows on the riverside have suffered from neglect and it is the intention to set up a 5-year cycle of pollarding in the future to ensure that these characteristic trees remain as an important feature on the weaver in Nantwich.

The willow harvested from these trees was used for sculpting during willow workshops.

Photo: Pollarded Willows



Removal of Fallen Willows – Environment Agency

The project was very fortunate in securing a significant amount of assistance from the Environment Agency in the form of specialist tree surgeons who were able to work in boats from the Weaver to remove trees from hard to reach places in Nantwich town centre. Such trees were causing visual obstructions to the river and had the potential to cause flooding upstream.

Willow Workshops:

Willow weaving and sculpting workshops were held for 4 days in half term near the Weir Pool and were well attended by local residents and visitors to the town, despite the weather. Workshops were run by an artist in residence and saw the creation of some temporary pieces including fish, caterpillars, bats and many other riverside beasts.

Photos: Willow Weaving and Sculpting



Halloween Performances and Tricks 'n' Treats:

Willow Weaver Week culminated in 2 Halloween performances by the Pickle Herring Theatre Company, who worked with Sound and District primary school to create Junk Puppets from recycled materials which were used as part of a daytime parade and performance on Mill Island.

The weir pool area came alive in the evening with a family friendly performance and tricks and treats. The evening was extremely well attended with over 100 people in attendance and also provided the public with an opportunity to view the willow creations in all their illuminated glory, including floating willow lanterns on the weir pool.

Core funding for Willow Weaver Week was secured from Arts Council England by CNBC's Community Development Team with other funding provided by the BBC.

Sponsors: Wulvern Housing and HSS Hire

Other Support: Weaver Valley, Environment Agency, Mersey Basin Campaign, BBC Breathing Places, Riverside Concern, Nantwich in Bloom

Photos: Tricks 'n' Treats



Creation of Riverside Willow Coppice – November

Following the interest in all things willow, a local donation saw the creation of a willow coppice in memory of a local environmental campaigner. The area comprises 8 different species of willow chosen for their colour, form and suitability for weaving and sculpting. Designed by CNBC landscape architect, Ruth Conley, the coppice will look fantastic as it grows and will also be able to be harvested in stages for use during future weaving events.

The willows themselves were planted by pupils from Weaver Primary School and countryside management students from Reaseheath College with valuable assistance from Nantwich in Bloom.

Photo: School Children Planting Willows



Photo: Reaseheath College Students, Mulching



Priorities for 2007:

Masterplan

With assistance from the County Council's Landscape Architect, Lucinda Long, the main drive for 2007 is for the formation of the Riverside Master Plan, which outlines key project areas and aspirations for improvements. During this stage, we will look at all elements of the riverside including the broader picture with regard to the relationship of the riverside with the rest of the town, paying particular attention to connective links to and from other areas of interest.

Further Access Improvements

Funding is currently being sought for improvements in many areas of the riverside where access is difficult during in the winter months due to existing ground conditions. Other improvements are required to restore historic pedestrian links and provide safe areas for access to the water's edge.

Volunteer Programme

Following on from the local support and enthusiasm for volunteer activities in 2006, there is a clear need to establish an annual volunteer programme of environmental improvement and conservation work. Funding will be sought to engage with a third party to provide a programme for 2007.

Himalayan Balsam Strategy for the Upper Weaver

Working in partnership with the Mersey Basin Campaign Action Upper Weaver and Cheshire County Council Rangers, plans are afoot to develop a strategy for significantly reducing the presence of Balsam on the Upper Weaver. This initiative will look at the problem on a catchment basis, following a pilot area study in the Nantwich Area where it will see a high level of volunteer input during all stages.

A Note of Thanks

Many thanks to all the individuals, groups, agencies and authorities who have contributed their time and efforts towards the improvement of the Riverside in 2006. We look forward to working with you all on the exciting improvements to come in 2007.

James Thompson
Nantwich Riverside Project Officer