

Wildflower meadows bloom in Cheshire

WITH the summer finally seeming to have arrived, now is a great time to get out and about to visit woods and meadows around the region, which have burst into colour, says the UK's leading woodland conservation charity, the Woodland Trust.

Two great local sites are Wheeldon Copse, Alvanley and Thorn Wood, Weaverham – both in the Frodsham area.

Speaking about Wheeldon Copse, site manager Tim Kirwin explained that his first project for the Woodland Trust was the 'Forest of Flowers', in partnership with environmental charity Landlife, back in 2003.

"Wheeldon Copse was the first site nationally where the Trust implemented the highly innovative technique of deep ploughing and sowing with wildflowers before tree planning. The success of the project has been credited to a new ploughing method, whereby soil up to one metre deep, is inverted using a special Bovlund plough. The plough buries the fertile top layer of soil while bringing to the surface the sterile sub-level on which wildflowers thrive.

"Wildflowers play a vital role in creating new woods, helping newly planted woodland become established by acting as ground cover to stave off weeds, and quickly attracting wildlife to the site. The success of the project at Wheeldon Copse led to several other major 'Forest of Flowers' projects being launched across the country.

"Landlife has, over the past 30 years, developed the idea of 'Creative Conservation' – the creation of new places from scratch where wildlife can flourish and which people can enjoy. This idea was in evidence at Wheeldon Copse, where schoolchildren from Alvanley Primary School sowed wildflower seeds, including poppies and blue cornflowers, in October 2003, at the start of the project. These and other annuals are supported by many perennials, and both underpin the 6,500 trees which were planted at the same time, and which are now standing tall above the flowers. The natural look of the trees on the site had contributed to its huge success."

He added that local people had remarked that the site was now reminiscent of how

Cheshire had looked in the past.

■ To find out more about Wheeldon Copse and Thorn Wood, visit the website www.woodlandtrust.org.uk.

