

Project Number : R6 Risley Moss



Project Overview: Risley Moss is a Local Nature Reserve, SSSI and SAC owned and managed by Warrington Borough Council. The site supports 68ha of internationally important lowland raised peat bog habitat. However, due to the sensitivity of the habitat and wildlife it supports, no public access to the open mossland is permitted.

This major project further enhances the accessibility within the Mini-Moss bog education area. This will include a raised and fenced boardwalk to replace the existing path made impassable by essential bog restoration work and a formalised walkway within the only section of easily accessible mossland in the area. A raised viewing platform will be installed overlooking newly restored habitat.

Project lead organisation and other organisations involved: Warrington Borough Council

Project Location: Risley Moss, Birchwood, Warrington

Project dates: 2017 onwards

Project Outputs

Measure	Target	Delivered	Notes
179 m of fenced raised timber boardwalk created	0.18km	0.18km	
40 m of pathway created	0.04km	0.04km	
14 channels blocked	14	14	
210 m channels rewetted	0.21km	0.21km	1.2ha of lowland raised bog restored. 1.5ha of wet woodland re-wet.
Raised viewing platform.		1	

Reflecting on the last 5 years, what's the one thing that you're most proud of that has come from your project being part of the Carbon Landscape?

The Mini-moss bunding and rewetting works have created a mosaic of bog pools, bog and wet woodland in an area that was previously dominated by bracken and scrub. There have been obvious benefits to biodiversity but the boardwalk has made it into a public experience. Having left all of the motorways, ring roads and housing estates of Birchwood behind, all of a sudden you pass through the gates of Risley Moss and into this different place. The boardwalk through the Mini Moss has enhanced the visitor experience and made it accessible to all.

Dr Paul Thomas of Natural England said: “It is another place with its own serenity, specialist plants and different rules apply. You gain a sense of being part of an ancient landscape.”

What difference has this project made to the cultural and natural heritage of Carbon Landscape?

Warrington Borough Council ranger Mark Cozens “With the restoration of the Mini-moss, we saw the outcomes for biodiversity immediately. Dragonfly surveys carried out with our Friends, Risley Moss Action Group (RiMAG), indicated that nine species had moved in straight away. This brings nature close to people's viewpoint because as they are walking down the boardwalk, the damselflies and dragonflies are resting up, sunning themselves. It ties in beautifully with environmental education and some of our key reptile species have also moved in there over the last few years: slow worms and the common lizard.

Some of our rarer birds; snipe and jack snipe have occasionally enjoyed the Mini-moss. The one bird that attracts visitors from all over the country to view the main mossland is the hobby. On rare occasions it visits the Mini-moss as it sheltered from the wind. Here they can take advantage of the abundance of dragonflies and damselflies.

The lowland raised bog habitat has responded quickly to the rewetting works with some of the key indicator bog species naturally regenerating. Before the works, there was only one small patch of *Sphagnum fimbriatum* holding on at the bottom of a dry ditch. We now have four species of *Sphagnum* that have spread across the entire Mini-moss. Other positive indicators are the cross-leaved heath, common cotton grass and ling heather. This is all because we have stabilised the hydrology and are keeping the water on site. This has greatly benefitted the other rare habitat of adjacent wet woodland which is especially important for rare species like the willow tit.”

What difference has this project made to people?

The new Access for All boardwalk and habitat has been well received by the community. Both children and adults have commented on the feeling of moving into a different space with contrasting vegetation. You feel as if you are going into a different realm.

Also, because we have let some of vegetation grow into the boardwalk you feel like you are part of the bog, in the habitat, not separate from it. In reality, this is the only place you can do this because the main mossland area is too vast and dangerous to allow open access.

Sphagnum squeezing and bouncing on the moss always go down well as activities with children. The main groups to whom a difference has been made are RiMAG, local families, local school visitors and wildlife enthusiasts. We can offer a wider experience to different groups.

The boardwalk forms part of the wider Wildlife and Orienteering trails created in partnership with the Mersey Forest. We have run some terrific events pre pandemic. Some of those have been our regular Green Safari, Halloween and Christmas Elf Hunt. But a standout event was the Boggarty Boggart day (reported in Carbon Connections) and the wonderful puppets. There has also been many films made about Risley Moss. We have appeared on BBC news, Natural England's Artist in

Residence Film showing inclusive mosslands, Virtual reality film to be viewed through a headset which is particularly valuable for people who cannot access nature easily or are housebound and then the children's film with Professor Jiggett. We have fantastic relationships with disability groups especially More Than Words CIC.

Comment by Andy Pearson member of Risley Moss Action Group.



Comment by a young adult with additional needs from More Than Words CIC



Useful Links

Opening of the Boardwalk www.carbonlandscape.org.uk/risley-moss-board-walk-opening

Audio trail with Mersey Forest www.warrington.gov.uk/risley-moss-nature-trails

Reintroduce Your Love Children's Video called with the lyrics "Revegetate the moss to reintroduce your love" with the actor Professor Jigget <https://youtu.be/gcxE8BPL6nk>

"Resurgence" VR Immersive Experience www.carbonlandscape.org.uk/vr-immersive-experience-resurgence

Podcast looking at the Character areas of the Carbon Landscape including interviews with the rangers and members of RiMAG www.carbonlandscape.org.uk/why-we-love-carbon-landscape-0

Rewetting of Risley Moss lecture with Mark Cozens and Paul Thomas <https://youtu.be/441vkZo6XsY>

The Story of Six Peat Bogs in a Day <https://youtu.be/4sgBDTm1FrM>

Next to Nature with Natural England with Gorse Covert Primary School, More Than Words CIC and RiMAG <https://youtu.be/f8wuPbhus1g>

Future Plans and Legacy

The viewing platform, boardwalk and Mini-moss will last for decades to come as will the visitors experience. The films are an integral part of the community education.

The partnership with Natural England is an integral and one of the most important partnerships for us to maintain into the future. The Mini-moss received massive input from Paul Thomas. With natural ecosystems there is not “a final destination” but constant fine tuning as you go. Our ways of working with partners and subcontractors has meant that we have confidence going into the future.

We are getting Risley Moss to the point where we can support species reintroduction e.g. white-faced darter dragonfly.

The work at Risley Moss has given confidence to other sites like that owned by the Woodland Trust at Pestfurlong. There was initially unease about removing scrub and rewetting, often by dog walkers, but because they have seen it work at Risley then can see that the importance of mosslands and it is important that they now that they are part of that tiny fragment of lowland raised bog that is left.

Finally, Risley Moss is to become part of a Proposed Mosslands National Nature Reserve and whilst early days a hub for the communities of Warrington and surrounds. As part of that there has been video documentation of all restoration works on site that will be stored with Warrington Council archives. This is quite technical but for future rangers.

Lessons learned?

As the project had been formulated over a long period of time, we had to wait for the Carbon Landscape to start and so we were chomping on the bit to get the Mini-moss improvements and boardwalk. I think our biggest lesson is the importance of getting the right contractors and building their confidence. This does not necessarily mean going for the cheapest one but the one who understands the needs of the bog.

Photographic Evidence

First three photos by Dr Paul Thomas, Natural England



Working on Risley Moss with a rainbow	Aerial shot from drone of the boardwalk
 <p>Restored Mini-moss</p>	 <p>Launch day of the Boardwalk with ITV Northwest</p>

Funding Partners

