

# Safer haven for Sefton's red squirrels

**T**his event recognises the enthusiasm and achievements of the borough to keep Sefton as the green capital of Merseyside for today and tomorrow'. The bullish comment came from the town's mayor, Tommy Mann when he planted the one-millionth tree – a Corsican pine – in Sefton, within The Mersey Forest (MF), in just over a decade.

Setting for the ceremonial planting was Lifeboat Road Woodlands, part of the coastal pine woodlands at Formby. He added: 'Despite the region recording less than four per cent tree cover by land area – the equivalent to less than two square metres of woodland cover for every man, woman and child in the Northwest's urban belt - Sefton has been able to keep its diverse range of native ecological land wildlife habitats'.

One of the most significant benefits of the latter is that this has contributed to the regeneration of a valuable home for the area's endangered red squirrel population.



**Celebrating one million trees as part of the Mersey Forest.**

England's largest such initiative, MF spans Merseyside and North Cheshire, created by the forest team, working with Sefton Council and other partners. Together, this Sefton Coastal Forest Partnership has collectively increased the area's woodland cover by more than 90% in 12 years.

The management of Sefton's woodland has been achieved with the support of local trainees taking part in an 'Intermediate labour mar-

ket scheme' – which helps unemployed people to develop new skills by taking part in conservation and forestry work.

Funded by the 'Neighbourhood regeneration programme' and the South Sefton Partnership and supported by Myerscough College, the 'Biodiversity and access project' (BAP) trainees came from the South Sefton area. Since the BAP scheme began in 2003, 24 people have achieved an NVQ in environmental conservation and have gained employment or gone on to further education.

Merseyside is one of the UK's poorest areas for woodland cover, at less than 4% compared with the national average of 8%+ and a European average of 46%. 'To reverse this trend, the (MF) was established to implement and manage a physical transformation that is not only increasing the area's woodland cover but is also creating new opportunities for forest tourism, utilising the woodland as a resource for training and improving wildlife habitats'.



**Local schoolchildren dig in at the one-millionth tree celebration at Sefton's Lifeboat Road Woodlands.**

'It's a credit to the partners...in Sefton', Tommy Mann continued, 'that their hard work is coming to fruition and the long-term programme to ensure the woodlands continue to provide benefits for future generations is on course'. MF director Paul Nolan added: 'These trees bring multiple, long-lasting advantages, from creating new woodland for recreational use, to providing new wildlife habitats, to improving the overall image of the area'.

Also at the event was Sefton's cabinet member for leisure and tourism, Cllr Lord Ronnie Fearn, MP Joe Benton, community volunteers and local council, Forestry Commission, English Nature and Mersey Forest Team representatives. Local schoolchildren backed the mayoral spade-wielding by planting a selection of pine trees around the ceremonial one-millionth tree.



**At the Sefton, Merseyside tree-planting event, L-R: Local cabinet member for leisure and tourism, Cllr Lord Ronnie Fearn, Sefton mayor Cllr Tommy Mann and mayoress Mrs Jean Lilley; MP Joe Benton and Mersey Forest director Paul Nolan.**