



Natural Economy Northwest

The Sound of Sopranos: Supporting people for their contribution to the economy, environment and community

Commissioned from The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside by Natural Economy Northwest



Lancashire,
Manchester &
N Merseyside

Funded by



INVESTING IN
englandsnorthwest

Preface

This is one in a series of reports produced between 2007 and 2009 within the Natural Economy Northwest (NENW) programme. NENW is a regional partnership programme led by Natural England, the Northwest Regional Development Agency and SITA Trust on behalf of a wide range of economic and environmental partners. The main focus is to deliver priority action 113 in the Regional Economic Strategy, to optimise the natural environment's contribution to the regional economy and quality of life.

The programme also includes the Enriching Nature SITA Trust biodiversity programme and the aspirations of Natural England and other environmental and economic partners to mainstream the natural environment within sustainable economic development. Key work areas within the programme are to:

- increase awareness of the value of the natural economy,
- commission and disseminate research to promote and facilitate delivery,
- provide direction to promote effective use of limited financial resources,
- contribute to the development and delivery of regional and sub-regional strategies,
- facilitate natural economy project development and encourage project delivery,
- promote and facilitate Green Infrastructure and Natural Tourism especially through the Sub-Regional Economic Partnerships and the Tourist Boards,
- encourage strategic investment in natural economy projects, and
- to facilitate training, skills innovation and advice to business.

In the partnership between NENW and SITA Trust, SITA Trust Enriching Nature funded projects were assessed for their delivery of economic benefits. Those that scored highest, and Sound of Sopranos was one of these, were given enhanced funding to develop the project further to optimise the economic benefits and to inform further development of the natural economy of the Northwest. This particular report was commissioned from the Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and North Merseyside for the Sound of Sopranos project. It reports on the work of habitat restoration for the Soprano Pipistrelle bat which provided opportunities for the long-term unemployed through the New Deal Environment Task Force (ETF) programme, with the aim of providing practical experience to become 'work ready' within the land based industry and environmental sectors. The report outlines the contribution of the project to the 11 economic benefits of green infrastructure, before looking at the potential for future continuation.

The collaboration with SITA Trust for linking the Enriching Nature Programme with this pilot in the Northwest, to position biodiversity projects for their contribution to socio-economic frameworks, has been very much appreciated. Biodiversity projects within the overall approach of Green Infrastructure not only contribute directly to economic benefits but also underpin sustainable economic futures through investment in ecosystem services.

This work along with other NENW information and publications is on our website – www.naturaleconomynorthwest.co.uk. You can contact us through our website. We are interested in the ways that this report has been of use to you so that we can take into account in the further development of the programme.

This report has been commissioned by Natural Economy Northwest in the delivery of its aims, outputs and outcomes and it should not be assumed that it represents the policy of the funders – Northwest Regional Development Agency, Natural England and SITA Trust.

Dr Will Williams

Programme Director
Natural Economy Northwest

September 2009

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	2
1. Introduction	3
1.1 The Sound of Sopranos Project	3
1.2 The Wildlife Trust's New Deal ETF Team	3
2. Project activity	4
2.1 Team recruitment and composition	4
2.2 Destination of team leavers	4
2.3 Training and skills	5
2.4 Work activity	5
3. Contributions to the Green Infrastructure Economic Benefits	7
3.1 Climate Change, Adaption and Mitigation	7
3.2 Flood Alleviation and Water Management	8
3.3 Quality of Place	9
3.4 Health and Wellbeing	10
3.5 Land and Property Values	11
3.6 Economic Growth and Investment	11
3.7 Labour Productivity	11
3.8 Tourism	11
3.9 Recreation and Leisure	11
3.10 Land and Biodiversity	12
3.11 Products From The Land	12
4. The Future and Continuing Activity	12
5. Conclusions	12
6. References	13

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and N. Merseyside received funding from the SITA Trust's Enriching Nature programme to monitor and enhance habitats for the Soprano Pipistrelle bat.

Practical habitat improvement work for bats was carried out by participants on the New Deal Environment Task Force programme for the long term unemployed. Natural Economy Northwest enhancement funding was used to provide additional training and support for trainees, and to determine green infrastructure benefits for the local economy and community.

The project was carried out between 1st January and 30th June 2009. Over this time 61 trainees participated, working on six green infrastructure sites. The project period coincided with a significant downturn in the job market and only one trainee moved into employment during the period.

The project activity was considered against the 11 economic benefits of green infrastructure, as identified in previous reports commissioned by Natural Economy Northwest. In particular the project activity made most significant contributions in the areas of:

- Climate Change Adaption and Mitigation
- Quality of Place
- Health and Wellbeing
- Recreation and Leisure
- Land and Biodiversity

The project reveals that activities which are designed specifically to manage habitats for wildlife can and do have identifiable benefits to the local economy, including quality of life and quality of place.

Measures to tackle rising unemployment levels recently announced by the Government will provide additional opportunities for providing training and work experience opportunities through the delivery of green infrastructure management.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Sound of Sopranos Project

The Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester and N. Merseyside was successful in obtaining funding from the SITA Trust's Enriching Nature programme for a project to monitor and enhance habitats for the Soprano Pipistrelle bat.

It has been discovered relatively recently that there are two species of pipistrelle bat resident in the UK, the Common Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and the Soprano Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*), the two species previously being grouped together. The Sound of Sopranos project has been training volunteers to monitor populations and collect data on the Soprano Pipistrelle, as well as other species of bat. The project also aims to enhance habitats for the bat on selected sites and it is this habitat enhancement work which has been the focus of Natural Economy Northwest enhancement funding to optimise the green infrastructure benefits, especially those for the local economy and community.



The Soprano Pipistrelle bat

1.2 The Wildlife Trust's New Deal ETF Team

The Wildlife Trust has been providing opportunities for participants on the New Deal Environment Task Force (ETF) programme since the introduction of New Deal in 1998. The programme provides work experience for the long-term unemployed with the aim of assisting them back into employment. Initially the team members were restricted to the 18 to 24 age group but now include trainees over the age of 25.

Qualification levels of team members tends to be low and individual trainees often face other barriers to gaining employment, such as a history offending, housing problems or homelessness, issues with substance abuse or problems with self esteem or presentation.

Although many can have extensive experience of employment programmes, job application and interview skills are often lacking.

Due to access to a broad range of work sites and projects the Trust has been able to provide its ETF trainees with a programme of good quality, meaningful work consistently over the history of the programme. However the operation of the teams has always required funding additional to that available from Jobcentre Plus in contract payments. Generally these additional funds have been obtained through accessing project funding for delivery of the practical work the teams do.

Between 2001 and 2006 the Trust was able to access European Social Funding and provide ETF trainees with wages. This proved to be very successful, improving both retention of trainees on the programme and movement of trainees into jobs following their time on ETF. It should be noted, however that there was a relatively buoyant or improving job market through most of this time.

2. Project Activity

2.1 Team recruitment and composition

During the project period of 1st January to 30th June 2009 there were a total of 61 individuals who participated in the project. Of these 37 individuals were between the ages of 18 and 24, and 24 individuals were over 25 years of age. Trainees were recruited on the basis of referrals from Jobcentres at Preston and Chorley.

All participants received a comprehensive induction on their first day, which included an introduction to the Wildlife Trust, the New Deal programme, expected standards of conduct, health and safety rules and arrangements, meeting points and minibus pickups and issue of personal protective equipment.

The trainees participated for 30 hours per week. This consisted of three days engaged in practical work on site, one day carrying out jobsearch activities and half a day of training, progress reviews, receiving additional assistance with job applications or preparation for site based work.

2.2 Destination of team leavers

The project period coincided with a major downturn in the employment market. Unemployment levels were increasing significantly during the period and employers who were recruiting were able to access a pool of candidates who have recent employment experience and up to date skills.

18 to 24 year olds become eligible for the New Deal programme after six months of unemployment and those over 25 after 18 months. This makes it hard for the New Deal client group to compete for available jobs, in a climate where employers can recruit candidates with a proven work record. This situation is likely to change as the recession continues and longer term joblessness becomes more the norm.

Consequently only one trainee secured employment during the project period. This individual did, however, gain a job in green infrastructure management as a contract operative. It is possible that jobs in green infrastructure related areas will continue to be available during the recession as funding for some of this work comes from funding streams which would continue to be available, such as national and local Government and Europe.

The funding for this project allowed for an additional supervisor to be recruited in response to the volume of trainees coming onto the programme. However as trainee numbers have remained relatively high, this post has been retained and we have been able to continue to provide an improved level of support for the trainees.

2.3 Training and skills

Trainees receive on the job training and instruction from their supervisors on a day to day basis and develop skills related to green infrastructure management. They also develop more generic workplace skills through their participation, such as effective team working, familiarity with the rules and routines of the workplace and effective communication.

A number of trainees were also able to gain qualifications. Certificates relating to health and safety were provided to many of the trainees, 15 trainees obtained a Fire Awareness Certificate of Achievement and 16 trainees gained a Manual Handling Certificate. This training was of use to the trainees whilst on the programme and will continue to be in future employment.

The Wildlife Trust became a centre for delivery of the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) Unit Award Scheme during the project period. Six trainees achieved a unit award in 'Making a Birdhouse', seven achieved 'Tree Species and Quality ID' and six achieved a unit award in 'Thinning a Young Woodland Plantation'. The AQA Unit Award Scheme was chosen because the units can be achieved over a relatively short timescale and for its straight forward assessment procedures. Many of the trainees on the ETF programme have few qualifications and for some the AQA units may be their first. The achievement of qualifications in the work place serves to improve the confidence of individuals in their own abilities and working towards the targets of the unit motivates them in their work. Although the content of the units may not always relate directly to future employment activities, employers can see that candidates can achieve training targets in the workplace. The funding for this project has assisted with the establishment of the AQA centre and we are continuing to provide units for our trainees.

2.4 Work activity

The work programme focussed on sites which were included in the original application to the SITA Trust for the Sound of Sopranos projects. Evidence suggests that Soprano Pipistrelles favour wetland and riparian habitats, so much of the work involved management of wetland sites and the control of water levels.

Moston Fairway Nature Reserve

Located at Moston in Manchester, Moston Fairway is an area of marshland which developed on former railway sidings. The site is of particular value as areas of marshland are rare in the urban environment and the site is unique in Manchester. The ETF team removed some of

the dense willow scrub which has been developing on the site, to create open areas which will be suitable for use by bats to feed.

Red Moss SSSI

Red Moss is situated at Horwich, near Bolton and is part of a once extensive mossland complex, of which now only fragments remain. The Trust has had a programme of restoration on Red Moss, which was previously cut over. The work of the team entailed installing dams from plastic piling and peat, with the aim of raising and controlling the water levels on the site. This re-wetting benefits bats by creating suitable feeding areas.



Installing plastic piling dams at Red Moss

Brockholes Nature Reserve

Brockholes is a former sand and gravel quarry, which ceased working in 2006. The mix of wetland and woodland at Brockholes Nature Reserve provides very good habitat for the Soprano Pipistrelle. The work included:

- The installation of an outfall pipe from the Conservation Lake to the River Ribble, so that water levels could be controlled.
- Clearing of scrub from the margins of the lake and islands.
- Woodland thinning to improve the woodland habitats.
- Stock fencing to allow for management of pasture areas by grazing.

- Control of invasive species.
- Propagation of common reed for use in developing reed bed areas.

Redscar & Boilton Woods

- Control of invasive Himalayan Balsam.
- Workshops carried out during bad weather
- Construction of bat and bird boxes, which can be installed on sites.

Additional sites

Good recruitment onto the New Deal programme enabled the operation of two teams and in addition to the above sites work was carried out on the following sites on behalf of Chorley Borough Council:

- Duxbury Woods – removal of Rhododendron close to the river, enhancing the habitat and feeding areas for bats.
- Withnell Nature Reserve – Management tasks in a former railway cutting, including thinning of trees, improving access, tree and shrub planting and installing silt traps in the stream. This linear site is a mix of wooded areas, wet grassland and some heath vegetation. It is well used by the local community as well as being used by bats.

3. Contributions to the Green Infrastructure Economic Benefits

The project activity and target work sites have been gauged against the 11 economic benefits of green infrastructure (GI) as identified in the research report 'The Economic Benefits of Green Infrastructure: The Public and Business Case for investing in GI and a review of the Underpinning Evidence' (ECOTEC, 2008), and summary publication 'The Economic Value of Green Infrastructure (ECOTEC & AMION, 2008).

3.1 Climate Change Adaption and Mitigation

It can be argued that the project activities have made a significant contribution to the mitigation of climate change. A considerable amount of work was carried out on Red Moss to raise water levels and rehabilitate the mossland. Work has already been carried out over a number of years to restore Red Moss with considerable success and there are many areas with active growth of sphagnum mosses. The work undertaken through this project will ensure active growth of sphagnum takes place over most of the area of the mossland.

Currently many mosslands are releasing CO₂ on net, through exploitation for horticultural peat and erosion. However the formation of peat in active mosslands locks away carbon and mosslands are by far the most effective UK habitats for carbon sequestration. Red Moss has an area of 47 ha and is capable of capturing 169 tonnes of CO₂ per year.

In addition to the work carried out as a part of this project, the Wildlife Trust is carrying out an extensive programme of mossland restoration, which could make a significant contribution to climate change mitigation.

Management of vegetation on other habitats can generally be considered carbon neutral. Most of the Wildlife Trust's woodlands are registered under the Forestry Stewardship Council / UKWAS scheme and are managed according to their guidelines for sustainability. Timber for items such as fencing is also obtained from sustainable sources.



Rehabilitated area of Red Moss, now actively capturing carbon.

3.2 Flood Alleviation and Water Management

Much of the work involved the management of water levels and allowed for larger storage volumes on site. Installation of the Brockholes outfall pipe for example, has allowed the level of the lake to be lowered to improve the habitat for birds. This means that the water body could be allowed to rise up to a metre in level as flood storage, delaying input into the River Ribble.

Moston Fairway Nature Reserve is an unusual site in that it is an urban marsh. It is surrounded by buildings, roads and hard surfaces, the run off from which will contribute to potential flood levels during high rainfall events. The capacity of this site to absorb and hold water probably helps to alleviate this effect. Clearly an extension of this principle is Sustainable Drainage Schemes, which are engineered to drain run off without contributing to flood levels. Urban green infrastructure sites contribute to the alleviation of flood risks but carefully designed, purpose built schemes can do this more effectively and contribute to the green infrastructure resource significantly.

3.3 Quality of Place

All of the work carried out by the teams has had a positive impact on sites in terms of visual amenity, biodiversity, access and education.

Both Moston Fairway Nature Reserve and Withnell Nature Reserve have established local communities which gain amenity from these sites. Both sites are well used by local people, some of whom have an involvement in the management of the site through membership of local groups or volunteering on activity days.

It is difficult to quantify to what extent sites such as these are valued and how much local communities consider them to be part of what defines their local environment, except possibly when sites are under threat and communities are motivated to take action. In the 1990's Red Moss was threatened with destruction by landfilling. These plans were opposed by a number of organisations including the Wildlife Trust and significantly, a local action group which formed as a result. To this point Red Moss was not used by a many local people, due to its location and difficult terrain. However, there were sufficient local residents with knowledge of the site's importance as a lowland bog and an appreciation of its place in the local landscape to form an effective pressure group. The landfill proposal was declined at public enquiry and the site designated as an SSSI.

Brockholes Nature Reserve is quite different in terms of how its quality of place is viewed, as its significance is regional, as well as being valued by local communities.

Quality of place for Brockholes has been changing significantly over the last couple of decades and will continue to change for some time. The original area of farmland will have had merit as part of the local landscape and the river bank valued by anglers in particular. With the advent of sand and gravel extraction the location became an industrial site and the perception of its quality of place presumably diminished. However, as the quarrying operation moved across the site the first area to be excavated started to mature and became a valuable wildlife resource, particularly for birds. The site became well known amongst ornithologists in particular and its quality of place began to increase.

When the Wildlife Trust was purchasing the site in 2006, £50,000 match funding was required to secure the grant funding obtained for the purchase. A last minute appeal for donations was launched, which turned out to be the most successful appeal the Trust has had to date and the target was easily exceeded. These donations from individuals are an indication of the value people have put on the site, the desire to see it managed as a nature reserve and green infrastructure site and the understanding that its quality of place will increase as a result.

The developments planned for the Brockholes site will enhance its quality of place for a range of users. Once the visitor centre is fully operational, 250,000 visitors are anticipated each year. These visitors will come for differing reasons, including its wildlife, habitats, visual amenity, recreation, leisure activities, geological interest, conference and educational facilities or catering facilities. Quality of place will therefore have a different meaning for the different user groups.



Brockholes Nature Reserve at the end of quarrying operations, now being developed as a green infrastructure resource of regional significance.

3.4 Health and Wellbeing

The links between the natural environment and health and wellbeing have been extensively reported on and established to the extent that conservation organisations, including the Wildlife Trust, engage in partnership projects with Primary Care Trusts and receive project funding on the basis of their benefits to health and wellbeing.

These sites are used for informal recreation by local communities and the positive management carried out by the ETF team contributes to the positive experience felt by users and in some cases improves access for site users. Brockholes will offer significant new recreational opportunities when open to the public and already provides opportunities for recreation and physical activity through guided walks and volunteering.

The Trust's volunteer groups, which also work on these sites as well as many others, attract a broad range of participants and health issues of one sort or another are not uncommon amongst the Trust's volunteers. Many of these volunteers attend groups regularly and enjoy the combined benefits of access to green infrastructure, physical activity and social interaction whilst making a positive contribution to the management of GI resources.

With the Government's targets to reduce the number of Incapacity Benefit claimants, the proportion of these individuals entering the New Deal programme increased, as claimants were moved onto Jobseekers Allowance. A proportion of these individuals join the ETF option and benefit from being able to work in the natural environment. For some trainees joining the ETF team represents a significant increase in levels of physical activity, compared to the lifestyle they are used to. Although anecdotal, team supervisors often report a noticeable improvement in fitness levels of these trainees throughout their time on the programme. The routines and timekeeping required can also represent a lifestyle change

and although trainee may find it difficult at first, this ultimately leads to improved motivation and preparedness for work.

3.5 Land and Property Values

Views of and access to adjacent green space is known to increase to value of properties. For the most part the work of this project has not created any new GI sites but positive management of these sites will help to maintain these property values.

3.6 Economic Growth and Investment

It is hard to say that the work of this project will have attracted increased economic growth and investment, except in the case of Brockholes Nature Reserve. Although the work of the ETF team represents only a small part, the overall investment in Brockholes will be approximately £8m. This includes extensive habitat creation, access and construction of a visitor centre. Long term sustainability will be reliant on commercial income generation, mainly from catering and conference facilities.

3.7 Labour Productivity

Although job outcomes from this project have been disappointing due to the current labour market, the Wildlife Trust's ETF programme has been able to provide a source of employees at times of higher demand. Evidence of reliability is often an employer's first priority in a job candidate. On the ETF team, trainees have an opportunity to demonstrate their reliability and attitudes in the workplace as well as gaining practical work experience. Consequently, candidates who have been on the ETF team are often more work-ready and can therefore be a productive employee from the start of their employment.

3.8 Tourism

For the most part the sites worked on are visited by people local to the site and probably do not figure greatly in attracting tourists to the area.

Brockholes Nature Reserve will attract visitors from outside the immediate area, a small proportion of whom may choose to use accommodation in the area. The site is also very accessible from the M6 motorway, making access rapid from some considerable distance, including several major urban centres.

3.9 Recreation and Leisure

All of the sites worked on are used by local people for mostly informal recreation and leisure. The positive management enhances the leisure experience and helps to provide a safer environment for members of the public. The Wildlife Trust's nature reserves are managed for wildlife; however the recreational resource that they offer to local people is often key to ensuring that they are valued by the local community.

Duxbury Woods has an extensive network of paths and is well used by the local community for recreation. Brockholes already has a public right of way, which extends through Redscar and Bilton Woods, as well as a permissive route along the River Ribble. A network of paths is planned for the site, including a cycle path which will link to existing and new cycle routes outside the site.

3.10 Land and Biodiversity

Although the work carried out on this project was done by ETF trainees, both the work at Red Moss and Brockholes forms part of much larger projects involving the engagement of contractors working in the land-based industries. These projects have also created four new posts directly with the Wildlife Trust in order to manage the project work.

The land at Brockholes has supported economic activity throughout its history in a number of ways, initially through agriculture, which has continued throughout on parts of the site and will continue into the future, through exploitation for sand and gravel and through its conservation interest.

3.11 Products From The Land

Generation of potentially marketable products directly from the land is limited for these sites. Sale of firewood from the thinning of plantations at Brockholes is proposed for the coming winter, which will generate a small income. Extensive areas of grassland are cut annually at Brockholes as part of the management regime. Currently this does not produce a saleable product but some of this could have a value in the future.

4. The Future and Continuing Activity

The Wildlife Trust has been utilising the New Deal programme as an effective vehicle for the delivery of green infrastructure management for over ten years and will continue to for the foreseeable future. The additional training and support for trainees which has been possible as a result of the funding provided for this project, will continue for the immediate future utilising small amounts of income generated from the team's work for external clients, such as local authorities.

Since the project started, the Government has announced a new package of measures aimed at tackling unemployment. The most immediate of these is the Future Jobs Fund and the Wildlife Trust is working with partners to develop short term jobs under this programme. This may provide access to additional funding, including the Working Neighbourhoods Fund. The Trust is keen to develop these opportunities into apprenticeships where this is possible and this could provide a supply of skilled green infrastructure managers which is likely to be needed in the future.

5. Conclusions

In compiling this report it became clear that the activities of this project are very much part of a wider picture in terms of the overall management of the green infrastructure sites involved. In order to manage GI sites the Wildlife Trust uses volunteers, ETF trainees, contractors and direct project staff. Each one of these delivers a vital part of the practical management of the GI resources.

Economic benefits come both from the activity (e.g. through health benefits or improving employment prospects) and the site itself (e.g. through quality of place or flood alleviation).

On the face of it, management of habitats for the benefit of bats would not appear to have many economic benefits but when this activity is viewed in a wider context, as part of a GI management programme, the benefits begin to emerge.

Many of the benefits are local to the sites in question, however the climate change mitigation associated with the work at Red Moss and developments at Brockholes Nature Reserve are certainly of regional significance.

The New Deal team plays an important role in the effective management of GI resources. Training programmes for the unemployed consume a considerable amount of public funding; however, on the basis of this project the direct and indirect economic benefits of their work could well outweigh the cost of providing these programmes, even without considering the savings to the state of returning benefit claimants to work.

6. References

ECOTEC / IBIS (2009), How to deliver, measure and demonstrate the economic contribution of the natural environment at a project level - A guide for project managers (draft).

Natural Economy Northwest, Research Summary 1 : Green infrastructure.

ECOTEC (2008), The Economic Benefits of Green Infrastructure: The Public and Business Case for investing in GI and a review of the Underpinning Evidence.

ECOTEC & AMION (2008), The Economic Value of Green Infrastructure.