Regeneration Resources Team

2007 - A year of change

As part of Transforming Cheshire, the County Council's environmental specialists have been brought together into a new Regeneration Resources Team.

The Team covers the natural and historic environment, air and noise quality, landscape, land reclamation, forestry and tree risk. It also leads on two of the County Council's strategic environmental regeneration projects: the REVIVE programme of land reclamation in Cheshire and Warrington; and the Sandstone Ridge ECOnet Partnership.

As ever, the Team's expertise has been much in demand and this Review of 2007-08 provides a summary of our wide-ranging activities.

The core of the Team's work continues to be advising on planning, infrastructure and development. We assessed 11,500 planning applications during the year and advised on 8% of these in detail. We have been involved as expert witnesses at two planning inquiries, and have supported colleagues in effectively monitoring and enforcing numerous planning conditions and agreements. We also worked closely with rural and countryside agencies, responding to a variety of environmental land management schemes. We ensured that the protection and enhancement of environmental resources was integrated in strategy documents including Local Development Frameworks, and we briefed Councillors about new biodiversity duties and potential additional obligations towards the historic environment. A strategy for waterlogged archaeological deposits in Nantwich is in preparation and will inform future policy.

We developed and delivered numerous regeneration initiatives to improve the quality of Cheshire's physical environment, including urban and landscape design schemes at Chester, Nantwich and Middlewich, and also at a number of recreation and closed landfill sites across the county.

We progressed several initiatives to improve the management of Council owned heritage assets including the Tree Risk Management Project.

We improved our knowledge and understanding of Cheshire's environmental resources with the publication of a draft Landscape Character Assessment and the final report and summary brochure of the Historic Landscape Characterisation. We increased the number of records of natural and historic environment sites and updated our air quality model.

Our community and partnership working progressed significantly during the year. We secured £17.3 million of NWDA funding to transform 170 ha of derelict land, and submitted a £1.4 million bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for our Habitats & Hillforts Landscape Partnership Scheme. In total we received income in excess of £319,000 (from grants, services/fees and data sales). In total we gave grants for environmental improvement projects undertaken by others in excess of £315,000.

Finally, we promoted awareness and understanding of the protection and enhancement of environmental resources and the work of the County Council by giving presentations, through our various publications and the ever popular Cheshire Archaeology Day.

Ian Marshall
Team Manager,
Regeneration Resources,
Cheshire County Council
The Team has used its expertise and experience to inform the planning process and work with planning authorities, developers and consultants in Cheshire, Warrington and Halton Boroughs to ensure that special sites and features and wider environmental resources are protected from harmful development and, wherever possible, enhanced.

These have included the County Council’s own development, large-scale proposals for mineral extraction, waste disposal, roads, retail and residential development, as well as smaller-scale household developments.

In the case of proposed development in Warrington and Halton and five of the Cheshire Districts, historic environment advice is provided through Service Level Agreements. During 2007-08 we continued to provide natural and built historic environment advice to Warrington Borough, and provided built historic environment advice to Congleton Borough Council on a temporary basis.

Some 11,500 planning applications have been considered for their potential environmental resource implications, of which approximately 8% were assessed in more detail.

Ecological conditions were recommended in the case of 35 separate development proposals in Cheshire (and 11 in Warrington) that were assessed as having major implications for habitats and biodiversity including designated sites and protected species. S106 planning agreements were recommended for Crown Farm Quarry in Cheshire and Walton Lock, Warrington. Two planning applications were recommended for refusal for their adverse ecological impacts, and in the case of 13 others further ecological information was requested.

Recommendations for archaeological work (eg, watching briefs, desk-based assessments, field evaluations, archaeological excavations) were made on 84 development proposals (an 18% increase on 2006-07).

Archaeological briefs were prepared for 4 proposed developments.

Archaeological evaluations monitored by the Team were carried out at 8 developments.

An archaeological excavation monitored by the Team was carried out at one site (Stockton Heath Primary School, Warrington).

Watching Briefs monitored by the Team during development were carried out at 9 sites.

43 archaeological reports were received and incorporated into the Historic Environment Record library.

Built historic environment advice (pre-application and planning application stages) was provided for 180 development proposals in Halton Borough (up 114% on 2006-07).

56 consultations were received for noise and air quality impacts, of which a number required detailed assessment, for example, King Street Gas Pipeline, British Salt Gas Storage, Edelchemie (precious metal recovery), and Bedminster (in-vessel composting). Additionally, advice was prepared for noise and air quality planning conditions for a number of consented sites.

The Team has assisted in the preparation of evidence for the planning inquiry into a proposed Resource Recovery Park at Ince on the Cheshire Marshes.

Proofs were prepared for the impact on air and noise pollution, and advice was given on ecology and landscape. Evidence was also given at a planning hearing into the refusal to give planning permission for a new green composting facility at Allostock (the appeal was turned down).
Monitoring and enforcement

The Team has supported Enforcement Officers in monitoring and enforcing planning conditions and agreements.

The annual Manchester Airport S106 monitoring report was prepared, and professional input was given via the Technical Advisory Group, Environmental Health Officers Group and Landscape and Habitat Management Steering Group. Natural environment advice was given in respect of obligations under a S106 agreement at Hough Mill, Wybunbury and in relation to the discharge of planning conditions at: Stublach Gas Storage Project; Dingle Bank Quarry; Fourways Quarry; Brereton Green; and Endon Quarry.

Compliance with planning conditions for noise has been carried out at properties adjacent to Macclesfield Waste Transfer Station and near Gowy Landfill site.

Noise and monitoring surveys were conducted for Highways in Haslington and Middlewich to assess whether traffic calming schemes had caused noise impacts that would require noise insulation grants for nearby sensitive properties.

Noise and vibration surveys relating to road traffic impacts were conducted at private properties at: Walkers Barn, Macclesfield (A537); Congleton (A34); nr Poynton (A5149); Saxon Way in Blacon; and Middlewich (A54).

Vibration monitoring has been carried out at properties near Gowy Landfill and in Lach Dennis.

An air monitoring report was prepared for the Neuro-muscular Centre near Winsford Household Waste and Recycling Centre.

Topographical surveys and engineering advice arising from minerals planning applications has been given at a number of sand and stone quarries in the Congleton-Macclesfield area.

Sustainable rural management

The Team advises on sustainable land management in rural areas, and in particular works closely with the Forestry Commission, DEFRA and the County Council’s Public Rights of Way Unit to encourage good practice.

The County Council is a statutory consultee for planting proposals for new woodlands of 10 hectares or more. New woodland planting of this size within Cheshire is unusual and no consultations were received during the year.

The Forestry Commission Online Register of New Planting and Felling includes all applications for planting grants and all felling licence applications. These were monitored during the year and in excess of 30 proposals were appraised. Comments were made on 10 proposals and a more detailed response submitted for one potentially contentious scheme. This involved the large scale clearance of trees from Beeston Castle which is a visually prominent site managed by English Heritage. The archaeological need for the felling was accepted although suggestions were made as to how initial impacts of the proposals could be minimised and the local community kept informed. One felling licence application was withdrawn by the applicant following comments from the County Council and Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council.

Under the terms of a national arrangement between DEFRA and the Association of Local Government Archaeologists, the Team advised on 19 applications for the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme.

As part of arrangements under a new protocol agreed in 2007 between the Team and Rights of Way colleagues, 20 consultations were received for Public Rights of Way diversions, proposed permissive routes and new paths.

“The County Council is a statutory consultee for a variety of environmental land management schemes”
On 18 March 2008 the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) agreed to invest £17.3 million to create 170 hectares of new green spaces in Cheshire and Warrington.

The grant will be managed by Cheshire County Council under the REVIVE Programme, which aims to transform brownfield land across the sub-region into new community resources with improved public access, including enhanced provision for nature conservation on previously developed land.

The Programme, which will run for 22 years, aims to improve the region’s living and working environments and make England’s North-west a more viable place for investment opportunities. It will cover 20 individual sites - 18 in Cheshire and 2 in Warrington - many within the Weaver Valley Regional Park, and will include the creation of a new cycleway between Chester and Mickle Trafford.

Partners in the scheme include Groundwork Cheshire, Community Forests, Local Authorities, the Land Restoration Trust, the Weaver Valley Regional Park and the Cheshire and Warrington Economic Alliance.

In anticipation of securing the formal agreement with the NWDA, negotiations have been on-going throughout the year with a number of landowners of sites associated with the chemical industry in order to identify potential partners. Topographical surveys have been undertaken on some of the sites. Scheme design has commenced on a number of projects including the proposed Chester to Mickle Trafford Cycleway along the route of a former railway.

A Core Team is in the process of being appointed to deliver the Programme.

Sites reclaimed through the REVIVE Programme will provide opportunities for countryside recreation, safe walking, cycling and horse-riding, and the creation of valuable wildlife habitats.
Environmental regeneration projects

The Team has helped shape numerous regeneration and landscape improvement projects across the county.

Urban design schemes were prepared for Chester Rail Station and Welsh Row in Nantwich, both acknowledging their significant historical context. Chester Station Square, a £1.3 million remodelling project which forms a key element of the £10 million Chester Renaissance Initiative, was designed and constructed in partnership with Highways’ Special Projects Team. A roundabout was moved from the Station frontage to Brook Street and “Chester Station Square” was created including: new roads; Yorkstone, granite and sett paving; drainage systems; pedestrian crossings; taxi rank; 6 bus stops and shelters; short -stay and disabled parking; traffic islands and signage. The Welsh Row scheme has been designed in liaison with Highway engineers to reduce the heavy traffic on a sensitive residential area, whilst encouraging pedestrian use.

Masterplans have been prepared for Middlewich and Nantwich as part of the Weaver Valley Regional Park’s vision to provide focal points for regeneration activities in each town. Prepared with local people, these plans set out a vision for: regenerating each town centre and creating a lively and thriving focus for local residents and visitors; building upon each town’s heritage and local distinctiveness; enhancing the canal corridors to benefit boaters, towpath users and wildlife; protecting and conserving the natural environment and improving access for all to open spaces and the surrounding countryside, and; creating a sense of ownership within the local community of each town’s unique features.

Additional work for the Weaver Valley Regional Park included the production of a Weaver Way Feasibility Study. This comprised a survey and assessment of existing footpaths along the Trent & Mersey and Shropshire Union Canals, including recommendations for improvement. This work was then progressed to delivering 2 exemplar projects at Nantwich and Frodsham. This included the design and supervision of canal towpath improvements at Acton Canal Bridge and Nantwich Marina and footpath improvements along the banks of the River Weaver at Frodsham.

At Macclesfield Learning Zone, a landscape design scheme was developed in partnership with Macclesfield Borough Council, landscape architects and school children. This proposed an external art space, quiet space and external dining area, wildflower meadow and tree planting.

Landscape maintenance projects at Whitley Pit, Acton Bridge and Crewe Green Link road involved newly created woodland, formal planting areas on roundabouts and also wildlife mitigation areas.

Specialist advice to colleagues in the Countryside Management Service has included detailed design, preparation of contract documents and site supervision for a number of recreation sites including: public access improvements at Teggs Nose Country Park; disabled access improvement works at the Weaver Parkway, Winsford; footpath improvement works at Brereton Heath Country Park; footpath improvements at Alsager former landfill site; site investigations into problems of flooding at Biddulph Valley Way; and production of a feasibility study and detailed design for a multi-user underpass below the Wheelock Bypass at a point where the highway passes at elevation over the river and canal. This would allow an important recreational route, the Wheelock Way, to pass safely below the highway by means of a raised boardwalk.

Additional advice and support was given to the Waste Management Service for the restoration of former household waste sites at Newgate Tip, Wilmslow and Pymms Lane, Crewe. This included detailed designs, the preparation of contract documents and site supervision.

A Landscape Design scheme is currently being drafted for the Alderley Edge Bypass. The scheme will involve planting over 9 km of hedges and 23 ha of woodland and shrubs; as well as creating wetland, grassland and 13 new settlement basins and conservation ponds. Badgers and Great Crested Newts will be protected during the construction works.

Footpath improvements at Nantwich Marina, as part of the Weaver Valley Regional Park

“Successful regeneration works with the landscape: drawing inspiration from a neighbourhood’s indigenous character to strengthen local identity”

Visual illustration of proposals for Middlewich Town Wharf
Sandstone Ridge ECOnet Partnership

More than £290,000 of County Council and Rural Enterprise funding has benefited the many and diverse habitats along the Sandstone Ridge during 2007.

The improvements - part of the ongoing Sandstone Ridge ECOnet Partnership (SREP) initiative to create interconnected areas of habitats that benefit local people and wildlife - have been made to hedgerows, woodland and grassland, ponds and sandstone walling. 54 separate projects have been supported, delivering:

- 5km of hedgerow restoration and planting
- 11.6 ha of woodland restoration and planting
- 3.8 ha of grassland restoration, and
- 365 metres of walling, using local craftsmen.

Local farmers, landowners and volunteers have provided in excess of £100,000 worth of private contributions.

Other funded works have included the development of 19 more visitor-friendly access points to the Ridge, the restoration of the Dovecote at Peckforton (an historic structure) and protection to the ramparts of the Iron Age hillfort at Helsby Hill.

Habitats and Hillforts

The chain of important hill-top forts concentrated along the Sandstone Ridge is the focus of a new £2.2 million scheme – the Habitats and Hillforts of Cheshire’s Sandstone Ridge.

Hillforts are the most conspicuous features of the Iron Age that can still be seen in our landscape. The scheme will target resources at six hillforts and their surrounding habitats and landscapes in order to improve their conservation and the public’s experience of them.

The scheme is led by Cheshire County Council in partnership with English Heritage, National Trust, Woodland Trust, Forestry Commission, Cheshire Community Council, Vale Royal Borough Council and local landowners. Subject to a successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, the scheme will run for 3 years and help to raise awareness of these special assets and the issues affecting them. Practical activities will improve their condition, their surrounding habitats and their links with the landscape and encourage more people to enjoy them and take an active role in their management.

There is a lot to be discovered about Cheshire’s hillforts. Very little is known about them in terms of chronology, function, occupation history, economy and status. The scheme has already started to reassess what we know about these sites, which will develop our understanding of them and lead to enhanced interpretation.

How these sites were used in the medieval, post-medieval and modern periods has contributed to their physical state today. Ploughing, woodland planting, scrub encroachment, and even use as an army cadet training area have all left their mark. Thorough ecological and archaeological condition surveys of the hillforts will be followed by maintenance work, as well as a reassessment of their current landuse and long term management.

The scheme will also provide opportunities for local communities to get involved in archaeological and ecological surveys; work to create access links with the Sandstone Trail and; provide both on and off site interpretation. All of this will help enhance public awareness of the hillforts, their great antiquity and their importance in the landscape.
Trees - managing the risk

In 2005 Cheshire County Council commissioned an independent study into ‘Tree Risk’ in response to a number of major legal cases involving tree-related injury and death within the UK.

The findings highlighted the authority’s corporate responsibility to manage the risks associated with trees and led to the Council instigating the Tree Risk Management Project, with four main strands: survey & inspection; training; risk zoning; and strategy & policy.

For the first time a full survey is providing a snapshot of the numbers and condition of trees under the Council’s control. Dead, dying or dangerous trees can be hazards and County Council locations are accessed by millions of people every year using Public Rights of Way, highways, country parks and schools etc. Data has already been collected for more than 73,000 trees, with one third of the road network and half of school sites still to be surveyed! Approximately 100 imminently dangerous trees have so far been removed as a consequence of the survey.

A number of different strands of training have been developed in order to meet the needs of colleagues with varying degrees of tree knowledge. An online ‘Tree Awareness Training Course’ has been pioneered with a partner academic establishment. Designed for colleagues with site responsibilities but no background in trees, this has seen more than 100 members of staff from Highways, Community Services and Waste Management trained. The training will be rolled out to all Departments and Services with site responsibilities over the next few months.

For staff with some tree knowledge, such as Countryside Rangers, training has been provided to a nationally recognised standard in Basic Tree Inspection & Survey. Six courses have been held, resulting in 62 members of staff being trained. In addition, 5 members of staff have been trained to Professional Tree Inspection Level, the highest nationally recognised level.

The risk zoning process forms a fundamental part of the project and will inform tree managers where to direct resources. For example, a tree in poor condition in a high risk area such as a major road will receive attention before a tree in poor condition in a low risk area such as a rural road. The information will improve the planning of future maintenance programmes.

The three strands above will provide the information to develop Service Strategies which will operate under the umbrella of a County Tree Policy. Service Strategies will soon be in place within Countryside, Community Services, Waste Management and County Farms.

A healthy heritage

The County Council is custodian of around 400 different types of heritage assets, including nationally important Scheduled Monuments and Listed Buildings.

A second health check of 59 of these assets was completed in 2007. These included boundary stones, milestones, stocks, and groups of bollards and railings at locations across the county.

All of the structures surveyed are on Highways land. The majority were found to be in good condition and at “low” risk.

Where issues are identified, further surveys may be required. At Marton moated site a condition survey has been commissioned with a view to consolidating the fabric of the structures in order to improve their condition.

The health checks are helping the authority to understand the assets in its care and ensure that they are passed on in good condition for future generations to enjoy.

“Fallen trees on County Council land have caused injury. This initiative will help reduce those risks”

“The first stage of tree risk management is to assess and quantify the degree of risk”

More than 60 milestones and mileposts in Cheshire are listed
Environmental policy

The Team has informed a wide range of policy and strategy documents, ensuring that the protection, conservation and enhancement of environmental resources is properly recognised and fully and effectively integrated.

Most of these relate to proposed changes to the land use planning system, for example: Planning for Sustainable Future White Paper; Congleton LDF Core Strategy Issues and Options; Congleton LDF Supplementary Planning Document: Rural Development; Crewe and Nantwich LDF Core Strategy Issues and Options; Minerals Development Framework Core Strategy Issues and Options.

Advice was also given to: Higher Level Scheme Targeting Guidance for the Northwest; Cheshire Public Art Strategy; and the Consultation on Restructuring English Heritage Regional Science Advisor Posts.

Officers advised on ways to reduce noise impacts as part of a Noise Action Plan that may be required as part of the European Noise Directive.

County Councillors were briefed on proposed changes to heritage protection (the Heritage White Paper), as well the Council’s biodiversity duties under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act.

Nantwich Waterlogged Deposits Strategy

Nantwich is underlain by a rich archaeological resource of organic waterlogged deposits, unique in Cheshire and exceptional in the Northwest.

In an attempt to understand more about these resources and to address the issues of their continued survival in the context of modern development and hydrological change, the Team has set up the Nantwich Waterlogged Deposits Project with the support of English Heritage and Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council.

Carried out by SLR Consulting Ltd., the results from a coring programme and assessment of soil samples recovered from the boreholes have helped to define the limits and depth of the waterlogged deposits, as well as characterising their nature.

Two distinct zones of preservation have been identified; a low-lying zone adjacent to the river in which well-preserved organic remains have been recovered, and a secondary zone along the higher slopes in which organic preservation has been detected but active decay appears to be in progress.

Samples from the organic-rich deposits have been submitted by English Heritage for radiocarbon dating, which should assist with dating the onset of the waterlogging process.

A well-informed management strategy is in preparation which will provide archaeologists, planners and developers with information on the archaeological implications of future developments in Nantwich in order to ensure the survival of the town’s archaeology through sympathetic construction methods.

A project design for a second stage of the project is being produced which, subject to funding from English Heritage, will help to monitor the stability of the waterlogged deposits and the long-term feasibility of preservation in situ.
Cheshire Archaeology Day 2007

Archaeologist and broadcaster Julian Richards was this year’s guest speaker at Cheshire Archaeology Day.

The popular event took place at The Memorial Hall in Northwich on Saturday 21st April 2007 and, as usual, was sold out.

Julian Richards, famous for his “Meet the Ancestors” TV programme, spoke about recent archaeological work at Stonehenge and the building of a new visitor centre there.

Talks also covered recent archaeological work at the Chester Amphitheatre taking in the many finds found on the site, including an unusual post medieval pot in the shape of an owl; the Old Mill Congleton, which may have been designed by James Brindley; the latest on conserving the Nantwich salt ship; and the national Portable Antiquities Scheme which records finds including those made by metal detectorists.

“This annual event is always extremely popular” said Cheshire’s Historic Environment Champion County Councillor Peter Byrne.

Revealing Cheshire’s Past

Revealing Cheshire’s Past promotes physical and intellectual access to the County Historic Environment Record.

The public access database available on the web has both guest and registered users. The database had 166 new registered users between April 2007 and March 2008, taking the total to over 500. When asked to define their area of interest, 33% of users state that they have a general interest, 27% are professionals, 26% are students, 7% are teachers/lecturers and the remaining 7% are classified as “other”.

During the year the software and web interface used by the public access database were upgraded. This will enable users to interrogate the data using the County Council’s internet mapping service, as well as the Revealing Cheshire’s Past web pages. It also allows the data to be read by the English Heritage sponsored Heritage Gateway, enabling users to cross search a number of online databases holding information on the historic environment, such as, the National Monuments Record’s Pastscape, Listed Buildings Online and a number of County HERs.

Communication

Officers have promoted the work of the County Council to numerous local societies, professional organisations and conferences.

As acknowledged experts in ecological networks, the Team presented at a major UK conference to promote ecological networks organised by the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (IEEM). Our involvement included drafting IEEM’s Position Statement on ecological networks.

The latest news, developments and events of the Sandstone Ridge ECOnet Partnership were disseminated by electronic newsletter – SREP E-News.

Issue 15 of Cheshire Archaeology News was published in the spring, with a circulation of 3,500 and is also available on the web.
Information management

Up-to-date, extensive and accurate information underpins the Team’s work to protect and conserve Cheshire’s environmental resources, ensuring that our advice is focused and informed.

In addition to computerised databases of over 31,000 wildlife, archaeological and historic sites, the records contain supplementary files, record cards, maps, published and unpublished sources (including numerous inventories), photographs, slides, plans, drawings, and a library of over 1500 items.

The maintenance and enhancement of this data is an ongoing process. During 2007 over 1600 new records were added to the Historic Environment Record, with amendments made to a further 648 records. 118 new consultation records and 125 mapped event records were also added.

Air quality modelling

The Team models air pollution levels throughout the county using the “Airviro” computer modelling package.

The system contains an emissions database holding information for road vehicles, rail, industry and domestic sources. Originally information was collated for the entire county but more recent data has been updated on an ad-hoc basis for specific study areas that are to be modelled. The areas that can be modelled are those where wind fields have been calculated. These areas currently are: Ellesmere Port; Chester; Crewe & Nantwich; Northwich & Winsford; Macclesfield; Congleton; and Knutsford.

There may be some opportunities for modelling work with the district councils in 2008/09. Macclesfield Borough Council has expressed an interest in commissioning some modelling for its air quality detailed assessments and Chester City may continue to use the County Council to carry out its technical analysis on the Boughton Gyratory air quality management area.

The Airviro system is also used to collect and manage data from 3 real time air quality monitors at different locations in the county.

There are currently 12 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) in Cheshire. The past year has seen the development of the action plans in Congleton, Ellesmere Port and Nantwich. The detailed assessment conducted by the County Council for the Boughton Gyratory led to the declaration of the AQMA by Chester City Council.

Currently the Local Transport Plan Annual Progress Report is being put together with an air quality section showing the status of the air quality action plans.
Cheshire’s Landscape Character

A draft Landscape Character Assessment has been completed to aid understanding of the differences between Cheshire’s landscapes, and to serve as a framework for decision-making that respects their local distinctiveness.

Landscape is the dynamic backdrop to our lives. It is how we perceive the relationship between nature and culture in our surroundings. It is a living record of the interaction between people and place that is vital to our local and national identity. It is a driver for local economies; a resource that must be carefully managed and maintained.

The draft Assessment, which identifies and describes 20 different Landscape Character Types, is going through a process of consultation - first with Cheshire’s district councils and a number of other organisations, and then at a later stage with the public.

It is hoped that the document will stimulate a wide-ranging debate to consider the most important issues affecting the Cheshire landscape. This discussion will then assist the formulation of policies and guidance for communities, developers, farmers and land managers, landscape and planning professionals to understand what makes a particular landscape unique, and to plan and manage landscape change more effectively.

The Landscape Character Assessment has been informed by two other major pieces of work undertaken by the Team in recent years.

The Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) has characterised the historic processes that have gone into shaping Cheshire’s modern landscape. HLC has been designed to ensure that the whole fabric of the historic landscape is taken fully into account in decision-making. It also enables a broader landscape-based approach to the interpretation of data held in the Historic Environment Record and to the formulation of planning advice on the historic environment.

The final report, including GIS mapping, was published in February 2008 and is available on the County Council’s website. An additional brochure summarising the HLC project and providing general guidance for the sustainable management of historic landscapes has been produced. This is targeted at parish councils and community groups embarking on parish plans, village design statements and parish landscape character analysis.

The Cheshire Ecological Network has defined a strategic network of expanded and linked areas for wildlife that aims to improve conditions for wildlife and enhance people’s quality of life. A web-based toolkit provides guidance about where to expand areas of wildlife and improve connectivity, what types of habitat should be given priority, the size and shape of each habitat that is required ecologically to create viable networks and what type of vegetation communities we should aim to create.

All three pieces of work are valuable spatial tools to inform and guide development and land use changes and ensure that they are sustainable.

“The use of landscape character assessment to inform local policy making is one example of putting into practice the European Landscape Convention which became binding on the UK in 2007”
The Regeneration Resources Team works to:

- **Protect, conserve and enhance Cheshire’s environmental resources (the natural and historic environment, air and noise quality, landscape, land, and trees)**
- **Increase people’s understanding and enjoyment of those resources, and**
- **Broaden access to resources, both physical and intellectual.**

We do this within a framework of legislation and central and local government policy and guidance, and in partnership with colleagues from across a wide range of Council Services as well as externally with national and local agencies, district and parish councils, private industry, developers, societies and individual members of the public.

### The year ahead

2008 promises to be a year of further changes as preparations are put in place for the establishment of two new unitary Councils for East Cheshire and West Cheshire and Chester.

The major task for the Team will be to ensure that our environmental expertise is appropriately included in the structures of the new authorities, and to prepare for the transfer of staff and resources.

During this period of change we will strive to continue to provide high levels of service in response to increasing public concerns about the state of the environment and new Government initiatives, guidance and legislation; ensuring that the County Council meets its statutory and other obligations. In 2008 we will:

- **Continue to appraise and monitor the environmental impacts of development proposals.** Major schemes that will require our input include: Alderley Edge Bypass; Middlewich Eastern Bypass; Crewe Green Link Road; Crewe Rail Gateway; and a number of proposals for mineral extraction.
- **Progress the delivery of our strategic projects – the REVIVE programme of land reclamation and (if our bid to HLF is successful) the Habitats and Hillforts Landscape Partnership Scheme.**
- **Respond to the Draft Heritage Protection Bill, that proposes major changes to the way England’s heritage is managed and will increase responsibilities for local authorities towards the protection of the historic environment.**
- **Prepare strategies for Nantwich Waterlogged Archaeological Deposits, as well as the management of the Council’s trees.**
- **Ensure that environmental resources are integrated within the Highways Asset Management Plan and the delivery of the Local Transport Plan.**
- **Finalise a Landscape Character Assessment for Cheshire.**