

Beautyspot gets official vote



Photographer Gary Louth captures the atmosphere inside the forest and some of the colour (inset)

AN URBAN woodland site in Blackley is set for official recognition after plans to develop it as the city's second local nature reserve were approved this week.

Blackley Forest, a green oasis off Blackley New Road, is already classed as a Grade B Site of Biological Importance, with many good examples of broad-leaved trees, alongside a rich variety of ground fauna.

Situated just off Blackley New Road the forest sits on both sides of the River Irk, and is a woodland area largely created by community planting in 1953 to commemorate soldiers from the area lost in the Second World War.

The 19 hectare site is managed as part of the Irk Valley Project, and contains a diverse mix of habitats including meadows and ponds and provides a variety of leisure activities such as fishing,

by Louise Nicholson

walking and informal environmental education opportunities.

Local Nature Reserves are approved by English Nature and contain wildlife or geological features that are of special interest locally.

Members of the community have taken a great interest in the management and development of Blackley Forest through the Friends of Blackley Forest group.

Working alongside Manchester City Council and other partners including the Irk Valley Project and Red Rose Forest they have produced a 5 year management plan for the continuing preservation and enhancement of the Forest.

The City Council intends to create a number of new Reserves over the next five years as part of

Wildabout Manchester, the wildlife plan which aims to conserve, protect and enhance biodiversity in the city.

Residents can check out www.wildaboutmanchester.info for more information and to nominate their own biodiversity hotspots.

Councillor Neil Swannick, Executive Member for Planning and Environment said: "Blackley Forest is a tremendous resource for the local community.

"We hope that many more people will now be encouraged to use and enjoy all that it has to offer. Local Nature Reserves are a key part of the strategy to make Manchester greener and ensure that the city's wildlife is protected for future generations. We plan to develop a number of Reserves throughout the city and we want local residents to follow the examples set at Blackley Forest by playing a key role."