



## **National Nature Service Case Study: Northwich Urban Rangers**

**Location: Northwich, Cheshire**

The [National Nature Service](#) is a jobs programme that will enable unemployed people to find paid work and training in nature conservation at the same time as putting more resource into meaningfully improving the UK's depleted natural landscapes and seascapes. The idea is based on the most successful work programme enacted by Franklin D. Roosevelt following the Great Depression. There is an opportunity to pilot an urban greening programme, as part of the National Nature Service, in Northwich.

The Northwich Urban Ranger Service would be jobs programme in which unemployed young people are trained as Rangers for 12 months as a stepping stone towards a landscaping career, whilst simultaneously carrying out environmental management and green space creation in the town. There is potential to employ rangers to enhance and restore riparian habitats along the rivers Weaver and Dane running from the urban fringes of Northwich into the town centre and to also create new habitats (grassland, woodland and wetland), as well as improving biodiversity at existing greenspaces in the town.

### **The opportunity for Northwich**

Northwich is a major town in Cheshire home to some 50,000 people and over 1500 businesses. Like many areas, C-19 has brought about an increase in the number of people in the area now claiming out of work benefits and rises in the number using foodbanks.

The most deprived part of Northwich is the Rudheath and Witton area – a community that forms part of the National Lottery Community Fund's 'Big Local' programme – highlighting its concern for already high levels of deprivation and inequality in the area.

Even before the impact of Covid-19, the area was characterised as having:

- A higher than average number of people on out of work benefits compared to the regional average 14.3% v 13.7%
- Higher numbers of people on disability benefits
- Highest rate of child poverty in Northwich
- High number of households with incomes lower than North West and England averages
- A higher number of households with no or low levels of qualifications when compared to regional and national averages (the number of people with no qualifications is 28.3% (higher than the North West average of 24.8% and the England average of 22.5%).

As a result the area is experiencing disproportionate impacts of C-19 including job losses and increased ill health.

## How the nature work would happen

[Groundwork](#) has strong local links and working relationships with the Canal and River Trust, Cheshire Wildlife Trust and relevant council departments and would be well placed to employ the rangers and deliver the project.

The project would see a major programme of works to enhance biodiversity, improve local greenspace and reduce flood risk in and around Northwich town centre – delivered through the creation of an implementation team offering temporary job opportunities for unemployed local residents.

In the town, the project will include the development of a new high-profile public park (on brownfield land) to incorporate various habitats, and work to enhance the wildlife value of a number of other existing town centre pocket parks. Work also encompasses the creation of new sustainable urban drainage schemes to help reduce water flow and stop high street flooding during periods of heavy rain e.g. through creating new wetland areas, reed beds and leaky dams.

A major part of the work will also include the development of a 'green corridor' along the banks of the rivers Weaver and Dane, with enhanced community access and riparian habitat improvements. The corridor will link the town centre to existing and newly created housing estates on the urban fringe.

Work in the urban fringes will include enhancing the nature value of small local greenspaces within the 'Big Local' housing area, improving an existing Groundwork 'Grozone' (community growing site) and the creation of a new community orchard.

Delivery teams will also have an opportunity to support work to improve greenspaces within Warrington Town Centre, specifically working on enhancing the nature and amenity value of identified 'grot spots'.

The approximate annual cost of delivery would be as follows:

Item	Annual Cost
Project costs (non people)	£30,000
NNS Supervisory and development costs	£21,000
Other (skilled and technical) people costs	£9,000
Employment of ten NNS staff (8 rangers and two supervisors)	£400,000
TOTAL	£460,000

Some match funding is likely to be available through Cheshire West and Chester Council for creation of the urban park. Match funding also in place for Community Orchard and River improvement works via the Environment Agency. There is a potential opportunity for future funding to be secured from the local Business Improvement Districts (Northwich and Warrington).

### **Benefits for nature**

- Creation of urban park approx. 500m<sup>2</sup> of mixed habitat creation on brownfield site. This would include tree planting and greening of urban land.
- Creation of 200m<sup>2</sup> Community Orchard with significant tree planting on publicly accessible land. Improving access from the urban fringe to the town centre through green corridors and opening up access to nature for new property development.
- Creation of 12 new wetland habitats along the river Weaver creating sediment traps thus slowing the flow of water and reducing flood risk. Sediments also absorb and store carbon, with soil holding approximately twice what is in the atmosphere as carbon dioxide and two to three times that in plants. Constructed wetlands bring benefits to pollinating insects and provide habitats for birds and other beneficial wildlife. Constructed wetlands can also create resting and breeding groups for aquatic life.

### **Benefits for people**

- New jobs created in 2021
- At end of the 12 months, qualified Rangers would have the skills to offer commercial landscaping services, leading to lasting employment
- Opportunities for improved community connections and promotion of more healthy, active lifestyles
- Increased opportunities for community engagement and volunteering
- Enhanced employability of local people furthest from the job market
- Improved visual attractiveness of the town centre further supporting the revival of the high street and attracting wider inward investment into the town
- Mitigation against climate change including reduced incidences of flooding affecting homes and businesses, greater community resilience to extreme temperatures, a reduction in carbon emissions and reduced noise and air pollution.
- Greater public access to high quality greenspace near to where people live, helping to improve wellbeing and quality of life