

Liverpool City Region Ecological Network

Nature Improvement Area focus area

NIA Focus Area 02: Formby Mosslands

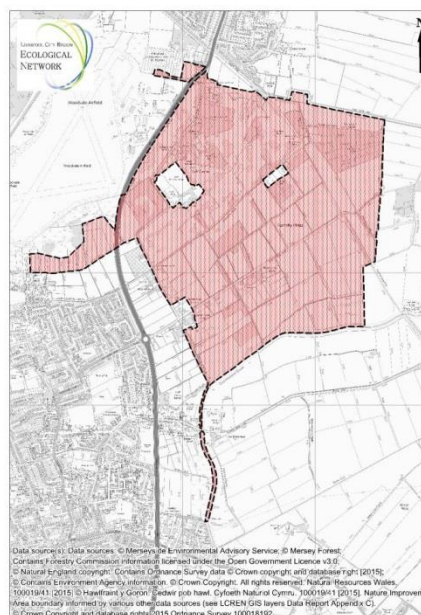
District(s): Sefton

Area 324 hectares

Ecological priorities are:

Habitat creation

- Ponds, building upon the existing concentration;
- Reedbed, swamp and fen, which could be small scale in existing ditches or larger by managing surface water;
- Wet heathland;
- Grassland, mainly wet grasslands; and
- Wet woodland, around the existing woodlands or hedgerows.



Habitat management

- Enhancing the agricultural land and grasslands for breeding birds and overwintering feeding birds;
- Maintaining and enhancing the ponds, reedbeds and swamps;
- Maintaining the wet heathland;
- Enhancing the watercourses; and
- Managing and enhancing the existing woodlands and hedgerows.

Existing ecological features:

1. There are 80ha of existing habitat.
2. Core Biodiversity Area: 2 Local Sites and part of another; together with heathland, wetland, grassland and woodland Priority Habitats.
3. Linear features: River; ditches; hedgerows; and a dismantled railway.
4. Species: Red squirrel; water vole; dragonflies and damselflies; brown hare; bats; breeding birds and farmland birds



(e.g. tree sparrow and linnet); passage and overwintering birds.

Formby Hall Golf Course, www.golfingdays.co.uk

Focus area description:

The Focus Area is drawn around the important wetland habitats of Formby Hall and Formby Moss, which includes an important concentration of ponds, particularly within Formby Hall Golf Course. The ponds are important for insect species and also provide habitat for amphibians and water voles, while the grazing land provides habitat for breeding birds. There is an extensive network of ditches that drain the grazing land within the Focus Area, which is naturally wet. Passage and overwintering birds use the Focus Area for feeding.

The Focus Area includes Wham Dyke Meadows and parts of Willowbank Holiday Park as these sites contain a population of water voles and important wetland habitats. Downholland Brook runs along the south of the area and provides a benefit of flood alleviation by transporting water. The Trans Pennine Trail that travels from Halewood via Maghull/Aintree to Southport runs along the eastern side of the Focus Area.

Ecological opportunities

Habitat creation:

- **Ponds:** The Focus Area is significant for the concentration of ponds. These support a large number of insect species. Further ponds would support the populations of insects, as well as providing habitat for amphibians and breeding birds. They would also provide important habitat for water voles and otters. Ponds could be created around the edges of fields to maintain the land use.
- **Reedbed and Swamp:** Swamp habitats exist mostly along the rivers and brooks. Further naturalisation of the ditches would provide one opportunity to create this habitat. The Focus Area is naturally wet and potential exists to create small pockets of habitat where existing pooling occurs. Large areas could be created by managing the drain network to increase the wetness of the fields, for example at Wham Dyke Meadows. This could benefit species such as water voles.
- **Fen:** Parts of the Focus Area may contain degraded peat. As the fields are prone to wetness some peat may remain. There is some opportunity to create fen habitats if the peat is present. Areas are likely to be small and form part of a habitat mosaic with other wetland habitats.
- **Grassland:** A key habitat is 'wet grassland'. The ground is naturally wet and enhancing the existing areas of grassland by planting appropriate species and altering management could result in habitat enhancements relatively quickly. Fields prone to flooding or close to brooks that would enable flooding could be wetted further and managed as grazing marsh. Alternatively small habitat areas could be created where water pooling already occurs. This could provide feeding resources for passage and overwintering birds.
- **Wet heathland:** A small pocket of wet heathland habitat is present at Willowbank Holiday Park. There are limited opportunities to expand the habitat but some potential could exist within the green spaces within the Holiday Park.
- **Wet woodland:** Wet woodland would be appropriate adjacent to existing woodlands or hedgerows. Small areas around field edges could help to retain the land use. Wetting or increasing the wetness of existing woodlands, combined with tree planting could provide the quickest results for habitat creation.

Habitat management priorities:

- **Agricultural land/Grassland:** The current use of agricultural land is mainly grazing land or in golf course management. Increases in the plant diversity of the grasslands would improve the potential for farmland species, passage and overwintering birds to use the area. The alteration of management practices in both grazing and golf course use could act as a mechanism to ensure feeding areas are maintained for birds that are qualifying species of the coastal protected sites, such as the Ribble and Alt Estuaries. This management would retain the existing land use.
- **Rivers and ditches:** Downholland Brook is controlled in places due to flood protection. The channels and banks are maintained to ensure the flow of water is not impeded. Similar management is in place for the ditches within the farmland. This results in linear swamp and tall grassland habitats, which are important for water vole, otter, fish, breeding birds and insects. Management should aim to maintain the habitats and allowing them to expand where possible. A maintenance programme that is sensitive to ecology, such as rotational bankside cutting, is important to balance flood defence and ecology matters.
- **Ponds:** A significant concentration of ponds exists within the Focus Area. The ponds differ in the habitats they provide, being at various stages of succession and this is important as it provides habitat for a large number of species. Management can maintain the range of habitats and also prevent ponds drying out and being too shaded. Protection of ponds from pollution inputs such as nutrient enrichment is important to ensure the habitat can support important species.
- **Wet heathland:** The small fragment is affected by tree growth. Removal of some of the trees to allow heathland plants to expand is vital to maintain the habitat. Tree removal could also help with maintaining water levels. It is important to maintain an appropriate landscape screen between the A565 and the Holiday Park.
- **Woodland:** The existing woodlands are important for red squirrels. Maintaining a feeding resource and control of grey squirrels is vital to maintain the red squirrel populations. Traditional management, such as coppicing, could be used to maintain or increase species diversity.
- **Hedgerows:** Traditional management of the hedgerows, such as laying, would strengthen the structure. Measures such as filling gaps in existing hedges and cutting every 3 years would improve the function of the hedgerow. Maintaining tall trees along the route would maintain the existing character.

Ecosystem Services Benefits

The Focus Area's watercourses, wetlands and floodplain areas act to store water. Improvement in the function of the habitats will help to store more water, while further habitat creation will add to the storage capacity. This could help to make properties and land more secure outside the Focus Area and is linked to property values. The watercourses are also in poor condition under the Water Framework Directive. Improvements and expansion to habitats such as swamps could help to filter water and improve the quality. Initiatives such as the Water Framework Directive could help to support landowners to deliver wetland habitat creation and management.

Grasslands, reedbeds and woodlands all store carbon.

The arable land is predominantly grazing land. The identified ecological opportunities could maintain the current land use and support the agri-businesses to produce high quality and high value sustainable meat and dairy products. Wetland creation, such as ponds, provides alternative leisure opportunities such as fishing. This compliments the existing recreational activities at Formby Hall Golf Course and Willowbank Holiday Park.

Focus Area support to wider priorities and strategies

Local Plans – The local authorities in the City Region have worked together to prepare the LCR Ecological Network as a joint evidence base and to help plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale in line with the National Planning Policy Framework. Discussions with neighbouring areas through Nature Connected, the Government-recognised Local Nature Partnership, have enabled wider connections beyond the city region to be made. In line with paragraph 117 of the National Planning Policy Framework, the LCR Ecological Network includes a Core Biodiversity Area of designated nature and geological sites and Priority Habitats, linking networks and strategic priorities for habitat creation or enhancement. This is one of seventeen Nature Improvement Area Focus Areas which together make up the LCR Nature Improvement Area. Although not a Proposals Map designation, further refinement of NIA boundaries and land uses may occur as part of each district's Local Plan processes.

Catchment Flood Management Plans –the ecological opportunities could store flood waters and release them slowly. This is in line with the approach the Environment Agency is taking to deal with surface water within the Alt/Crossens catchment.

River Basin Management Plans (Water Framework Directive) - the ecological opportunities would help to deliver improvements to water quality and morphology. This would help improve the ecological condition of the watercourses.

Mersey Forest Plan – wet woodland and hedgerow creation is in line with Policies for this area in the Plan. The protection, expansion and management of other habitats are a Plan wide policy which the ecological opportunities would help to deliver.

National Character Areas –the ecological opportunities are in line with the four 'Statements of Environmental Opportunity' identified in the Sefton Coast NCA 57 profile. Delivery of the Focus Area ecological opportunities would strengthen landscape resilience and adaptation to climate change. This would help the Character Area achieve sustainable growth and a more secure environmental future.

Countryside Stewardship scheme – The scheme could support land managers in the delivery of multiple public benefits. Overall, biodiversity should be the priority for the scheme but synergies also exist to maximise opportunities to deliver biodiversity, water quality and flooding benefits. The scheme could also contribute towards the delivery of our water quality objectives.

Nature Connected – implementation the Focus Area's ecological opportunities would work towards the LCR LNP's Key Action D and would also support the delivery of its other Key Actions.

LCR LEP – the identified ecological opportunities could help to support the LEP's Priorities for Low Carbon Economy, and Visitor Economy, such as at Formby Hall Golf Course and the Willowbank Holiday Park, including sustainable transport. The Focus Area could also help to support the LEP's Priority for Knowledge Economy and Skills by enhancing and inspiring learning

for school and higher education students, including work placements/training in the natural environment.

Atlantic Gateway – the NIA ecological opportunities fit with the investment opportunities of infrastructure through flood control and sustainability.