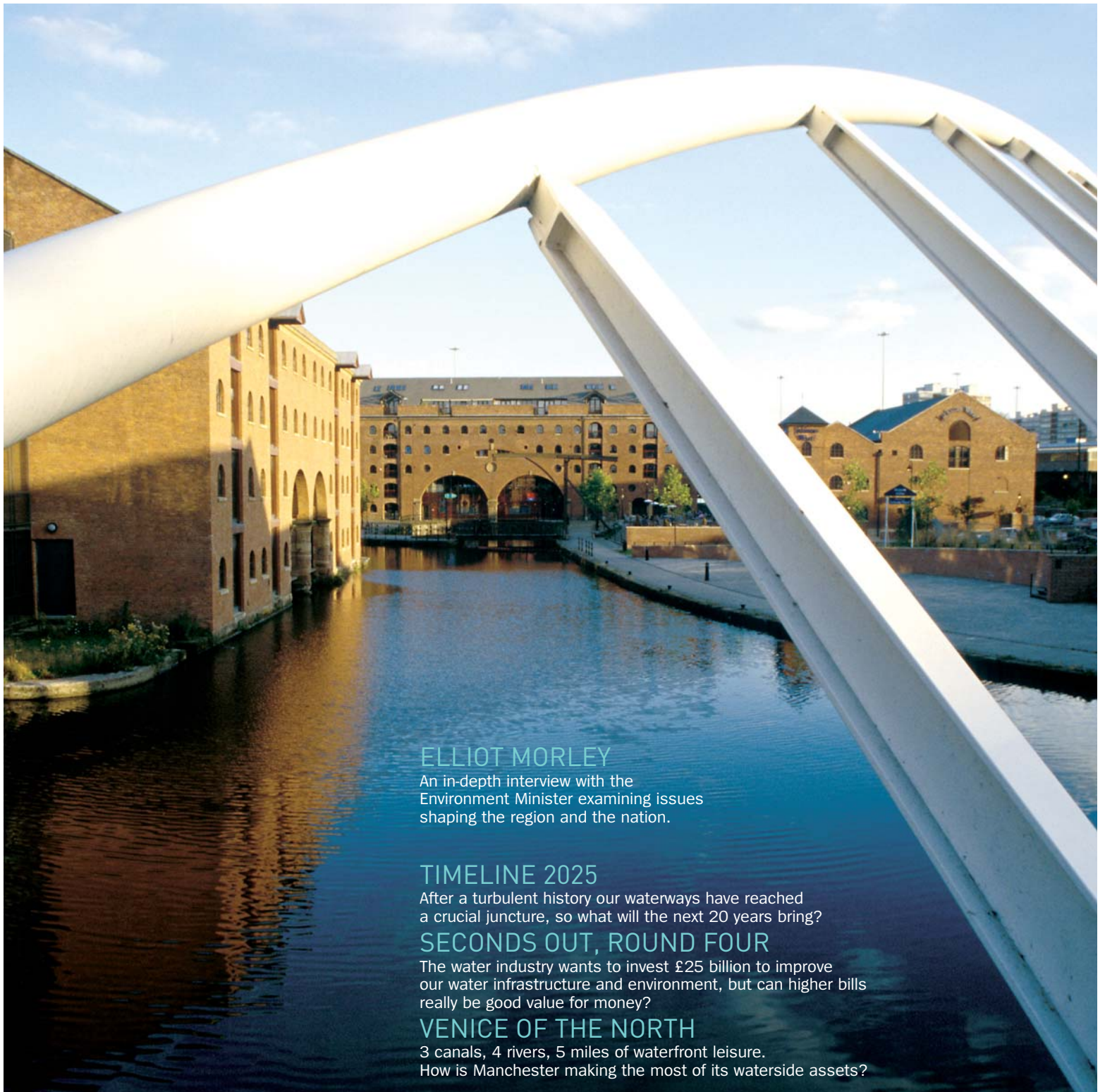


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WATERS | REGENERATION | ENVIRONMENT | SUSTAINABILITY



ELLIOT MORLEY

An in-depth interview with the Environment Minister examining issues shaping the region and the nation.

TIMELINE 2025

After a turbulent history our waterways have reached a crucial juncture, so what will the next 20 years bring?

SECONDS OUT, ROUND FOUR

The water industry wants to invest £25 billion to improve our water infrastructure and environment, but can higher bills really be good value for money?

VENICE OF THE NORTH

3 canals, 4 rivers, 5 miles of waterfront leisure. How is Manchester making the most of its waterside assets?



As well as providing your water services, we also help keep the seas in the North West clean.

 **United Utilities**
Supplying life's essentials
Water Power Telecoms Home Services

At United Utilities we don't just provide clean water to your taps. We also take away your wastewater, clean it and return it safely to the environment. The region's coastal water is cleaner now than at any time since the industrial revolution. So much so that 36 out of 37 bathing areas now meet strict European Union standards, compared with just six in 1988.



These are interesting times for those whose lot it is to work in the realms of water, the

environment or regeneration. Looking ahead, decisions made in the coming months will help shape the future of our region, as well as the entire country.

In part we're starting to feel the force of a steady stream of new Directives from Europe. The Freshwater Fish Directive, Nitrates Directive, Bathing Waters Directive and the Water Framework Directive - the kingpin of them all - are raising the environmental bar. Rising to them won't be easy.

Here in the UK, the Water Bill has left the Lords and entered the Commons, sparking controversy over its fluoridation amendment as it goes. Soon it too will alter the legislative landscape.

Meanwhile, the Northwest is a region awash with encouraging news. Liverpool will be the Capital of Culture in 2008, Manchester has been called the most creative place in the country and sustainable development supremo Jonathon Porritt has hailed the region a leader in sustainable regeneration.

The challenge ahead is a complex but crucial one - a cleaner environment, a healthy economy and a sustainable future - and it's closer than it's ever been. Let's keep our eyes on the prize.

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Source Northwest is published quarterly by the Mersey Basin Campaign. The opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the publishers.

Comments and feedback are welcomed and should be addressed to the editor.

Source Northwest is printed on 100% post-consumer waste recycled paper using vegetable-based inks.

Source Northwest is sponsored by



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Cover Manchester's Castlefield (p18)

© Clare Hayes / picturesofmanchester.com



Grand buildings drive Northwest's architectural renaissance

The Northwest is rediscovering the gems of its architectural heritage and bidding for worldwide recognition.



ROYAL MILLS IS AT THE HEART OF A MULTI-MILLION POUND REGENERATION SCHEME

MORE INFORMATION:

www.liverpool.gov.uk
www.nwda.co.uk
www.neweastmanchester.com
www.ingrealestate.co.uk

At one time, Liverpool and Manchester vied to out perform each other, as in most other things, in the prestige of their buildings. But in the dark days of the Northwest's decline a century later, it was easy to forget that the region had once been at the epicentre of Victorian architecture.

Now, a £65 million regeneration scheme will see four historic mills in the Ancoats area of Manchester transformed into a canalside complex of apartments, shops, offices, cafes, bars and commercial facilities. The Royal Mills site is the first private sector development for the Ancoats Urban Village. Overlooking the Rochdale canal, the mills stand adjacent to Murray Mills, which are themselves being preserved in another multi-million pound project.

The flagship three year scheme is supported by the Ancoats Urban Village Company and New East Manchester Ltd, and is part-funded to the tune of £8.8 million by the Northwest Development Agency. The work is being undertaken by international property giant ING Real Estate, which previously pioneered similar large scale schemes with historic buildings such as Liverpool's Albert Docks.

ING's chief executive Ian Pearce declared the aim to be "creating a thriving and sustainable community in a truly mixed development, which will appeal to residents, visitors and businesses alike."

Like the construction of the City of Manchester Stadium for the successful 2002 Commonwealth Games, the project represents a major link in the efforts to regenerate east Manchester. But in one way the Royal Mills project differs significantly from its flashy predecessor. The massive amount of private cash being pumped into it - almost as much as was spent on the nearby stadium - is being hailed as the crucial element if Ancoats is to enjoy long term rejuvenation.

"Ancoats is regarded as the world's first industrial suburb," according to Stefan Brzozowski, development manager at Ancoats Urban Village. The historic urban village area, of which Royal Mills forms an important part, is on the UK shortlist to be nominated for World Heritage Site status. It is the first time a bid from Greater Manchester has been shortlisted.

Across the region, meanwhile, Liverpool's grand waterfront and surrounding civic buildings are further along in the nomination process and will find out in the middle of next year if they are to join Unesco's worldwide list of 730 sites.

Industrial archaeologist Steve Little, who is advising ING on the Royal Mills project, said of it, "New life will be breathed into the buildings, creating a modern day version of the vibrant and internationally recognised community which lived here a century ago." With restoration efforts continuing apace across the region and the prospect of international recognition on the horizon, the region's architectural heritage is emerging as the jewel in its crown.

As many as three hundred anglers are expected to compete in the UK's biggest beach based **sea-angling tournament** at Otterspool on Merseyside. Held on November 29-30, the international standard event is ranked 'UK Masters' and national and world champions are expected to compete for the £20,000 prize money. Fishing competitions are now regular events on the Mersey and its tributaries. According to comments on the National Federation of Sea Anglers website "the fishing on the Mersey is at its best for many years because of the river clean up system" that has been ongoing throughout the catchment for a number of years.

United Utilities (UU), the water utility for the Northwest, has called for investment of £3.8 billion over 5 years in its draft business plan. In total, the UK water industry proposes to increase investment by a full 25% to £25 billion between 2005-2010, with the aim of protecting recent improvements in services and water quality and meeting higher European standards. In July UU announced Britain's biggest rights issue of the year, hoping to raise around £1 billion towards the investment, although price rises appear unavoidable. The draft business plans are part of a process of negotiations with industry regulator Ofwat to determine prices after 2005. www.uu plc.co.uk

... two weeks later the Environment Agency, English Nature and the Countryside Council for Wales threw their collective hat into the ring with the publication of **A Good Deal For Water**. The report claims that 60% of freshwater and wetland Sites of Special Scientific Interest are in need of regeneration and calls for continued investment, although it recognises that major improvements have been achieved since the 1990s thanks to water industry investment. According to Environment Agency chief executive Barbara Young the required investment "will cost each household around the equivalent of the price of a can of fizzy drink a week." (full story, see page 12). www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Environmental regeneration pioneer **Groundwork** has published a document designed to outline its services and showcase the skills of its staff. According to Building Sustainable Communities in England's Northwest, the organisation spent over £24 million on 1,110 regeneration projects in the region last year. Jason Brindle of Groundwork's community team is quoted as saying, "We work with local communities, not for them." The Northwest is Groundwork's birthplace - the first of what is now a national network of trusts was established in St Helens in 1981. www.groundwork.org.uk

Northwich Community woodland in Cheshire is soon to receive a grant of nearly £1 million from the Northwest Development Agency. The money will help to create a bridge across Witton Brook and build new pathways around the area. The cash is part of an ongoing development project in Northwich that includes the multi-million pound restoration of the nearby Anderton Boat Lift. Tourist numbers have already been boosted by the scheme and County Councillor David Roberts considers this the "icing on the cake" of Northwich's regeneration. www.nwda.co.uk

No time to relax

Good news, says the Environment Agency: water quality is up again. But the environmental watchdog is still not satisfied.

MORE INFORMATION:

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Rivers and canals in England and Wales are cleaner now than at any time since records began, according to the latest figures from the Environment Agency (EA). In 2002 the EA studied some 7,000 sites throughout England and Wales for its annual survey of chemical and biological water quality, representing around 40,000km of rivers and canals.

In the Northwest, 63% of the nearly 6,000km of waterways tested were classified as either 'very good' or 'good' in 2002, a major step up from ten years ago, when the figure was only 50%. Looking specifically at the chemical quality of the water, 91% of the region's waterways were of good or fair chemical quality in 2002, up significantly from 75% ten years ago.

The improvements result from a potent mix of legislation, regulation and investment. European Directives and UK laws have raised the standards demanded of water quality, the Environment Agency works to enforce those standards and water utilities have invested huge sums to achieve them. In the Northwest, spending by United Utilities is running at around £2 million per day. It's the kind of investment of which the railways can only dream. Meanwhile, partnership organisations such as the Mersey Basin Campaign help the organisations to work together more effectively.

Some of the biggest improvements in recent years are the River Mersey near Warrington, the Calder near Whalley in Lancashire, Loo Gill near Alston in Cumbria, Worsley Brook near Eccles in Greater Manchester and the Manchester Ship Canal near Salford Quays. Indeed, new research from aquatic specialists APEM has revealed that the Ship Canal now has one of the fastest growing fish populations in the country (full report, page 22).

But the EA says that its figures also show that many of the country's most important rivers still need more protection from damaging pollution. High phosphorus levels were found



in more than half of all rivers in England and Wales, and high nitrate levels in nearly a third. Most worrying is that nearly 20% of rivers designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are failing to reach their full potential, leaving only 80% classified as good or very good.

The EA's concerns are partly behind its recently released report, A Good Deal For Water, which contributes to the debate on the new round of Asset Management Plans (full story, page 12). The report calls for increased investment, saying 60% of freshwater and wetland SSSIs are in need of regeneration.

According to EA chairman Sir John Harman, "The question is whether we choose to pat each other on the back and say 'well done', or do we decide to tackle phosphates and nitrates head on, and put an end to historic pollution hot spots such as storm sewage overflows."

The Northwest is a **leading region for science** in the UK, according to Dr Roland Jackson, chief executive of the BA (British Association for the Advancement of Science), which held its annual festival of science at Salford University in September. Speaking during the festival at the launch of Industrial Evolution, a new magazine from Sustainability Northwest on environmental technologies and sustainable science, he stated that the region is "definitely showing real leadership on science within the UK." www.englishnorthwest.com/sustainability

The **Environment Agency** is urging anglers with an interest in the Ribble river catchment to help develop long-term plans to improve it as a fishery. The catchment is one of Lancashire's largest, covering an area from the estuary as far as Chorley, Blackburn, Clitheroe and Burnley. The Ribble Fisheries Action Plan (FAP) aims to increase public involvement in local fisheries, conserve the water environment and promote the value of fishing. The agency is keen to hear from angling groups or individual anglers who want to input into the development of the plan, which will cover waterways of all kinds.

More information: stephen.whittam@environment-agency.gov.uk

A new project by the National Trust, Redrow Homes and Bryant Homes promises to make sustainable housing a reality. The **Brookside Farm** masterplan lays out a vision of a sustainable residential development south of Manchester with "key initiatives such as energy efficiency, reducing reliance on the private vehicle, water conservation and the recycling of waste." One goal that is certainly leading edge is the drainage system, which will "contain a range of drainage features that will enable water from roofs, roads and paths to percolate back into the ground" instead of pouring into streams and drains where it can contribute to flash flooding. www.nationaltrust.org.uk

A major project to restore former industrial land in both Liverpool and Stockport has been formally launched at an international two day conference in Essen, Germany. The **Artery** project draws in partners from four EU nations, with the Mersey Basin Campaign taking the lead both in the UK and on the role of public-private partnerships. With a potential budget worth up to £8.7 million the project will bring derelict riverside land in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK back to life.

More information: c.wilson@merseybasin.org.uk
www.merseybasin.org.uk

The arguments over the government's controversial **fluoridation** amendment to the Water Bill that have been bubbling away out of public sight for some time have begun to percolate through to the headlines. The bill is currently on its way through the Commons, trailing the same arguments it faced in the Lords in its wake, and both the BBC and Guardian have picked up on the fluoridation debate. The fluoridation amendment is widely regarded as making fluoridation of drinking water more likely, splitting opinion as to whether it ranks as a health benefit or indiscriminate mass medication. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/3054519.stm

Volunteers are key to success

MWH Mersey Basin Week 2004 succeeded in drawing in volunteers from all sectors of the community.

**LOUISE ELLMAN MP (FRONT),
BEV MITCHELL AND
MWH'S CAROLINE DOWNEY
RIDE BLOCARTS**



Events in Liverpool and Manchester kicked off this year's MWH Mersey Basin Week, the Northwest's biggest series of water themed events and activities. The week is organised by the Mersey Basin Campaign and sponsored by engineering specialists MWH with the aim of encouraging people to enjoy the region's rivers and riverside locations as well as to clean and improve the environment.

Bev Mitchell, who organised the launch events and co-ordinated the week's 180 activities, said: "We've had even more events this year than last, with over 30 schools and thousands of volunteers taking part. I'm especially happy that more youth groups than ever have been involved."

In Manchester, Chris Davies and Arlene McCarthy, Liberal Democrat and Labour MEPs for the North West Region respectively, launched the activities. Along with staff from British Waterways, Manchester City Council, Manchester Ship Canal Company, Royal Mail and local bar Barca, they cleaned up the water and watersides in Castlefield. In Liverpool, Louise Ellman, MP for Liverpool Riverside, joined volunteers from Merseyside Youth Challenge Trust to have a go in a blocart on Liverpool Pier Head.

An array of activities throughout the region then followed. They included guided bird watching on the Mersey estuary (an area of international importance for many bird species), river and canal clean ups, canoeing, river studies and boat cruises. Even a concert by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic orchestra sponsored by United Utilities was on the list.

Louise Williams, the Mersey Basin Campaign's local co-ordinator for the River Irwell in Manchester, organised five boat trips for local schoolchildren sponsored by Greater Manchester Waste. "It was an ideal opportunity for the children to learn about their local waterways and the problems of litter and pollution, and to see how much the area has improved in recent years."

At Risley Moss Nature Reserve in Warrington the Campaign's co-ordinator Hazel Lord worked with local businesses Unilever, Brunner Mond, United Utilities and Scottish Power, as well as the Prince's Trust. She said: "The response from local businesses was fantastic. We had 70 volunteers removing trees from the reserve's mossland, which is vital because it is a rare and endangered habitat."

Talking up the Ribble

The River Ribble is benefiting from high levels of investment in the environment and enjoys significant opportunities for the future, according to speakers at the annual Source to Sea conference in Chipping, Lancs. The conference was organised by Lesley Cryer, the Mersey Basin Campaign's local River Valley Initiative Co-ordinator, and brought together representatives of all the major companies and organisations with a stake in the Ribble.

Carla Kayser-Booth detailed the spending by water company United Utilities, which is driving much of the investment in the Ribble catchment. Dan Bond from the Environment Agency (EA) noted that the river is the focus of the UK's pilot project for the European Water Framework Directive, which he described as a "great opportunity" for the EA to get up-to-speed delivering the Directive. Liz O'Neill, also from the EA, spoke on the opportunity afforded by another project that will touch the Ribble. The ICREW project, "improving coastal and recreational waters for all", will look at how recreational waters can be developed.

Nevertheless, delegates were reminded that the Northwest still performs poorly in the nationally recognised beach quality schemes run by Encams, the Seaside Awards and Blue Flags. And the EA's Phil Heath argued that the Northwest faces a difficult task if it is to meet the standards of the revised European Bathing Waters Directive.

MORE INFORMATION Lesley Cryer estuary@ribblesourcetosea.org.uk

Unflagging demand

A visually spectacular art display is back by popular demand at a top Cheshire beauty spot. Artist Wendy Meadley produced a dazzling array of flags for the opening of the renovated Dutton Locks in summer 2002. Wendy worked with children from Weaverham Forest Primary School to produce original designs, from which she created individual flags. This year the flags were back, mounted on 14 staffs around a central 30-foot high pole. The commission was inspired by the collection of Mr Carl Leckey, a lock keeper at Dutton Locks for 32 years. Carl now lives in retirement at Dutton Locks and his collection of flags, donated by ships from exotic destinations as far afield as Singapore, Panama, Antigua and Lebanon, remained a secret until a visit from Ann Bates, the Mersey Basin Campaign's Weaver Valley Initiative project co-ordinator. "Meeting Carl coincided with planning the Dutton Locks project, so his fascinating hobby provided the natural material for one of our community art projects," said Ann.

MORE INFORMATION Ann Bates ann@weavervalley.freeserve.co.uk

The Mersey Basin Campaign is sponsored by



Fully immersed in sustainability

Jonathon Porritt, advisor to Tony Blair, says the Northwest is home to a wealth of innovative ideas on how to build a sustainable future.



The government is “putting its toe - it's whole foot, even - into the waters of sustainability, but there is not yet full body immersion,” according to Jonathon Porritt. The same cannot be said of Mr Porritt, who has long championed the cause of sustainable development and is chair of the UK Sustainability Commission, as well as programmes director of Forum for the Future.

Porritt made the comments when he spoke to an invited audience at the Lowry arts centre in Salford. The core theme of his speech and the lively questions and answer session that followed was the tension between optimism that progress is being made towards a sustainable future and despair that progress is not faster. “You have to be an optimist to be in sustainable development,” Porritt said at the outset.

The event was organised by the Mersey Basin Campaign and Sustainability Northwest as part of the annual MWH Mersey Basin Week, with the support of the Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) and the UK Sustainable Development Commission. Walter Menzies, chief executive of the Campaign, said: “We are very proud to have hosted this event with Jonathon Porritt. This was an opportunity to discuss the future of the Northwest with the UK’s leading sustainable development commentator.”

One cause for optimism, said Porritt, is the fact that this government has “moved things along a lot further and faster than any preceding government” on issues of sustainability. But asked about Tony Blair’s own attitude to sustainable development, he said, “Is sustainability a political concept that gets Tony Blair excited? I think the honest answer to that is no.”

Instead, much of the best work on sustainable development is being done at the regional level. And the Northwest is ahead of the game, said Porritt. He admitted that his own region, the Southwest, has been happy to follow the Northwest’s lead in establishing organisations to promote sustainability and renewable energy.

Stephen Broomhead, chief executive of the NWDA, who also spoke at the event, said the agency is mainstreaming the principles of sustainable development. “We’re putting our money where our mouth is,” he said.



ICREW launched in Blackpool

- Almost 200 delegates from Portugal, France, the Canary Islands, Ireland and the UK gathered in Blackpool in October to launch a new international project on bathing waters. The ICREW project, “improving coastal and recreational waters for all,” aims to boost the profile of recreational waters as a vital part of tourism, a healthy environment and a better quality of life.

The Environment Agency is the lead partner in the UK, working with Blackpool Borough Council, Preston City Council and the Mersey Basin Campaign. Only certain stretches of water are officially designated as bathing waters by Defra and the Campaign will ensure the right stretches are chosen in the next round of designations.

MORE INFORMATION
c.wilson@merseybasin.org.uk
www.icrew.info



Twenty-two years after the Toxteth riots, which led to his memorable period as ‘Minister for Merseyside,’ Michael Heseltine has returned to Liverpool to witness for himself the extraordinary transformation that is taking place in the city, Merseyside and the Northwest. At the invitation of the Mersey Basin Campaign, Lord Heseltine was the guest of honour at a dinner attended by local luminaries in Liverpool’s sumptuous Town Hall. A spectacular series of initiatives resulted from Michael Heseltine’s involvement with Merseyside in the early 1980’s and he congratulated Liverpool on two decades of change that have been crowned with the Capital of Culture win.

AGENDA

24 November 2003

Mersey Basin Campaign Conference

High profile speakers include Elliot Morley, Minister of State for the Environment, and Sir John Harman, chairman of the Environment Agency. The conference will ask what the future holds for water, the environment and regeneration in the Northwest.

Venue: The Investment Centre, Wigan

More information: Mersey Basin Campaign 0161 242 8200
campaign@merseybasin.org.uk

28 November 2003

Evolution or revolution?

Conference examining the implementation of the Water Framework Directive. Includes an update, a forum on outstanding critical matters and details of the draft guidance.

Venue: Church House Conference Centre, London

More information: Erica Hammond 01787 249 290

10 December 2003

Style Cities: new dimensions in regenerating the North

How can the North of England best be regenerated? What is the relevance of regionalism? How can people be involved as end users? Where will the investment come from? How can change happen in culture and enterprise? Speakers will address each of these key questions.

Venue: FACT centre, Liverpool

More information: Victoria Deakin 0800 018 1260
info@bura.org.uk

11 December 2003

Regeneration Masterclass: Community Involvement and Consultation

Eleventh in a series of best practice workshops, with speakers Alex Hirschfield and Suet Ying Ho from Liverpool University.

Venue: The Tate, Liverpool

More information: events@nwda.co.uk
www.nwda.co.uk

3 February 2004

World Wetlands Day Conference 2004

Annual conference bringing together key UK organisations involved in wetlands issues.

Venue: SOAS, London

More information: Bob Earl 01531 890 415

1 March 2004

Regeneration of Coastal Towns

Two day BURA-organised conference examining the regeneration of coastal towns. Peter White of the NWDA, which is sponsoring the event, will speak on “A New Vision for Northwest Coastal Resorts”. Prof Peter Collins, director of the Centre for the Study of Gambling and Commercial Gaming at Salford University, will discuss how proposals to liberalise gambling laws can promote economic development.

Venue: Imperial Hotel, Blackpool

More information: Victoria Deakin 0800 018 1260
victoria@bura.org.uk

24 March 2004

Current Water Resources Issues

Joint meeting of CIWEM with ICE

Venue: Preston

More information: Brendan McAndrew 01928 571 026
brendan.mcandrew@ewan.co.uk

19-21 April 2004

Management of Wastewaters Conference

Third conference focusing on the topical areas in wastewater that are demanding attention in the European Community.

Venue: Le Meridien, York

More information: Sarah Hickson 0113 242 4200

23 April 2004

Integrated River Basin Management in the North West: Problems and Solutions

Symposium addressing research priorities in river basin management for achieving and sustaining good water quality, in terms of the EU Water Framework Directive.

Venue: Geoffrey Manton Building,
Manchester Metropolitan University

More information: Dr Amanda Wright 0161 242 8200
a.wright@merseybasin.org.uk

STREAM OF WORDS

Elliot Morley, Minister for Environment and Agri-environment, talks to Walter Menzies, chief executive of the Mersey Basin Campaign.

Menzies Minister, you were brought up in Liverpool. The city is transforming itself and there is a new spirit of optimism with the Capital of Culture designation and ambitious initiatives such as the Mersey Waterfront Regional Park - a very high priority for my organisation, the Mersey Basin Campaign. When you revisit the City - and Merseyside - what strike you, on a personal level, as being the positive changes?

Morley It is some considerable time since I have lived in Merseyside but there is no doubt that the changes have been far ranging and exciting. The physical appearance of the city centre and outlying areas such as Speke and Garston is striking and the waterfront area shows how well Liverpool copes with combining its culture and history with the needs of modern cities. But the changes go deeper than the physical, the attitude of the people of Liverpool was a key factor in persuading the decision makers to award Capital of Culture to Liverpool and forthcoming activity, including the Mersey Waterfront Regional Park, is very eagerly anticipated. Liverpool and its environs have definitely established that it is a vibrant place to live, work and play in the twenty-first century.

Menzies One of your responsibilities is the Environment Agency - active partners in the Campaign. The Agency is the lead for the Water Framework Directive (WFD), a major Directive from Europe, and we are already working together on its UK pilot project. There has been talk of 'no gold plating' and questions raised about the Directive not being incorporated into the Water Bill currently before parliament, as well as how it links to vital land use issues. How will it link with the new regional spatial strategies and local plans?

Morley The Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive will require planning authorities to assess the implications of their development and land use plans for the objectives of the Water Framework Directive. All public bodies will have regard to the relevant river basin management plan when exercising any functions so far as affecting the river basin district. We are also ensuring that national and regional land use planning guidance properly reflects new water priorities and Defra is in touch with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to establish what further action, if any, is needed.

“Public participation is about making better decisions, but it is also an investment for the future.”

Menzies Defra's over-arching mission is sustainable development. The Mersey Basin Campaign has been recognised as an outstanding example of sustainable development in practice. Water quality improvements are one of the country's great successes and waterside regeneration has moved up this region's agenda, though there is still far too much dereliction. There is a risk of complacency and there are a few who argue that enough has already been done. How should the Campaign maintain its momentum?

Morley The successes of the Campaign can be a double-edged sword. It is important that the Campaign's achievements are publicised but equally important to stress that we are not yet at the point where the successes are self-sustaining. By our continuing support for the Campaign, the government recognises that further effort is required to build on the Campaign's achievements. This is the message that the Campaign must get across. The changes that the Campaign has recently made to its structure, the widening of representation on the Campaign Council and the enhanced role for the voluntary and community sectors, is already sending a clear message to the region that the Mersey Basin Campaign is as much about quality of life as about water quality and that there is still a very important job to do together.

Menzies An innovative feature of the Directive is the requirement for public participation. We know from our own experience that public participation takes time and costs money and it is widely agreed that in some other areas it often leaves a lot to be desired. What do you see as the real benefits of participation in the WFD and how far, realistically, should we go?

Morley We believe that effective public participation improves the planning process and at the same time provides for better delivery. By bringing in stakeholders with different perspectives on river basin management, we can give a spur to innovation, solve complex 'puzzles' through collaboration, and identify and exploit opportunities. There are significant links between river basin planning and existing participation processes: co-ordination between these linked decision processes will make it easier for the government and our stakeholders to target efforts and resources efficiently. Public participation is about making better decisions, but it is also an investment for the future: when stakeholders have bought into a plan, they are more likely to support and get involved in making it work. Here we are talking about building understanding and education to deliver ecological objectives. Where there has been no education or 'social learning', strategies and plans stay on shelves.



Menzies We welcome Defra's policy document "Directing the flow" and the debate Defra is encouraging on setting water and sewerage price limits as the outcome is so important for sustainable improvements in water quality. We fully support your commitment to advise OFWAT using "Directing the flow" as guidance. The fourth price review of water charges (PR04), which will set prices between 2005-2010, is well underway and it seems likely that the high levels of investment by water companies will continue to pay for environmental improvements. But industry tends to view environmental improvement as an undesirable additional cost. Is there a danger that those who pay will balk at higher bills? What more should be done to point out the benefits of higher standards and build support from bill payers?

Morley We believe that, in making decisions on water prices, it is very important to understand how paying water customers and the paying public view water policies and their priorities for spending over the 2005-2010 period. The main participants in the periodic review have engaged in a combined survey of customers' views, expectations and priorities, to help inform stakeholder decisions. The results of the first stage of the survey process were published late last year and revealed that there is some demand for further environmental improvements and some willingness to pay for this through higher water bills. These findings reinforced our general approach and we are looking forward to the results of the second stage of the customer survey, to be published next month, on customers' views on local improvements to water and sewerage services and the impact on their bills.

Menzies Many problems of point source pollution, such as from sewerage works and waterside industries, have been dealt with - largely funded by water customers through their bills and investment by these businesses. What are your thoughts on the policy levers that Ofwat does not own such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the polluter pays principle, particularly when tackling diffuse pollution, such as from agriculture?

Morley I agree that the agricultural industry needs to play its part in reducing water pollution. Reforms to the CAP agreed in June will help, but will not be enough on their own. In April, Defra published a stakeholder discussion paper, which reviewed the latest evidence on the size and extent of the problem, and the specific contributions of different farming sectors. We are currently working to develop an action plan to reduce diffuse water pollution from agriculture in England. Agriculture is not the only contributor to diffuse water pollution, for example, the urban environment and related infrastructure contains many sources. Defra has therefore begun a review of non-agricultural sources of diffuse pollution, which will be carried forward through a process of engagement with stakeholders by Defra and the Environment Agency.

Menzies The timetables for the periodic review of prices and the Water Framework Directive do not fit. How can we ensure early, co-ordinated planning for WFD so that sustainable - rather than end of pipe - solutions can begin to be implemented now?

Morley The periodic review and WFD timetable do not coincide because the specific obligations of the WFD will not have an impact on water companies, and hence water bills, until outside the 2005-2010 review period. There is a clear need to ensure that there is a consistency of approach between investment decisions taken now, and those that will be needed to implement the Directive in the future.

Menzies We also welcome Defra's commitment to local environmental quality and responded to the consultation document "Living Places - Powers, Rights, Responsibilities". There is an unresolved issue of responsibility for litter in aquatic environments. We are doing something about this - with a programme at Salford Quays and a purpose designed litter recovery vessel cruising the central Manchester canals, for example. But the problem is enormous, growing, and the responsibilities are confusing. Can we expect to see government action?

Morley Following the consultation, "Living Places - Power, Rights, Responsibilities", officials have been consulting further with stakeholders on the individual options in the document, including the options relating to the aquatic environment. My officials will be meeting with the Mersey Basin Campaign shortly. We will be consulting further on specific proposals in light of previous meetings and those still to take place. We look forward to Mersey Basin Campaign engagement in this process.

Menzies Finally, the Campaign is a very broad partnership including government, public agencies, local authorities, businesses, voluntary and community groups through to hundreds of individual volunteers. What message would you like to send to voluntary and community groups in particular to encourage them to get involved and take practical action at the local level? What message would you send to businesses to encourage them to get involved and contribute to a more sustainable future for all of us?

Morley The Mersey Basin Campaign has an enviable track record of involving both voluntary and community organisations and businesses in taking practical steps to improve the water environment. Its establishment in 1985 was a real declaration of intent - and there are a host of achievements throughout the Campaign area which show how that vision paid off - from river valley initiatives bringing all stakeholders together to improve their local watersides to anti-litter projects and an extensive environmental education programme. Much has been achieved over the years and there is a real sense of achievement in many parts of the region, but there is still much more to do. We must all play our part - companies, residents groups, public bodies and voluntary organisations - in contributing to an improved quality of life, sustainable regeneration and a vibrant economy both for our own children and for future generations.

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TIME

Polish your crystal ball, it's time to peer into the future of water in the Northwest.



The Mersey had seen a fair few life forms come and go before Margaret Thatcher's Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine peered into its brown depths in 1982 and declared it "an affront to the standards a civilised society should demand of its environment," in the speech widely credited as the catalyst for the Mersey Basin Campaign.

Salmon, which had teemed through the river before 1700 and the industrial revolution, were almost as distant a memory as the woolly mammoths, which last roamed the Mersey Basin 15,000 years ago. Not a single Mersey salmon had been recorded since 1856. The old Liverpool joke always had it that you wouldn't drown if you fell into the Mersey. You'd die of poisoning instead.

Things could only get better. And they did. The Castlefield waterside development of the mid 1980s in Manchester; the arrival of seals and octopuses; and in 1999, what Northwest industrialist and Mersey Basin Campaign (MBC) chairman Joe Dwek describes as "the symbolic breakthrough" - the capture of the £45,000 prize for best river clean-up campaign on earth, at the World River Symposium in Brisbane, Australia.



RUTH TURNER,
MANAGING DIRECTOR
OF VISION 21

Then this April came the news that, for the first time since the industrial revolution, oxygen levels are high enough to support fish along the entire Mersey estuary.

So that's the first 20 years pretty much accounted for. What about the next 20? What's left to be done?

A colossal amount. From fishermen to property developers, the consensus is that MBC's job has hardly started. "Bring together more of the river users groups and help make the canoeists understand the irritation they cause

by damaging riverbanks when they don't even pay for river rights," says Huw Owen, River Dee salmon fisherman. "More focus on rural rivers away from the industrialised [river] basin, like ours," says Mike Callery, organiser of Friends of the River Yarrow in the Ribble basin. "More stock proof fencing to keep those darned cattle off."

"A boat link from Manchester city centre to the Lowry," says Ruth Turner, managing director of Vision 21. "A riverside walk along the Irwell through Manchester as an absolute minimum," says property developer Chris Brown, who helped revive Albert Dock in the 80s. "That dilapidated river makes me quite emotional. Its upkeep is dreadful."

And above all, don't let the public be fooled into thinking the job is done. "If you oversell the first 20 years you've got a problem," says professor Roger Ford, lecturer in innovation and technology strategy at Salford University. "Everybody says 'oh, come on, look at the waterways, they're fine.' Developing the basin sustainably needs massive civil solutions. It's a very complex system, a lot of people live there. It needs a big strategy with all partners."

From fishermen to property developers

Locals near the section of the Manchester Ship Canal where the UMIST Tyndall Research centre's Simon Shackley lives still know it as 'The Big Ditch.' "Get out of Salford Quays on one of the new Mersey Ferries trips and it's very dubious," he says. "It will take perhaps £10 million to put that right."

Public perceptions aren't the only thing focusing minds. The European Water Framework Directive (WFD) with its decree that all river basins should reach "good ecological status" by 2015, makes this a defining moment for water

LINE 2025

Words Ian Herbert



quality. As does the impending fourth round of Asset Management Plans (AMP4) for the water companies - under which United Utilities and others will lay out their spending commitments for the next five years. Infrastructure improvements are likely to mean a 10% increase in water bills under the forthcoming review of prices (PR04) - so everyone will have opinions.

But WFD is the biggest issue. "It's changed the goalposts, though many people haven't yet woken up to it," says Walter Menzies, MBC chief executive. "But the public's expectations where quality of life issues are concerned have also moved on. If this region's going to become an economic powerhouse, we can't accept an area of derelict land equivalent to seven cities the size of Preston."

Other European regions are impressed by us. "MBC's brilliant at getting the private sector to work with you," says Esther Widdershoven, project manager of a river basin clean-up on the IJssel, in the Netherlands. "We're way behind on that."

"Yes, you have a culture of public/private sector

The nightmare scenario for the next 20 years would be a failure to develop our water sustainably. "We've got to be careful," says Felicity Goodey, chair of The Lowry - that supreme advertisement for the commercial benefits of clean water. "We must maintain some waterways as arteries of the environment, simply to be enjoyed."

Arlene McCarthy, a North West region MEP, shudders at the thought of the detritus she's seen dumped in the Ship Canal. "I've even seen vacuum cleaner hoses in there, bobbing along with the beer glasses. In Amsterdam and Copenhagen they respect their rivers. We have to instil that culture."

Colin Sykes, BBC North West environment correspondent, says it would help if the cleaner waters were used more: "They're not always being used and embraced as they are on the continent."

There's no danger of these myriad views being ignored, since the WFD's defining principle is participation and inclusion - issues at the core of MBC's purpose.

"The Campaign was never conceived as a bunch of



the consensus is that MBC's job has hardly started.

partnerships which is just not developed on the continent. It's vital to the finance of projects," says Frank Rothmann, manager of a project in Germany's Ruhr Valley.

Avika Zieminska, a Polish masters student from Warsaw who has just completed an MBC secondment, agrees that everyone talks and participates - but the results can be chaotic! "When I began hunting out information, I got many overlapping reports done at the same time, talking about the same thing. A central database might be the answer!"

people sitting in a building in Manchester," says Walter Menzies, whose efforts to make MBC more inclusive currently involves considering a new name and brand for the organisation. "We've got to engage everyone. After 20 years, we're only at the end of stage one."

No wonder this year's annual conference theme is 'shaping the future.' The first 20 years of gains are about to become a distant memory.

AVIKA ZIEMINSKA,
MASTERS STUDENT


MORE INFORMATION:
www.merseybasin.org.uk

SECONDS OUT, ROUND FOUR

The fight is on to maintain high levels of investment in the environment and water infrastructure, without charging customers too much.

Words Karma Ockenden



A yellow excavator is shown in a low-angle shot, positioned on a large pile of dark brown earth. The excavator's arm and bucket are visible on the left side of the frame. The operator's cab is in the center-right, with a person visible inside. The background is a clear blue sky with scattered white clouds. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

Price rises of 70% sound a lot, don't they? But this is what Northwest water company United Utilities (UU) has said will be necessary between 2005 and 2010 if it is to fund a proposed £3.8 billion investment programme. In its recently published draft business plan for the period, UU says the average domestic bill would have to rise from £243 in 2004/5, the end of the current pricing period, to £416 at the end of the next pricing period in 2009/10. Northwest businesses won't get off the hook, either. Regional consumer watchdog WaterVoice Northwest estimates charges to a typical corner shop will rise by about £600 by 2010, while major manufacturers could see "well over £100,000" added to their bills.

[continued overleaf]

“Customers will get better services, cleaner beaches and rivers and improved water standards for their extra cash.”

The percentages sound scary, but can the bigger bills be justified? UU argues the higher bills are simply necessary if the company is to meet its statutory obligations. Graeme Sims, head of water regulation at the Warrington-based water utility, points out that UU hasn't just decided to go on a spending spree of its own accord, it has simply costed what the government wants to achieve for the water environment and water customers. “Our business plan sticks closely to the guidance we have received from ministers,” he says. “We have only included actions that are set out as ‘essential and clear’.”

The initial guidance from ministers stresses the importance of maintaining water and sewerage assets to minimise water leakage, sewer flooding and pollution incidents. It also stresses the need to build on the environmental and drinking water quality improvements already made.

This last point is backed by green guardians the Environment Agency (EA) and English Nature (EN). In ‘A Good Deal for Water’, their policy document on what needs to be spent to safeguard the water environment in 2005-10, the EA and EN state that water companies need to invest a further £5 billion on top of the £50 billion invested since 1990.

A look at some of the Northwest schemes earmarked under the EA's programme shows the kind of benefits on offer. Sites of national and international importance will be conserved. For example, the Abram Flashes Site of Special Scientific Interest south of Wigan will be restored by tackling sewer overflows discharging to Borsdane Brook. Tourism, for example around the Salford Quays and the Liverpool docks, will be boosted, and leisure pursuits - canoeing, sailing, walking and bird watching - will be encouraged. Fish stocks will prosper, and the plan is to investigate UU's impact on the beaches of the North Wirral coast, with a view to achieving the coveted Blue Flag beach status in the future. EA chief executive Barbara Young says: “Our environment programme asks water companies to invest in improvements to around 4,000 assets across England and Wales. This will safeguard some 6,500km of rivers and over 2,000km of lakes, ponds, wetlands and coastal waters. The healthier and more attractive the environment, the more we will see knock-on benefits for leisure, recreation, tourism and the wider economy, the value of which we estimate to be of the range from £5-8 billion.” Young says the extra money the plan would add to bills is “the price of a can of fizzy drink [50p] a week” per household... “a bargain”. So, far from the higher prices going to boost UU's profits or “fat cat” salaries, customers will get better services, cleaner beaches and rivers and improved water standards for their extra cash.

UU has already done a lot to improve the Northwest's water environment. Since 1990 it has funded £8 billion of improvements. Past initiatives include a £500 million ‘Sea Change’ programme to help clean up the coastline and enough cash to regenerate the notoriously polluted Mersey to such an extent that it attracted salmon for the first time in around a century in 2001.

But there is still lots to do. UU's business plan admits: “Despite major improvements in recent years, river and coastal water quality still lags behind other regions.” This is a product of both geography and history. Sims says: “We have all the features conducive to a big capital programme - a long coast line and many rivers.” The Northwest's place in history as the hotbed of the industrial revolution also has its part to play. With water quality standards lower than in many other areas of the country from the outset, UU has further to go to reach tip top condition than many other water firms. Hence UU's capital spending needs for 2005-10 are extensive. The company says it will be necessary to invest £3.8 billion in the period. Of this, £2.2 billion will go on quality improvements, such as better drinking water quality, higher standards of wastewater treatment, finding new outlets for sewage sludge, conserving nature and ensuring European standards are met at all Northwest beaches. Sims explains that on the ground level, this kind of investment means 400km more river will be able to support fish life, and hundreds of thousands of lead pipes will be replaced.

A further £1.35 billion is earmarked for maintaining UU's 40,000km of water mains, 39,000km of sewers, 192 reservoirs and 737 treatment plants, so it can go on supplying 2,000 million litres of water a day and treating 2,200 million litres of wastewater with minimal damage to the environment. “Our assets need more tender loving care than they've had”, Sims says, illustrating that the cash boost will mean fewer fines and better

60-second expert

- Every five years, the prices water companies can charge, and what investment they need to make to satisfy customers, environmental concerns and investors, are set by industry regulator Ofwat. The latest round of this process, known as the price review, is in full swing and will set prices for 2005-10.
- The Secretary of State's initial guidance to Ofwat emphasises the importance of maintaining assets (for example, to reduce sewer flooding and control leakage) and to build on the quality improvements achieved to date.
- United Utilities says it needs to invest £3.8 billion between 2005 and 2010 to deliver its three priorities: delivering a reliable and secure water service; solving the problems that matter most to customers; and improving environmental and drinking water standards. This means bill rises of 70%, making average annual bills £270 by 2006; £303 by 2007; £337 by 2008; £374 by 2009; and £416 by 2010.
- The Environment Agency has set out its preferred environment programme for the Northwest during the period, which will benefit rivers and coastline, not to mention countless anglers, water-sports enthusiasts, residents and tourists.
- Some consumer groups have reacted angrily to the proposed price rises. Other groups argue that the benefits of what can be achieved by 2010 far outweigh the costs.
- Ofwat will balance the arguments and make a final decision on prices and investment spending for 2005-10 in November 2004.

waters because discharge consents will be met more consistently.

Finally, £250 million will go on improving customer service, particularly on preventing sewer flooding and reducing the risk of bad smells from treatment works. Sims stresses UU is doing what it can to keep customer charges as low as possible. “Our challenge is to meet our statutory charges as cost effectively as we can, and we're trying to do that,” he says. It has left non-essential works out of its plan. It is using other sources of finance where possible for example, it has borrowed around £3 billion since 1989, and in July asked its shareholders to raise a further £1 billion (half of which has now been raised, with the rest to come after 2005).

But it has no choice but to recoup the rest from its customers. In fact, so onerous is the current investment programme, the company has asked Ofwat whether it can

alter its current five year settlement to raise prices from April 2004-5, as well as in the next period. If Ofwat allows the price rises next year, this will offset some of the increases UU says are necessary after 2005. Sims also stresses UU is being straight with its customers by providing realistic cost estimates now rather than closer to 2005. "We're being responsible about it," Sims says. "We're not waving the flag for this plan, but at least we've started the debate. We're conducting as open and transparent a process as we can so people in the Northwest can have their say."

It is not just the Northwest that will be affected by bigger bills between 2005 and 2010. The water industry as a whole says bill rises of a third will be necessary during the five years, taking the average 2004/5 household bill of £240 to £315. This will pay for investment of £21 billion across the country, up 25% on spending in 2000-05. Firms say they need £7 billion for more environmental and drinking water quality improvements, mostly to comply with a steady stream of recent Directives from European Commission such as the Urban Wastewater Treatment, Freshwater Fish, Bathing Waters and Habitats and Birds Directives. A further £4 billion will go on meeting growing demand, but the bulk, some £8.5 billion (up 20% on the 2000-05 figure) will be spent on maintaining sewers, mains and plants, many of which are in a pitiful state.

The rejig is all part of what's known as the price review. Because water companies are monopoly businesses, whose activities have an enormous impact on the environment and on the health and wellbeing of the population, the prices they can charge their customers are controlled by a regulator, Birmingham-based Ofwat. Every five years, Ofwat, under government guidance, looks at what water companies need to spend to protect public health and the environment, to serve customers properly and to remain buoyant businesses in which people want to invest. It also looks at what customers can and should pay. It balances all these factors and makes a decision on what investment needs to take place, and consequently how much customers have to pay.

The current price review is known as PR04, while the investment programme set for the industry is called the Asset Management Plan. The next one will be the fourth, hence AMP4. The government will issue further and final guidance to Ofwat in January. Then Ofwat will publish its draft prices and investment plans in July 2004, with final decisions out in November 2004. The new prices and spending will kick off in April 2005.

So far, Ofwat has played its cards close to its chest. It has acknowledged prices will have to rise, but has given little indication yet of whether it endorses the numbers in company business plans. Director general Philip Fletcher says: "These draft plans provide vital information to inform decisions that will need to be taken before we finalise price limits next year. We will be scrutinising these very carefully. It is early days in the process and we need time to review the evidence provided."

Price rises of some kind are inevitable. What remains to be agreed is exactly how much bills have to rise by, and just what the money will be spent on. One thing is certain. All the investment made will help achieve an incoming quality standard from Brussels. The Water Framework Directive will be transposed into UK law this December. Its ambitious objective is 'good' ecological quality for all watercourses in the European Union. A pilot study is already underway on the River Ribble in Lancashire, led by the EA and supported by the Mersey Basin Campaign. Although no investment is being directly committed to the Directive under AMP4, all the investment made will go towards its eventual achievement. Funds will be dedicated to the Directive under AMP5, although this fifth AMP period may not be one as we know it. Ofwat is considering lengthening review periods in future, to make the pricing and investment cycles more in tune with the water industry's long term needs.

It is easy to be scared, outraged, confused by the prospect of big price rises. But before jumping to conclusions and throwing up our arms in protest, we should consider what we get for the money, and what good value it is. After all, who would want the Mersey to go back to how it was? How much benefit has the community got from its clean-up? These are the questions we should be asking ourselves.

"The outcome of the price review is critical to achieving the objectives of the Mersey Basin Campaign and the Northwest region: sustainable economic development balanced with improved quality of life for our people. For this region to succeed in the twenty-first century, a healthy environment and good water quality are vital. Citizens should not have to put up with poor sewerage facilities, unpleasant aromas, flooding and dereliction. This is a real challenge for the government and Ofwat because of lobbying from consumer groups and some sections of industry committed to keeping prices down - this could delay this essential programme. The government and Ofwat need to realise that the people of the Northwest should not be disadvantaged and should not have to put up with antiquated and outdated infrastructure. It's certainly not value for money to put off investment for short term savings when we'll be forced to make it eventually to comply with the Water Framework Directive."

Joe Dwek chair of the Mersey Basin Campaign.



MORE INFORMATION:

www.uuplc.co.uk
www.environment-agency.gov.uk
www.ofwat.gov.uk
www.water.org.uk
www.watervoice.org.uk

JOE DWEK
BUSINESSMAN AND CHAIR OF THE
MERSEY BASIN CAMPAIGN

THE TURNAROUND SPECIALIST



"The Northwest is waking up to the fact that environmental improvements must go hand in hand with industrial regeneration," says Joe Dwek, Northwest businessman and out-going chair of the Mersey Basin Campaign.

It's the kind of message the green brigade have been trumpeting for years, largely unheeded. Coming from them it sounded a little too good to be true, like sugar coating on a pill, and many in the business community turned a deaf ear. But Joe Dwek, CBE, is not easy to ignore. Ranked amongst the most influential industrialists in the region by Northwest Business Insider magazine, he's one of the business community's own leaders. After rescuing a series of struggling businesses he's widely regarded as a turnaround specialist.

region's rivers and canals. His experience in turning around struggling businesses was about to be tested in the public sector. He says of the Campaign at that time, "It didn't have a proper corporate structure, it didn't have a satisfactory work programme, the work programme was not a delivery mechanism - it was a campaign mechanism - and it had not won the respect of some of its key partners." The problem was how the Campaign had been set up at the outset. His predecessor, Brian Alexander, "actually did a bloody good job," he says. But "coming from the private sector you look at it and see a government quango which doesn't seem focused."

His response was to make an agenda and start working through it, although it rapidly became apparent that things had to be done differently compared to the business world. "In business the chief

**"Reputation is a one day phenomenon.
It has to be sustained."**

Renowned for his whirlwind energy, he is possibly the only man in the region who arrives in the office earlier since he retired than he did when he was working.

Dwek started in business in 1962, when the Northwest was a very different place. Born in Brussels but with a British father, his family were captured by the Germans in 1940, interned and put on a boat bound for Germany before their boat was captured by the British fleet and the family returned in Manchester. Dwek followed the great Northwest tradition and built up a successful business. But it was when he joined Bodycote International as managing director in 1972 that things really took off. When he retired in 1998 the original £3 million textiles group had been transformed into a science based metallurgical technology business with a market capitalisation of around £1.4 billion and operated in 17 countries with 200 plants.

It was soon after he retired that Dwek was appointed chair of the Mersey Basin Campaign, the organisation established by Michael Heseltine in 1985 to bring together industry, the community and the public sector to clean the

executive can make decisions and next morning people will get them done. In an organisation like the Mersey Basin Campaign, consensus objectives are very important. You have to take people with you, keep them informed, bring them into the loop and make sure that when you move they are with you." The lesson, he says, is that "it's an entirely different approach to the same problem."

Looking back on his business experience, his time at the Campaign and his numerous other public and business roles, Dwek is optimistic. The Campaign is now set up "in a way which makes it respected and gives it corporate objectives, and the right people are now in the right slots." As for the region as a whole, the "disparate collection of individual fiefdoms" has been replaced by a realisation that "the problems which confront us unite us, rather than divide us and that's a major step forward."

Equally importantly, "We've got across the boundaries so that everybody is working across the region with the same objectives and everybody can begin to realise that a healthy environment is good for jobs, output, growth, recruitment, inward investment and so on."

So is it finally time for Joe Dwek to slow down? "Never with me. I feel a very young, fit sixty-three and a half."

WORDS: PAUL UNGER

PICTURE: COURTESY OF THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

A REFINED HABITAT

Shell and the Environment Agency are proving once again that what's good for business can also be good for the environment.



Shell UK has helped create a £1 million flood defence scheme at its oil refinery near Ellesmere Port in a move that shows how business can harness environmentalism to its advantage.

Along with partners the Environment Agency (EA) and Cheshire Wildlife Trust (CWT), Shell has established a nature reserve at Gowy Meadows that is tipped to become the best marsh habitat in Cheshire. The meadows, which will be managed by CWT on a 25 year lease, have instantly taken the honour of being the largest nature reserve in the organisation's estate.

Eamon Chandler, technical manager of Shell Stanlow, said: "We are entering a long-term relationship on the Gowy Meadows with this initiative. The enhanced flood protection scheme ensures that our production of gasoline and diesel for the Northwest of England is not affected by rises in Gowy water levels."

While the River Gowy and Thornton Brook, which both run through the Shell site, have suffered high water levels in the past, Chandler said oil production had never ceased as a result.

The scheme, towards which Shell contributed £100,000, is the latest in a string of environmental, health and safety measures undertaken by the company. The new flood defence work involved changing the course of Thornton Brook through Gowy Meadows. CWT will use sluices to manage water levels over an area equivalent to 270 football pitches. The aim now is to create large areas of seasonally wet grassland to attract breeding and wintering waders and wildfowl, as well as water voles. The habitat will also contain rare insects and plants, such as bladderwort and water violet.

Chris Mahon, director of CWT, said: "This is our largest nature reserve to date and it comes to us in our fortieth anniversary year. It is a great way to celebrate and marks the start of our strategic programme of acquiring and managing large areas for wildlife."

As well as diverting Thornton Brook, flood defences have been improved by raising existing flood banks and repairing tidal gates. During extreme storms floodwater from the rivers will continue to be held back in the Gowy Meadows, which is a natural washland area. The scheme has been praised by the Regional Flood Defence Committee (RFDC), which advises the

EA on flood defence issues.

Sinclair McLeod, chairman of the (RFDC), said: "The regional committee, whilst improving and building flood defences for property, is also endeavouring to improve the environment and help wildlife. This scheme is a good example of this integrated approach."

McLeod added that other flood defence schemes recently carried out in the Northwest include work on the River Ribble at Walton-le-Dale, near Preston; Bollington near Macclesfield; Glasson Dock near Lancaster; the River Irwell at Salford; the River Roch at Littleborough; and Crossens Bridges near Southport.

The EA is required by the Environment Act 1995 to exercise its flood defence and land drainage functions through RFDCs. This includes the construction and maintenance of river and sea defences and the provision of flood warning systems, as well as the improvement of watercourses to reduce flooding of land and property.

This year, the RFDC approved a 6.5% increase in spending on flood defence activities in the Northwest aimed at reducing the problems of flooding. As a result, a total of £33 million was spent on flood defence programmes in the region in 2003.

At Stanlow, the flood defence will not only protect Shell but also provide the same benefit for the refinery's neighbours, including Cheshire Innovation Park, Associated Ocel and Burmah Castrol.

"We are keen to support initiatives like this where business and the environment both win"

Chandler explained: "We've formed an important link with the Environment Agency and the Cheshire Wildlife Trust and are keen to support initiatives like this where business and the environment both win."

The Stanlow plant is one of the largest oil refineries in the UK, processing 12 million tonnes per year, and the main source of petrol and diesel fuels for the Northwest.

Despite the scale of its operation, Shell has maintained strong local and grassroots links, sponsoring community activities as diverse as Chester's Gateway Theatre and Forest Enterprise at Delamere Forest, along with the Mersey Basin Campaign.

THE NEW SCHEME CREATES VALUABLE WETLAND HABITAT AT THE SAME TIME AS IT PROTECTS SHELL'S REFINERY

MORE INFORMATION:

www.shell.com

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Manchester City Council is the first authority in the country to produce a vision for the revival of its entire waterways system.

Words Ben Willis

Photographs courtesy of the Northwest Development Agency

VENICE OF THE NORTH

Imagine for a moment the banks of central Manchester's stretch of the River Irwell alive with people. Some will be taking a stroll along the water's edge, some perhaps a run; others will be sitting outside a café sipping a coffee or something stronger, enjoying the scene.

For there is plenty to watch: boats chug up and down on their way from the restored Manchester-Bolton-Bury Canal; cyclists weave in and out of the walkers; anglers line the banks waiting for some of the river's fish to bite. One takes the bait and flickers in the evening sun as its captor reels it in.

Now hold that thought. The slow transformation of Manchester and Salford's waterways over the past few years is about to pick up pace, and scenes like this could become a familiar sight across the two cities. They may be an aspiration yet, but soon the gauntlet will be thrown down for all Greater Manchester's waterways to follow the example of Salford Quays and start smartening themselves up.

This autumn Manchester City Council will become the first authority in the country to produce a vision for the revival of its entire waterway system. Some, like London, have toyed with the concept, while others, notably Birmingham through its Brindley Place development, have recognised the value of a waterside location in regeneration. But Manchester can lay claim to being the first to go the distance and set out what waterways could mean for the whole city.

Given Manchester and Salford's progress over recent

years in converting stretches of their extensive waterways from scars of the industrial revolution into valuable regeneration opportunities, there may seem little purpose for a "waterways strategy". What use is a plan for a process that has clearly already begun?

According to Councillor Val Stevens, Manchester City Council's Executive Member for Planning and the Environment, who has led the development of the strategy, the answer to this question is precisely because the process had already begun. "Through a number of our regeneration schemes we had what you might call the beginnings of a water strategy," she says.

"But it seemed to me as though we hadn't got the baseline of what we were dealing with, where the ownership was, what the water quality was, and what the developments were going to be."

For Councillor Stevens, the state of its waterways is one of the Northwest's greatest challenges - "the last stage of clearing up after the industrial revolution." But she also believes that as pressing as this challenge is, it should nonetheless be carried out with a clear idea of where to start from and where, ultimately, to go.

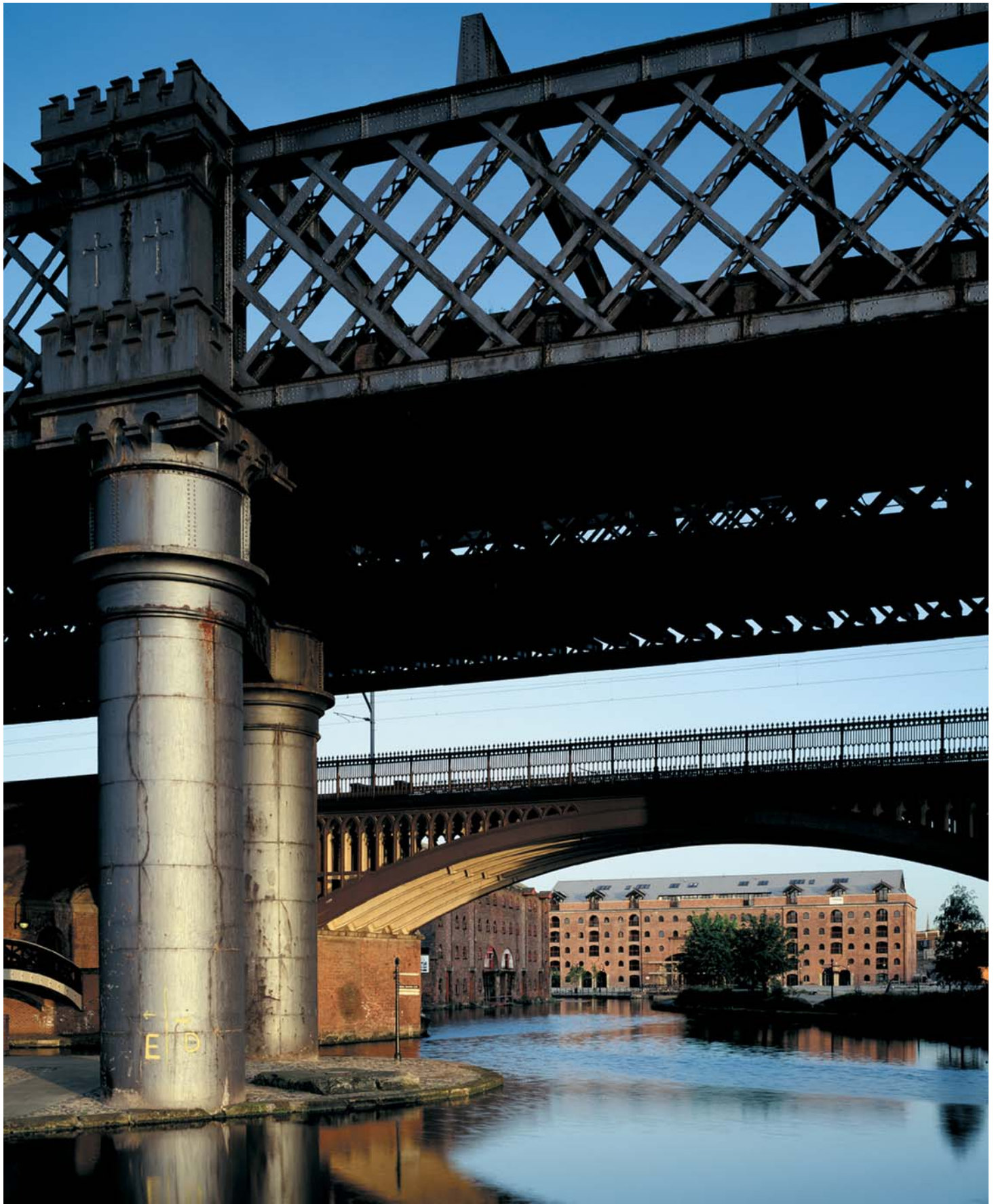
She says: "What we needed was something that would tell us what number of rivers we've got,

who's involved in that development, who's responsible for cleaning it, maintaining it, ensuring it improves, and what are the investment opportunities around that, and what added value can that bring to the city."

The strategy was designed to offer this kind of analysis. By examining each river and canal individually, the council was able to assemble a picture of the overall network, a snapshot of its environmental quality, ownership, existing regeneration programmes and, importantly, its potential for further development.

Although this process revealed few surprises, Councillor Stevens says, the analysis broadly reinforced the view that Manchester's waterways are a vast but underused resource. One striking example of this, she says, is the River Irwell.

"We've got two cities divided by a river instead of a central core united by a waterway," she says. "If you look at the waterside development, the river was always at the back of development





“We’ve got two cities divided by a river

in Manchester and the back of development in Salford. So in other words developments were looking away from the river, and the river was just a dirty little thing.”

Informed by this sense of an opportunity missed, the strategy sets out a vision of reanimating the waterways and watersides, and reintegrating rivers like the Irwell that have become backwaters into new developments. The vision is summarised thus: “The potential of the Manchester waterways should be maximised for the benefit of local residents, the economy of the city and biodiversity, bringing about sustainable environmental, recreational and regeneration benefits that are fully integrated into every walk of life in the city.”

To achieve this vision, the strategy outlines a number of key objectives or interventions for each of the waterways in question. These are organised under a number of strategic themes, including regeneration, biodiversity, crime and tourism.

Of course, visions are all very well, but are not an end in themselves. There is a danger in an age of endless regeneration strategies that too many are drawn up only to gather dust on shelf. The measure of a successful strategy is its ability to render real change.

Walter Menzies, chief executive of environmental and regeneration partnership the Mersey Basin Campaign, believes that a lack of delivery will not be an issue in Manchester. “Too many strategies are very watery, using

words like ‘strategy’, ‘social inclusion’ and ‘partnership’,” he says.

“You could write any strategy on the back of a fag packet with tick box words like this without even knowing what the subject is. But I don’t think this is the case with this strategy because it’s very focused indeed: it’s dealing with specific waterways and what should be done with them, and that’s good.”

Indeed, the strategy is very clear on delivery. In acknowledgement of the breadth and scale of regeneration initiatives already underway in Manchester, and the number of organisations involved in them, it proposes a citywide management body to oversee implementation of its numerous objectives.

Provisionally dubbed the Manchester Waterways Partnership, the proposed body would have a cross-local authority boundary and multi-agency remit, bringing together the wide array of organisations involved in regenerating the city’s waterways.

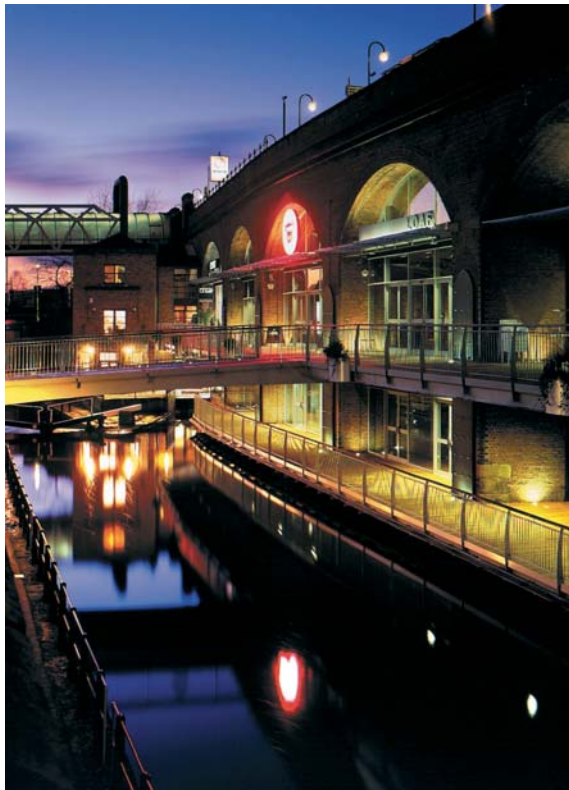
More importantly, perhaps, the council is hoping that once approved, the strategy will be worked into Manchester’s unitary development plan (UDP), the blueprint that will shape the city in the future. “My aspiration is that we embed the key

points of the strategy in our UDP - so that these things are recognised in five, ten, 20 years,” says Councillor Stevens. “This means there will always be a presumption of access to water, and that people look towards water, not away from it.”

For people working on the ground to regenerate Manchester’s waterways, official take-up of the strategy is now crucial. Sarah Flynn is co-ordinator of the Manchester Waterways Initiative, a Mersey Basin Campaign programme focusing on the city centre. With daily problems of litter, dog fouling and crime to contend with, it cannot happen quickly enough.

“One of the issues about the strategy is how it will be disseminated when it’s finalised,” Flynn says. “If it trickles through the council into all the relevant departments across the whole of Manchester, it could be fantastic. Once it becomes part of the UDP people will start to work with waterways and not against them.”

Apart from encouraging local



instead of a central core united by a waterway.”

stakeholders to sing from the same hymn sheet regarding waterways, Flynn hopes the strategy will also be a useful lever for securing funding for new projects. One of the problems at the moment, she says, is that although ideas for ways of improving waterways are never in short supply, drumming up the cash to fund them is a different matter.

For example, an issue in Flynn's area is poor street lighting, which discourages pedestrians from using the canal towpaths as a direct route across town. She has had a lighting survey done, but is wondering how to take this further. "Once you've had the survey done, it's a question of where to take it to next," she says. "Who's going to take responsibility for paying for the projects? I think the strategy will help with the funding of our projects."

As well as offering practical assistance in brokering partnerships and leveraging in funding, outside observers also believe the strategy might mark a turning point in the way

waterways are regarded as an engine for regeneration. According to John Fletcher, chairman of the Inland Waterways Association, waterway regeneration has often been characterised by the narrow view it takes of what can be achieved by bringing a canal or river back into use.

He says: "If you look at how waterway regeneration has been used, it has tended to pocket off the areas with the highest land values: the centre of Birmingham, or the centre of Manchester are the areas where it has been concentrated.

"Even as recently as the [2002] Commonwealth Games it took a very significant effort to get all the players involved to understand that the importance of the location was not just the three or four hundred metres of canal outside the stadium."

Fletcher believes that for too long waterway and waterside regeneration have been cherry-picking exercises, where the best bits of land are creamed off and developed, leaving the rest to rot. His hope is that an over-arching strategy will enable the council and its partners to tackle Manchester's waterways in totality, rather than just regenerating bits here and bits there.

Derek Cochrane, managing director of British

Waterways North, argues that other areas of the country would do well to gain a similar appreciation of the wider role of waterways. Rivers and canals are, he says, an integral part of the UK's landscape, both urban and rural. Regeneration and the health of the nation's waterways are therefore inextricably linked.

"There is a deeper reason why this report is so important," he says. "Most of our major towns and cities were either built alongside existing rivers, or developed along the back of the canal network being constructed in the 1800s. What that means is that there is a cultural thing happening.

"When rivers are not used for recreation, when waterways become unused and derelict, it begins to depress areas around them. By bringing waterways back to life with animation and vitality, you return to that original culture."

What must happen now, Cochrane continues, is that other towns and cities in the UK follow the example set by places like Manchester, and to a lesser extent Liverpool and Birmingham, where waterways are rising rapidly up the political agenda. "I wouldn't really say that other places have failed to grasp the importance of waterways - some have," he says. "Now what it's about is action on the ground, and making sure that for UK plc, waterways really make a difference."

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Back from the dead

Dr Keith Hendry of aquatic specialists APEM outlines a remarkable success story in the Manchester Ship Canal.



THE ADVANCED OXYGENATION EQUIPMENT WAS LOWERED INTO THE TURNING BASIN IN 2001.

The Manchester Ship Canal is a fascinating modern day contradiction. The once thriving commercial waterway is now one of the most exciting and successful waterfront redevelopments in the world. At the same time, it also has the unenviable reputation of being one of Europe's most polluted water bodies.

The canal's poor water quality was caused by a combination of the polluted legacy of our region's industrial past, the restructuring of the natural river system to provide a commercial waterway and the growth of a large urban population without adequate investment in sewage treatment.

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Japanese academics visit Northwest

A group of leading Japanese researchers have made the trip to the Northwest for a two day visit with the Mersey Basin Campaign to learn about its work in river basin management. The group of academics from Universities across Japan, as well as senior researchers from the National Institute for Rural Engineering, were especially interested in the Campaign's experience of working with partners from the private and public sectors. In Japan there is very little tradition of working in partnerships. The visitors took in a trip to Salford Quays, led by Dr Keith Hendry, to look at how a partnership approach to innovative water quality management has benefited the Quays. David Crawshaw, environment manager with United Utilities, explained how the water company works in partnership with the Campaign.

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The upper reaches of the Manchester Ship Canal were closed to navigation in the mid 1980s. Since then they have been redeveloped into the flagship waterfront development known as The Quays, which encompasses the old Manchester Docks, now renamed Salford Quays, and the Turning Basin between Salford and Trafford Wharf. The Turning Basin is a large area of open water covering 28 hectares, which is fed by the grossly polluted Manchester Ship Canal.

As early as 1988, the polluted state of the canal's upper reaches and the Turning Basin was recognised as a major disincentive to redevelopment. Some £500 million of bankside regeneration was threatened by poor water quality. Otherwise attractive waterfront locations were blighted by bubbling, often foul smelling water on which floated rafts of sewage-derived sediment. Only animals such as leeches and bloodworms could tolerate and survive in the canal's polluted water. Fish were largely absent, particularly in the summer when the water column was devoid of oxygen.

It was this lack of oxygen that was identified as the key issue. With financial backing from water company United Utilities, an ambitious large scale oxygenation project was developed through the 1990s that would elevate oxygen levels above the critical threshold of 4 mg/l, at which point the bubbles and smells would disappear. After several years of experimentation and field trials, a unique design was developed using liquid oxygen injected under high pressure to achieve the environmental targets. The £4.5 million scheme was commissioned in 2001, injecting up to 15 tonnes of oxygen per day into the waters of the Turning Basin, immediately achieving the 4 mg/l objective and resolving the aesthetic problems. However, what has happened to the river ecology in the two years since full-scale operation commenced is little short of astounding.

Prior to oxygenation there were less than five species of water dwelling invertebrate, such as insects and snails, which could tolerate the polluted waters in the Turning Basin. Following two years of oxygenation there are now 30 different species of invertebrate. By way of comparison, a control site in nearby Pomona Docks that has not been subject to oxygenation still averages only four species of invertebrate. And not only are there now more species, there is also a greater number of each species, such as the relatively pollution intolerant freshwater shrimp.

But the improvements are not restricted to invertebrates. The fish community has also seen a remarkable transformation. Roach and perch are now present throughout the year and there is even evidence of spawning. In the past, such species could not survive the particularly low oxygen conditions in the Turning Basin during the summer months. However, examination of fish scales has revealed that growth rates, particularly of roach, are amongst the highest to be found anywhere in the country, if not the highest.

The oxygenation project has proved its worth by producing water that attracts people to live by it and drives regeneration, and by transforming the ecology of the canal. The flagship Quays waterside redevelopment can now proudly boast to have matched the high standards of the landward built environment with a remarkable transformation in the status of its aquatic life.



Words: Dr Mark Everard

Dr Mark Everard is a Board and Committee member of the Anglers' Conservation Association.

WANTED: RESPONSIBLE OWNERS

Who owns your local river?

Farmers, estate owners or local authorities probably own the land through which it flows. A water company probably has the right to take water from it and return treated wastewater to it. In England and Wales, the Environment Agency regulates a long list of activities that affect it. River trusts, conservation and heritage groups, angling clubs and a host of voluntary organisations all champion their own specific interests in it.

But who really owns our rivers?

Rivers are defining features of our landscape, special places for recreation and quiet enjoyment that support our economy and hold cultural and even religious significance. They will continue to be so when the farmers, landowners, local

is a simple one: price. The imperative is to protect the consumer by keeping up the pressure on both government and business to ensure the lowest water prices. After all, who could argue with low prices?

For others, quality is what counts. The quality of the water in our rivers and waterways, and the quality of our environment. The issue is how to cope with the excessive quantities of pesticides, nutrients, suspended solids and other pollutants that are allowed to wash into and contaminate our rivers. It's a lamentable fact that often these pollutants stem from ill-conceived yet subsidised practices of land-use. It's doubly lamentable that we find ourselves paying twice for the mistake: once through taxation to subsidise such damaging practices in the first place and again through the higher water bills needed to fund the clean up of their effects.

If ever there were a clarion call for action towards a more sustainable future, it is reflected in the legacy and future potential of our rivers.

bureaucracies, water companies and agencies are all long gone. Think of them in those terms and surely we are the guardians, not the owners, of our rivers.

Sadly, our industrial heritage is one of environmental over-exploitation, especially here in the Northwest. We have poured our wastes into our rivers, dammed them, changed their channels and their catchments unwisely, and built on their natural flood plains. The result is increased pollution and land that can no longer act as a sponge to soak up rainwater, which pours into rivers and contributes to flash flooding.

Our rivers have suffered immeasurably, and with them their ecosystems, fisheries, aesthetics and capacity to support human well being. We all count the costs.

And we all care, of course.

At least we should do. For some, the issue

The trouble is that we're happy to go on thinking that someone does indeed own the river - someone else. They own the river and they own its problems. Someone out there is in control, has the river under constant scrutiny, and can be relied upon to act as its guardian.

There are those who care about rivers for nobler reasons. Maybe they value fisheries, wild and beautiful places, the landscape and diversity of nature, or natural resources. Whatever the reason, there is certainly a substantial and growing groundswell of concern for the future legacy resulting from our actions today.

Who are the guardians of our rivers? The answer is as simple as it is obvious. We all are, because we are all responsible for them. The question is whether we are ready to live up to that responsibility. If we are prepared to speak up we can lobby for change through any of the many wildlife, heritage and other special interest groups. Your voice, raised in defence and indeed promotion of the vitality of the rivers that you love, can make a difference.

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doesn't need
a leak.**

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**For information on how to protect
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