

source^{NW}

WATERS | REGENERATION | ENVIRONMENT | SUSTAINABILITY

RESCUE ME

A unique rescue service that operates 24-hours a day on the River Mersey is celebrating twenty life-saving years.

PLUS news, reviews, interviews and comment

WIND IN THEIR SAILS

Liverpool Sailing Club's iconic new clubhouse will be the jewel in the crown of a major new coastal reserve.

THE HIDDEN POLLUTION

Researchers are highlighting a host of threats to our rivers and waterways that are yet to be dealt with.



Committed to Regeneration

As one of the UK's largest private landowners, and owners of the Manchester Ship and Bridgewater Canals, Peel are committed to waterside regeneration and **have invested more than £300m in the Manchester Ship Canal corridor**

Encouraging Tourism

The **Bridgewater Canal** connects North and South Canal networks and is also part of the Cheshire Ring this attracts over **7000 boats a year**.

Waterside Development

Peel's new **Stretford Marina** development an attractive focal point for the local community and an important facility for the Trafford area. Peel are planning a multi-modal freight terminal that will bring more shipping back to The Manchester Ship Canal at Salford, helping to reduce lorry movements on roads.

Environmental Consideration

The Speke Garston Coastal Reserve

Derelict land adjacent to the **Mersey Estuary** is set to be transformed into a **Nature Reserve** by a steering group including landowners Peel Holdings p.l.c., The Mersey Basin Campaign, The National Trust, Liverpool City Council and the NWDA.

Peel Holdings



www.peel.co.uk

Peel Holdings p.l.c.
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The weather wasn't the only thing that put the dampeners on summer in the Northwest this year. The sense of

unfulfilled promise extended to a trio of high profile projects in regeneration, politics and sustainable transport, on which the sun refused to shine.

First to feel the rain was Liverpool's controversial 'fourth grace,' which was to have become the first new landmark building on the city's waterfront in almost a century. Instead it collapsed amid acrimony before work ever began. It seems that nicknaming the amorphous structure 'the cloud' was unintentionally prophetic.

Then, just weeks after finally announcing a date for a referendum, the government postponed indefinitely the vote on regional devolution for the Northwest. Days later the eagerly awaited extension to Manchester's hugely successful and popular tram system was cancelled.

Even so, there is ample good news from around the region that is due its moment in the sunshine. First and foremost are the unsung heroes of the Mersey River Rescue service, whose story is told on p18-21. Then there are the achievements at the local level detailed on p8-9. And despite the disappointment of 'the cloud,' there's even some outstanding news for Liverpool's waterfront, reported on p5. **Matthew Sutcliffe**, editor m.sutcliffe@merseybasin.org.uk

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Website www.merseybasin.org.uk Cover Members of Mersey River Rescue by Len Grant (p18)

Wharf speed ahead for freight

The historic Manchester Ship Canal could help address some very modern problems.

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www.peel.co.uk

The Manchester Ship Canal looks set to continue rebuilding its economic importance with the development of Port Salford, five miles west of Manchester city centre. An increase in water-borne freight is currently being pursued nationally by Defra, the Department of Transport and British Waterways, amongst others, with the Ship Canal as the Northwest's leading opportunity.

A single 5000 tonne ship is able to remove the equivalent of 100 container trucks from the roads, reducing both traffic congestion and air pollution, and contributing to a cut in greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, water-borne freight can lead to the redevelopment of brownfield sites and help create new jobs.

Port Salford is a major expansion of the port's existing facilities on a vacant 81 hectare brownfield site. Peel Holdings, which owns both the site and the Manchester Ship Canal, believes the facility could become the region's leading distribution hub. As well as being close to where the canal passes the M6 and M62 motorways, it will also have a rail link to the West Coast mainline.

Approximately 300,000 containers a year would be handled at Port Salford, with around 50,000 arriving and leaving by ship. A planning application for the proposal will be decided by Salford City Council later this year.

Mike Butterworth of Peel said: "Salford Docks and the Ship Canal were once at the heart of the region's economy. This plan will revitalise the canal and once again make Salford the distribution capital of the Northwest."

Peel's announcement comes at a time when the nation's waterways are enjoying a renaissance, fuelled by the restoration of many canals and a rise in the number of people using them for leisure.



British Waterways, which oversees much of the rest of the inland waterways network, agrees with the government that around 3.5% of the nation's road freight could be transferred to waterways.

However, as Tony Plews, head of freight at British Waterways, explains: "It is the large, commercial waterways with links to the sea, such as the Manchester Ship Canal, that hold the real potential."

A 5000 tonne ship carrying 200 containers can travel the 30 miles from the sea along the Ship Canal in six hours. But the narrower inland canals and waterways face the problems of adequate water supply and the fact that "the size, number and frequency of locks make it very difficult for the narrow canals to be used for freight." The Rochdale Canal, for example, has 91 locks in 32 miles as it climbs over the Pennines, meaning a journey from Manchester to Sowerby Bridge can take almost a week. That leaves such inland waterways best suited to carrying heavy cargoes such as aggregates, which are not time-sensitive, over short distances of up to about 15 miles.

In the Northwest, however, such freight activity is extremely limited, leaving the Ship Canal and Port Salford as the major opportunity.

Liverpool waterfront joins heritage elite

Major boost to city's aspiration as cultural capital of the North.

Liverpool's grand waterfront has helped propel it to the coveted status of World Heritage site, alongside international icons such as the Taj Mahal and the pyramids of Egypt. Meeting in Suzhou, China, Unesco's world heritage committee took an hour to end 18 months of suspense and add Liverpool to its list of 788 sites.

The international seal of approval has been conferred on the city's waterfront, commercial centre and cultural quarter. Waterfront splendour in the form of the Liver building, the Cunard building and the Port of Liverpool building - the 'three graces' - was key to the success, along with the stunning neo-classicism of St George's Hall, the Walker art gallery and the former court sessions house. It also reflects Liverpool's importance as a maritime mercantile hub at the height of Britain's global influence.

"This is the news we have been waiting for," said councillor Mike Storey, leader of Liverpool City Council. "It is another great boost to the city's image... We were optimistic that we would gain World Heritage status but we knew we had to prove that we deserved such an accolade and that it was never going to be just rubber stamped.

"We have demonstrated that not only does the city have unrivalled architecture, with an outstanding waterfront, but that we have in place plans to manage the site in a way which will maintain its grandeur and attraction without stifling development."

Councillor Storey's last point is apt given that Unesco has placed a condition on Liverpool's status, insisting that all new developments must be in harmony with its existing features, such as the Pier Head and Albert Dock.

The announcement will be particularly gratifying for those Liverpoolians who have long championed the city as home to the country's finest architectural heritage outside London.



LIVERPOOL'S GRAND WATERFRONT, NOW A WORLD HERITAGE SITE

They point to the fact that the city has more Georgian buildings than Bath and more listed buildings than anywhere outside the capital.

It is also a huge boost for the city in the run up to its year as European Capital of Culture in 2008.

"Coming on top of the nomination last year as Capital of Culture 2008 this announcement marks yet another step in the continuing regeneration of the city," commented heritage minister Lord McIntosh. Although it brings no extra money in itself, it is expected to attract thousands more tourists and set the seal on the Capital of Culture.

The city's bid for World Heritage status got off the ground in December 2001, with the appointment of John Hinchliffe as world heritage officer. A year later a nomination document was produced and in January 2003 the government announced that Liverpool would be the only UK bid for the prestigious title.

Commenting on the city's success, John Hinchliffe said: "This decision is the culmination of many years hard work by very many people. The support of Liverpool people and the pride they showed in the city was crucial in helping us achieve this status."

MORE INFORMATION: whc.unesco.org | www.liverpool.gov.uk

SOUND BITES

S The Mersey estuary's **Special Protection Area** has been increased to include the Site of Special Scientific Interest at New Ferry. In addition, the entire area has been classified as a Ramsar site, in recognition of its value as a wetland of international importance. The area covers over 5,000 hectares and is home to over 100,000 wading birds and waterfowl, such as wigeon, shelduck, redshank and great crested grebe. Many of the species are migratory and use the Mersey estuary as a place to over-winter, encouraged by the river's improving water quality.

S A proposal to create a **new home for environmental and regeneration** professionals in the Northwest has been tabled by the Mersey Basin Campaign, which is due to vacate its offices atop Manchester's City Tower next summer. Facing impending homelessness, the Campaign has approached several similar organisations - most notably Groundwork Northwest and Envirolink - to explore the possibility of shared premises in Manchester. Closer working ties and cross fertilisation of ideas should ensue, along with cost savings on shared services. The door is still open to other interested organisations - according to Campaign chief executive Walter Menzies, "We're open to offers." More information: Walter Menzies 0161 242 8200 w.menzies@merseybasin.org.uk

S Liverpool's former **International Garden Festival** has been named the most influential landscape development in Britain since 1970, despite the fact that the waterfront site has been largely abandoned for almost 18 years. The festival, which was held in 1984, was up against competition including Canary Wharf in London and Glasgow's Royal Exchange Square. Around 5,000 members of the Landscape Institute marked the institute's 75th anniversary by awarding the site a special one-off prize as the "most influential development undertaken between 1970 and 2004."

S United Utilities believes it will have to **invest £3.2 billion** between 2005-10 in order to meet higher water quality standards, increased demand and tougher environmental regulations. The company goes into detail in its final business plan for the period, which is now available on its website. The business plan is the product of careful negotiations with industry regulator Ofwat as part of the fourth Asset Management Programme. As a result of the programme, new water prices will come into effect in April 2005 and a major new round of investment will accelerate. More information: www.unitedutilities.com

S The first of 253 **eco-friendly homes** have gone on sale at a new development built on land formerly owned by the National Trust, near Dunham Massey Park in Altrincham, Cheshire. The development will include a major river restoration project on Sinderland Brook and a number of measures to maximise energy efficiency and reduce the impact on the environment. These include water efficient toilets, extra insulation and heating and ventilation systems that minimise carbon dioxide emissions. The Stamford Brook development will also form the basis of a research project by Leeds Metropolitan University designed to influence future building regulations. The icing on the cake? Buyers get free membership of the National Trust. More information: www.stamfordbrook.co.uk

S A second **Mersey river crossing** is unlikely to cause serious environmental damage, according to new computer modelling. Concerns that a new £335 million bridge might fix in place the Mersey's notoriously mobile sandbanks, which normally change at every tide, are said to have been allayed by the initial results of extra studies. The findings are a boost to those backing a second crossing a quarter of a mile east of the existing Silver Jubilee Bridge, linking the central expressway in Runcorn to the eastern bypass in Widnes. More information: www.merseycrossing.co.uk

S Thousands of rare white-clawed crayfish have been **killed by pollution** in Cumbrian rivers this year, including large numbers found dead in separate incidents in the River Mint and River Lyvennet. Around 6,000 crayfish were wiped out in the River Mint, near Kendal, over the summer by a toxic pollutant that the Environment Agency (EA) rapidly identified as sheep dip. White-clawed crayfish are Britain's only native species of the lobster-like crustacean and their numbers are falling through competition with imported American Signal crayfish. Hundreds of dead crayfish were also discovered by the EA along a five mile stretch of the River Lyvennet near Morlan, during routine chemical sampling in June. More information: Julie Edge 08708 506506

S **Central Salford** is like a jigsaw of regeneration, says Felicity Goodey, the journalist, broadcaster and businesswoman who helped make the landmark Lowry arts centre a reality at Salford Quays. Ms Goodey is leading the international search for a team that will fit the pieces of the jigsaw together. The aim is to co-ordinate the many private and public sector activities already ongoing in central Salford under one umbrella, making them more effective. Architects and designers from across the globe are being invited to submit entries to revitalise the city, and a public exhibition will be held in Salford in October for the short-listed consortia to illustrate their ideas and visions. More information: Chris Dessent 0161 907 3732

S The **Merseyside Environmental Trust**, which this year celebrates 20 years in action, is set to announce the award of 24 grants worth a total of £5,500 to schools and community groups throughout Merseyside. The trust's chair, Don Thompson, says that, "Grants to kick start small initiatives can help people go on to make big improvements to their area of Merseyside." The grants are awarded as part of the trust's environment week, held over the summer, which in 18 years has given out some £70,000 to hundreds of schools and community groups. More information: Karen Evans 0151 794 3137

S New evidence published by the Environment Agency this week confirms that the phenomenon of polluted water causing **fish to change sex** is widespread in English rivers, raising concerns about the long term threat to our fisheries. In a survey of more than 1,500 fish at 50 river sites, over a third of male fish exhibited female characteristics. The research, which is the latest stage of a 20 year investigation, shows that the feminising effects observed in fish are directly related to their exposure to treated sewage effluent. (See also, page 12-15). More information: www.environment-agency.gov.uk/news



Now in its twenty-fourth year, the Mersey River Festival photo competition 2004 attracted over 1,500 entries, many of the highest calibre. The festival takes place every summer to celebrate Liverpool's profound link to the River Mersey, with the photo competition firmly established in the events calendar. This year it drew an audience of well over 1,000 to an exhibition of entries held in the splendid surroundings of the Cunard building. Despite strong competition, Keith Fisher's fine shot of canoeists took top spot among the slides in the special section, Messing About on the Water, sponsored by the Mersey Basin Campaign.

MORE INFORMATION:

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River of light

Forum highlights bold new ideas for Mersey estuary.

Liverpool and the Mersey estuary would make a stunning backdrop for a spectacular Hong Kong style light show, a forum on the estuary's future has heard. The suggestion came as part of a full day of presentations at the Mersey Estuary Forum, held in Liverpool's Maritime Museum.

Graham Phoenix, managing director of lighting specialists Light Matters, told around 110 delegates that "a spectacle of light" of world stature could be created covering an area from Warrington to Runcorn and Southport. The proposal would attract people to the river and redefine it as a night time destination, he added. His was the day's final presentation to an audience of local community representatives, voluntary sector delegates, academics, local authority representatives, businesspeople and educators.

"The river creates a sense of theatre," he said.

Likening what could be achieved to Hong Kong's large scale shows of lights and fireworks, which are best viewed from its harbour, he said that Liverpool is unusual in the UK for having the space for such a show.



COULD THE RIVER MERSEY BE TRANSFORMED INTO A RIVER OF LIGHT?

by the Mersey Basin Campaign. This year saw Professor Peter Batey, the Campaign's newly appointed chair, reprise his traditional role as chair of the forum.

Opening the forum, Professor Batey said: "Two thousand and four is a very exciting year as far as the River Mersey is concerned. There is a long list of projects that are underway." He went on to praise the forum's constructive atmosphere and

"Two thousand and four is a very exciting year for the River Mersey."

Earlier in the day delegates heard a range of opinions from those with an interest in the estuary's future, none more forcefully or cogently presented than those of the keynote speaker, Claire Curtis-Thomas, MP for Crosby. She explained that "twenty miles of coastline falls within my constituency," including a significant amount of the Mersey estuary itself. Noting that land use on the estuary is extremely complex, she recognised the "miraculous transformation" that has taken place on her stretch of the river.

Ms Curtis-Thomas then went on to lambaste the Mersey Docks and Harbour company for building a "huge £2 million shed" on the estuary, calling the decision "a complete clanger" and suggesting that it is probably "visible from the moon." (Full comment, page 23).

Now entering its second decade, the Mersey Estuary Forum is organised

call for developments linked to the estuary to "unlock opportunities for economic development" and "play a dynamic role in the run up to Liverpool's Capital of Culture" in 2008.

Kris Donaldson, the recently appointed marketing director of the Liverpool Culture Company, called the Capital of Culture "a chance of a lifetime" and a unique opportunity to "reposition Liverpool as a world class city." He emphasised the need to learn from other cities and make sure the momentum generated by the Capital of Culture is carried beyond 2008.

In a presentation that touched on many of the day's topics, Sara Wilde, chair of the Mersey Waterfront, explained that the Waterfront's task is to "bring together projects [on the Mersey] into a coherent concept."

"Mersey Waterfront is the thread to connect key attractions along the whole of the waterfront."

She noted that the river of light feasibility study is being funded by the Mersey Waterfront.

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People's panels

Local residents have expressed forthright opinions over wide ranging proposals that regeneration experts claim will revitalise waterfront areas of the River Mersey around Merseyside. It is the first time on Merseyside that a new technique known as people's panels has been used to facilitate comments from the community.

Thirty-two community representatives joined two people's panels organised by social research company Vision 21 on behalf of Mersey Waterfront, the organisation leading the regeneration of the waterfront area. A series of reports based on the consultation will help guide future regeneration efforts.

But while supportive of many of the proposals, the panels refused to merely rubber stamp them.

They debated proposals including a huge landmark in the estuary along the lines of the Statue of Liberty and the regeneration of 7 km of dilapidated promenades at Otterspool and Egremont, on either shore of the river.

The panel that commented on the Pride in Our Promenades project was adamant that public facilities are much needed and should not be overlooked in the rush for higher profile improvements.

"The provision of public facilities is an issue that has come up time and time again... Facilities that could be of benefit to the Waterfront include toilets (vandal proof), kiosks, picnic areas, and interpretation boards," notes the panel's report.

The Pride in Our Promenades project is being led by the Mersey Basin Campaign, which is currently developing a business plan for it together with Mersey Waterfront, Liverpool City Council and Wirral Borough Council.

The Campaign's development manager, Iain Taylor, who made a presentation on the project, said: "The people's panels are a rare and excellent opportunity to share ideas and develop proposals with the very people core to their long term success."

The panels will reconvene at regular intervals. The next people's panel is planned for the community of Sefton in late August.

Resources:

www.netregs.gov.uk

Netregs is a website from the Environment Agency (EA) that offers information on environmental regulations for small and medium sized businesses. Designed to aid them traverse the sea of environmental legislation, it's billed as providing "plain language guidance" which will "help businesses to understand the complex regulations affecting their environmental obligations."

If you've ever been to the Environment Agency's website (reviewed in issue two of Source NW), you'll know what to expect from Netregs in terms of design and navigation.

The site is divided into four distinct sections. "Sectors" offers a list of areas of relevance, such as electronics or agriculture. Clicking on one of these brings up a further, more specific list, which provides a logical route to the information the user needs.

The Legislation section employs a similar list, but one that's aimed at legal issues, providing a guide to current and future environmental law. The Management section, meanwhile, uses a clickable diagram for navigation, allowing the user to refer to legislation on specific issues, such as noise pollution, emissions and raw materials.

The final section, More Resources, provides the user with a list of relevant links, from EU and UK government websites to regulators and research bodies. It also contains a list of pollution prevention guidelines for the various sectors.



From a design perspective the site offers little that's new, and while it's largely straightforward and thorough, it would benefit from more concise descriptions. The pollution prevention guidelines could have been given more prominence in this respect.

While we're being picky, the search function - which uses the same engine as the EA's own site - requires the user to be inconveniently specific. The capacity to search the Sectors section would also be useful.

But the site is functional and well presented and its clear design means that, for the most part, searches are somewhat redundant anyway. The clickable diagram in the Management section is a great idea and works effectively. Those features, plus the fact that it's updated regularly, are enough to make it a must for those needing information on environmental law.

September 9

Action Ribble 2004

Forum looking at issues of water quality, regeneration and public engagement throughout the River Ribble catchment. Presentations include a look at the potential of the waterside assets in Preston city centre.

Venue: Harris Conference Centre, Preston

More information: Bev Mitchell 0161 242 8212
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September 13-15

CIWEM Second National Conference

The Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management's second national conference consists of four events, including Management of Wastewaters and Water Resources and Water Quality. These events are followed by afternoon workshops.

Venue: Bretton Hall, Wakefield

More information: www.ciwem.org.uk

September 16

The Tide is Turning - NW Regional Coastal Conference 2004

Focussing on the prospects for offshore renewable energy in the Northwest in the context of integrated coastal management and the wider marine environment, with keynote speaker Sarah Kydd addressing national renewable energy policy.

Venue: Maritime Museum, Liverpool

More information: Caroline Salthouse 01942 776 941
caroline.salthouse@nwra.gov.uk

September 24

Northwest Development Agency Annual Conference & AGM

Venue: MICC, Manchester

More Information: karen.crosland@nwda.co.uk

October 1-10

MWH Mersey Basin Week

The 13th annual MWH Mersey Basin Week. Thousands of children and volunteers will enjoy a week of fun and a range of water themed activities across the Northwest aimed at making the most of the region's waterways.

More information: Bev Mitchell 0161 242 8212

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October 7

The North West Environment - A Better Place?

Environment Agency regional conference at which it will launch its "diagnosis" of the region's environment. There will also be a debate on how to make the Northwest a better place to live.

Venue: Fact Centre, Liverpool

More information: www.environment-agency.gov.uk

October 12-14

Encouraging Active Involvement - Sharing Best Practice in Public Participation for the Water Framework Directive

European event promoting best practice in public participation in delivering the EU Water Framework Directive, focusing on lessons learned in the UK's pilot project on the River Ribble.

Venue: De Vere Hotel, Reebok Stadium, Bolton

More information: Dan Bond 01772 714 215

ribble@environment-agency.gov.uk

October 26-27

environment 2004 - Choice in a Changing Environment

The 3rd annual national conference of the Environment Agency, open to public, private and voluntary sector workers. Speakers include Sir John Harman and Barbara Young of the EA, Will Hutton and Patricia Hewitt MP.

Venue: International Convention Centre, Birmingham

More information: www.environment-agency.gov.uk

November 9-11

Restoration Ecology (non-urban aspects of habitat restoration)

The Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management presents a conference aimed at ecologists and other environmental professionals involved in restoration ecology, with a focus on non-urban environments.

Venue: Royal Clifton Hotel, Southport

More information: Dr Jim Thompson 01962 868 626

conference@ieem.demon.co.uk

www.ieem.org.uk

November 19

Mersey Basin Campaign Conference

This year's keynote speaker is Catherine Day, director general of the environment for the European Commission.

Venue: Bridgewater Hall, Manchester

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Pond life

Clifton Country Park in Salford has a new home for watery wildlife, thanks to help from volunteers.



COLOUR CO-ORDINATED EMPLOYEES OF SHELL UK WITH OTHER VOLUNTEERS

More than 30 volunteers from Shell UK took part in a 'good deed day' at Salford's Clifton Country Park, which combined team building with local community projects. The day was organised by the Mersey Basin Campaign and the Salford Ranger service following an approach from Shell UK, which asked to get involved in an environmental project.

Local volunteers had already carried out the vital digging work on the pond, allowing the Shell volunteers, Campaign staff and rangers to concentrate on planting and landscaping the area in order to help establish the pond.

The 8 m pond replaces an older pond that is drying up, allowing the local newts, frogs and dragonflies to relocate and flourish.

Hazel Lord, the Mersey Basin Campaign's local action co-ordinator said: "We are delighted that Shell UK took part in the day. Shell is a huge company working on a global scale and we are pleased that they are keen to get involved in our local environmental projects."

Since the Mersey oil spill from its Stanlow refinery in 1989, Shell UK has invested millions with environmental organisations such as the Mersey Basin Campaign, and has worked hard to clean up its image. Polluting emissions are at record low levels and recently the company helped to create a nature reserve near the refinery.

Shell UK volunteer Steve Bean travelled from Middlesex to take part in the project. He said: "We are glad to make a contribution to the work of the rangers and the Mersey Basin Campaign. It is a good chance to meet colleagues while putting something back into the community."

Ranger Ian White said: "Having so many volunteers working within the park is a great help to us. We are hoping that we can make a big impact with the work that we are carrying out."

The volunteers also created sluices and set about removing the invasive Himalayan balsam plants. Louise Williams, project co-ordinator for Action Irwell said: "We were fortunate that the rain held off making it perfect conditions for the work, and we managed to complete all the tasks by the end of the day."

Clifton Country Park is tucked away in the Irwell Valley, a short drive from Salford city centre. The park relies heavily on the input from volunteers to work on projects to improve habitats and encourage wildlife.

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School children make Anderton art history

An exhibition of children's artwork portraying the history of Anderton Nature Park has gone on display at the Anderton Boat Lift visitor centre in Northwich, Cheshire, marking the end of two years work.

Around a hundred pupils from years five and six of Comberbach Primary School have been busy researching the industrial and natural history of the park, which is closely linked to the history of the River Weaver. Their investigations have taken them to Ellesmere Port Boat Museum, Lion Salt Works, The Salt Museum, Anderton Boat Lift and the nature park itself. Along with many local people, the children have worked with six artists to piece together the story of Anderton and present it in a mixture of words, tapestry and pictures, which will be on show until October 20th.

The project has been co-ordinated by the Weaver Valley Initiative and Cheshire County Council, with funding from Cheshire County Council, the Local Heritage Initiative, Nationwide Building Society and The Waterways Trust.

Photographer Cathy Mathias worked with the children, teaching them the art of photography whilst investigating the history of the park. Long established Northwich chemicals company Brunner Mond assisted with the research by providing access to their photo archive, which dates back to the late 1800s.

Artists Jill Maguire and Wendy Meadley held a number of workshops with both children and adults to create a tapestry depicting the story of the park.

The children have continued to explore their local heritage and have penned a series of poems with the help of poet Harry Owen. Ceramic artist Stephen Charnock has used the poems as the basis for a design for a mosaic bench that will be unveiled at the nature park in September.

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FAIRHAVEN LAKE IN LYTHAM ST ANNES (TOP) AND DELP DIVING CENTRE NEAR ECCLESTON (BOTTOM) COULD BOTH BECOME OFFICIALLY DESIGNATED RECREATIONAL WATERS



Local sites identified for European project

A Europe-wide project to encourage greater recreational use of coastal and inland waters is identifying potential local sites in the Northwest.

Local co-ordinators from Cumbria to Cheshire are in the midst of a project to assess locations around the region that are commonly used for water-related recreational activities, from boating to swimming. Some 100 inland and 40 coastal sites will be whittled down to a short list of officially designated locations, thus helping to protect water quality standards and gain better facilities.

The ICREW project is funded under the European Community's Interreg IIB programme for the Atlantic Area and run in the UK by the Environment Agency. Its aim is to improve certain areas of coastal and recreational waters in the various project countries - United Kingdom, Ireland, Portugal, France and Spain.

The re-identification of recreational waters is one of seven initiatives established by the ICREW project, and is managed in the UK by the Mersey Basin Campaign.

Judith Allnutt, local co-ordinator with the Campaign in Lancashire, has been assessing sites around the county. She said: "We have a huge range of sites to assess for the project, from reservoirs and purpose built sites, to old quarries and rivers."

Sites throughout the Mersey river system were collated by local action co-ordinators from the Mersey Basin Campaign, while the Eden Rivers Trust is identifying potential sites in Cumbria.

The Environment Agency has been monitoring the coastal aspect of the project, surveying sites with aerial photography over bank holiday weekends to establish how the coast is used and which are the popular destinations during peak times.

"Ultimately we will make recommendations to DEFRA of the region's prime locations," said Claire

Wilson, the Campaign's European projects manager. "Then in the last year of the project we will work with local partners to promote the chosen waters through guides, websites and on-site information."

Sites are currently being assessed to establish the recreational activities for which they are already used and how they are promoted, as well as existing levels of safety and accessibility. Through consultation with local authorities, landowners and recreational groups, ICREW will establish each site's current and potential significance to the local population.

ICREW aims to improve recreational waters in the UK, Ireland, Portugal, France and Spain

After the initial assessments, water quality will also have been tested by late summer. Based on both sets of results, the different sites will be ranked and the highest ranked ones looked at again in terms of the economic and environmental impact of official designation.

A series of successful promotional programmes has already done much to draw the crowds back to the Northwest's cleaner, better managed beaches. But as well as highlighting the region's seafronts, ICREW also aims to promote recreational opportunities on the Northwest's inland waters.

"Along the coast we are looking to build a more accurate list of bathing water sites, so sites presently popular with the public, but which are not currently designated for bathing, may be established as such," added Ms Wilson.

MORE INFORMATION:

www.icrew.info
Claire Wilson 0161 242 8202

LOCAL SOUND BITES

S October 1-10 sees the return of the **MHW Mersey Basin Week**. This successful annual event relies on volunteers and organisations to make a difference in their area, and every year thousands of children and adults get involved in local events. Groups and individuals are encouraged to take part in a variety of water related activities, with grants of up to £100 available to help organise your own event. More information: Bev Mitchell 0161 242 8212
b.mitchell@merseybasin.org.uk

S The Mersey Basin Campaign and its partners generated a programme worth over £180,000 for **aquatic litter initiatives** in the Northwest last year, according to the Campaign's project co-ordinator Hazel Lord. The programme includes two specialist litter retrieval vessels and a huge number of clean ups involving hundreds of volunteers, residents, businesses and partner organisations including Groundwork and the Environment Agency. Hazel Lord said: "This has made a significant and positive impact on the environment, both locally and regionally." More information: Hazel Lord 0161 242 8214
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S A study by three students from Manchester Metropolitan University has discovered worrying evidence of **invasive plants along the River Bollin**. Himalayan balsam was found along the entire length of the river, while Japanese knotweed has appeared in large clumps. Not only are such vigorously growing plants a threat to native species, they also damage flood defences and affect river users by restricting access to riverbanks. Himalayan balsam can be removed by hand, but Japanese knotweed is notoriously difficult to eradicate, requiring mechanical cutting devices and other tough measures.

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S A 2.5 km stretch of the **River Chor** will be moved out of the shadows and into the limelight after Chorley Borough Council gave permission for the river to be re-channelled as it flows through the town's Astley Park. Plans include a pond, easier access and an artificial ox-bow lake, as well as the planting of wildflowers on the banks of the river that gives Chorley its name. The Environment Agency is providing £9,000 for the improvements, which some are calling a restoration. Local project co-ordinator Judith Allnutt said: "The idea is to bring the river into the heart of the park and raise awareness locally." More information: Judith Allnutt 01772 877 389
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S It seems that the Northwest's waterways are becoming a **haven for Hollywood's elite**. According to tabloid reports, Star Wars and Indiana Jones hero Harrison Ford and his girlfriend Calista Flockhart, the waif-like star of TV's Ally McBeal, were spotted chugging along the Shropshire Union Canal heading towards Chester. Could this lead to a flood of narrowboats filled with narrower celebrities?

Mersey Basin Campaign corporate sponsors include





WIND IN THEIR SAILS

Liverpool's major new coastal reserve gets its flagship building.

Words Deborah Mulhearn Photographs Cass Associates & Terry Mealey



LIVERPOOL SAILING CLUB'S WATERSIDE ELEVATION (TOP LEFT) AND LANDSIDE ELEVATION (TOP RIGHT)

CATHY ELWIN AND TOM WORKMAN AT THE WRECK OF LIVERPOOL SAILING CLUB'S FORMER CLUBHOUSE (ABOVE AND OPPOSITE)

Three years ago the future looked bleak for Liverpool Sailing Club. The clubhouse, on the Mersey shoreline between Speke and Garston, had been reduced to a burned out shell by an arson attack. Without a base, and with a dwindling and ageing membership, it seemed the club, which started in 1958, could not continue. But against all the odds, the club has not only survived, it has thrived. Work has begun on tearing down the old clubhouse and next year construction will start on a gleaming new building from which a whole range of watersports and water-borne activities will be offered. This stretch of the river will teem with sailing dinghies, power boats, cruisers, canoes, fishing boats, windsurfers and jetskis, and by the time the club celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2008 races and regattas will also be a colourful and thrilling feature.

"We're already planning the celebrations," says Tom Workman, co-president of Liverpool Sailing Club and a member for nearly 40 years. Workman and fellow members worked closely with the Mersey Basin Campaign, landowners Peel Holdings, the Northwest Development Agency and other stakeholders to realise the club's new plans.

"Liverpool's will be the first of a new generation of sailing clubs."

"It will be the fulfilment of my dream. We want to see the clubhouse back for the members but also as part of a thriving community, where children and families as well as sailing folk can come and learn about sailing. We want to fill the river with people and boats, the like of which hasn't been seen since the days of the liners." The sailing club has been working with schools and youth organisations in South Liverpool, using blowcars, which are similar to land yachts, to introduce children and young people to the excitement of sailing.

The clubhouse is a key part of a wider initiative to carve a coastal reserve from the exposed,

unused and currently desolate stretch of land between the old and new airports. Support comes not just from local and regional sources, but also from an EU-funded European project called Artery, which aims to find ways to revitalise post-industrial waterside land in Germany, Holland and the UK. "Artery is an excellent example of trans-national working," says Claire Wilson, the Mersey Basin Campaign's European projects manager. "The steering group for the reserve is drawn from the public and private sectors and all partners actively contribute. We are currently creating a blank canvas so that we can consult local people, especially young people, to present ideas for the future of the reserve for informal recreation."

The clubhouse building, which covers around 600 sq metres on three levels, has been designed by Cass Associates, whose founder Richard Cass worked on the Liverpool Garden Festival project a few miles downriver twenty years ago. After years of decline, the project presents an exciting opportunity to celebrate and build on the renewal of the river, says Cass Associates architect Mark Line. In view of its recent history, designing in security was an essential feature, he explains, but the design achieves this without sacrificing stylishness or sensitivity to nearby Speke Hall, a Tudor house owned by the National Trust, who are also one of the partners of the Artery scheme.

"It's a small, but iconic, sculptural building that should become a talking point," describes Line. "It's inspired by


sail iconography. From the river the form resembles two sails but from the landward side we have minimised the amount of wall with an aluminium roof that slopes down to what is effectively a moat around the building. There is really only one elevation which faces the river, and this will be punctuated with glazing and look modern and bright with a white-painted render." Construction costs are expected to be around £1.25 million, and will be met mainly with public money, including grants from Artery, Sport England and other regeneration agencies.

The club found a champion in Geoff Haslam, a Bristol-based architect and project manager, whose father was a Liverpool builder and founder member of the club. "Somehow they managed to track me down through my mum," laughs Haslam, "and I ended up as the chair of the development sub-committee." Once the decision was made to try and resurrect the club, Haslam steered the remaining members through the funding rounds and planning regulations needed to realise the scheme. He also headed a drive for new membership, which in the club's heyday in the 1960s and 70s had numbered hundreds. But it had shrunk to less than one hundred because of the club's isolation and vulnerability to theft, fly tipping and arson after the mid 1980s, when the airport moved to a new site and left the clubhouse exposed. Membership is now back up to 200 and growing.

"We spent a lot of time translating the ambitions for the club into an

architectural brief, but just as important were the stories around the activities we wanted to include," he says. The new club will be the antithesis of the traditional, somewhat snooty sailing clubs, says Haslam. "It won't be centred around the bar like a traditional sailing club," he adds, pointing out the sailing dinghy fraternity have never been elitist. "It will be family friendly, with a high performance training centre for watersports, high quality changing rooms, café, rescue control and storage facilities. It's going to be the first of a new generation of sailing clubs and the great challenge is to encourage people who would never dream of getting involved in watersports."

Cathy Elwin works for Mersey Waterfront, the organisation established to transform, energise and connect more than 120 km of the Merseyside coastline. It will create a major new waterfront park with a unique sense of place for people to live, work, visit and invest in Merseyside. Cathy points out that whilst the business and airport expansion has brought economic benefits to the area, the creation of the coastal reserve and the new sailing club will provide invaluable recreational resources for local people and visitors. "It will bring the river back into use as an amenity but it's also about engendering a sense of ownership and a great opportunity to draw people in."

For Tom Workman, the lure of the river is irresistible, and there is so much to learn from sailing, he says. "You can genuinely relax and get away from it all, but you also have to be alert. It makes you constantly aware of the wind and the turn of the tide. It's beautiful, but you can go from a flat, calm surface to 6 ft white-topped waves in no time - yes, in the Mersey!" 

Dinghy sailing became a popular sport after the Second World War and increasingly accessible after the 1963 Boat Show when the Daily Mirror newspaper sponsored a new small boat design. Liverpool Sailing Club started in 1958 and was one of the first clubs in the country to appoint a lady commodore. Members sailed across the river to Cheshire, upriver to Widnes and beyond, and sometimes even downriver and back against the tide.



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THE HIDDEN POLLUTION

Just because you can't see it doesn't mean it's not there.

Words Edwin Colyer Image J Westrich / Zefa

You step out of the shower, wrap yourself in a warm towel and, as you squeeze toothpaste onto your brush, watch the remaining suds swirl down the plughole. The toothpaste froth soon goes the same way, as does the bathroom cleaner, bleach, detergents, paint washed from paint brushes and a whole host of other everyday chemicals.

Once down the drains we easily forget about their fate, and leave the water companies to wonder about how to clean everything up. Fortunately they do a good job: wastewater treatment plants cope admirably with the chemical cocktail that we send their way.

According to Defra, since 1990 over £20 billion has gone into upgrading the country's wastewater infrastructure. Limits on the amount of pollution that industries and water treatment plants are allowed to discharge to rivers ensure that the UK meets environmental quality standards. Further controls have reduced or even banned the use of several dangerous substances. All these improvements have led to a steady improvement in water quality across the UK. The arrival of salmon in the River Mersey in 2001 testifies to how things have changed.

Yet pollution still slips through the net. No matter how good our wastewater treatment plants are, they don't remove all pollutants. On top of which, not all polluted water passes through them. Scientists have found traces of everything from PCBs to ibuprofen in our river systems. They warn that even in small quantities the accumulative effects of such pollution could be serious.

Meanwhile, new pollutants are coming to light that in the past were not concerns. "Things that were the most obvious and dangerous hazards to human health were dealt with early on to stop us poisoning our estuaries, the environment and potentially people," says Dr Rick Leah, an ecotoxicologist from Liverpool University. "But we are now left with substances that are difficult to control.

"Only recently have people realised that pharmaceutical and personal care products are also a particular problem," notes Dr Leah, "mainly because they are biologically active and are not screened for biodegradability. Today pesticides have to pass rigorous tests to ensure that they will break down into harmless products in the environment but drugs and other personal care products are not tested in this way.

"Scientists are only beginning to realise that some things do not break down or get trapped in the treatment works. Ibuprofen, the common pain killer, for example, is persistent and is now being detected in the environment, although we don't know what it may do yet."

[continued over]

- Since 1990 over £20 billion has gone into upgrading the country's wastewater infrastructure.
- Together with tighter controls over pollution discharges and the banning of certain substances, this has dramatically improved the obvious 'point source' pollution such as sewage and industrial effluent, leading to far cleaner water in rivers and waterways.
- But researchers are increasingly concerned about substances that in the past were not thought to be a problem, such as medicines and personal care products.
- Some chemicals are known to have dramatic effects in the environment. Bisphenol A, for example, is one of a number of endocrine disruptors, chemicals which can cause the feminisation of male fish and are a particular problem in the River Mersey.
- Modern wastewater treatment plants are highly effective, but they cannot remove all pollutants from the water. There are also substances which campaigners and researchers are concerned about, but for which there is no regulatory requirement to remove from wastewater.
- Another major problem is that not all wastewater gets treated. In urban areas rainwater washes contaminants into the drainage system and during storms this can overwhelm wastewater treatment plants.
- With higher water quality standards coming into force from Europe and new research highlighting the effects of pollutants, we need to keep on finding ways of making our environment cleaner.

There is less doubt over what other chemicals in the environment can do, and it's not good news. Certainly, not all of them are washed down household drains in the same way that medicines and personal care products can be. But wherever they originate, there is mounting evidence that a chemical cocktail has accumulated in the environment.

One such group of chemicals are known as endocrine disruptors - in 2002 researchers published data revealing that low levels of oestrogenic hormones in wastewater could cause the feminisation of male fish.

"Endocrine disruptors are a special problem because small amounts do come through sewage treatment," explains Dr Leah. "They are the natural hormones we secrete and the synthetic hormones found in contraceptive pills. Plus there are other pollutants such as DDT that also have oestrogenic activity."

"Until recently, hormones did not feature on the Environment Agency's list of things to be concerned about," says Dr Leah.

The Mersey estuary has suffered particularly from endocrine disruption; it has the second highest rate of fish feminisation in the country. In other rivers specific sources of the oestrogenic pollution have been identified (sewage effluents or certain detergents used by the wool industry). In the Mersey, however, the hunt is still on.

Chemicals such as endocrine disruptors are just one symptom of a far larger issue now coming to light. Pollutants have accumulated throughout the environment, not just in our rivers.

And it is not just fish in which unexpected chemicals have been found. Blood tests on volunteers in the UK showed that every volunteer was contaminated with a large number of toxic man-made chemicals, albeit at low concentrations. No one is saying that people are starting to change sex, but equally, no one is really sure what the combined effect of the chemicals in our blood streams, even at low levels, might be.

Matthew Wilkinson, head of WWF-UK's Toxics Programme, says research suggests that these chemicals may affect behaviour and health. "At the higher levels of background contamination you start to see subtle effects such as a slight decrease in IQ and altered behaviours. People are conditioned so that if children have the right number of limbs and fingers then everything is OK. But children exposed to these background levels of chemicals may not be able to reach their full potential."

WWF wants to see robust regulation of hazardous chemicals and has a priority hit list of persistent and bioaccumulative substances, as well as endocrine disruptors, that it believes should be banned. They include brominated phenols used in flame retardants. "These could be the next generation PCBs," he warns. "They are already accumulating in whales and polar bears and getting into pristine environments."

WWF is contributing to the European Commission's consultation over the proposed REACH (Registration, Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals) legislation that is set to overhaul regulation of the chemical industry in Europe.

So the massive investment in water treatment facilities, combined with tougher laws and actions by industry, has been highly effective in dealing with the obvious 'point sources' of pollution, such as sewage and industrial effluent. This has led to vastly improved water quality. Yet researchers are uncovering more and more sources and types of pollution that in the past went unseen.

One of the big problems is 'diffuse pollution', which Defra recently called "the greatest challenge to further improving water quality." Diffuse pollution typically does not come directly from households or industry into the sewage system, making it hard to trace and harder still to deal with. Essentially, it occurs when rainwater runs off city streets or rural fields and into rivers and waterways, washing pollutants along with it.

In rural locations the bulk of diffuse pollution comes from agriculture, when excess pesticides, fertilisers, slurries and sludges are washed off into rivers or leach into groundwater. With around 70% of the UK's land being agricultural, both the government and most researchers focus on farming when looking at diffuse pollution. But urban environments also make a significant contribution.

Take a city like Manchester, for example, with all its traffic. Whilst you may only change your tyres every 100,000 miles, every journey you make rubs away the tread. Anticorrosive coatings, often containing cadmium, also gradually erode. Of course, you don't notice the effects on a single car, but when thousands of vehicles move around a city or along a motorway, the potential for pollution adds up. When it rains all the dirt, sediments and pollution are washed into the drains and can end up in our rivers.

"Diffuse pollution is caused by the inevitable consequences of how the country is plumbed," says Dr Leah. "Foul water is dealt with more-or-less satisfactorily most of the time in sewage plants, but you cannot treat the large volume of surface water during periods of very heavy rainfall in the same way."

The Mersey is a prime example of an urban river greatly at risk from this type of pollution. Dr Leah says that the figures speak for themselves. "The river may not exceed limits for specific pollutants, but the background levels can still be undesirably high. Whilst the point sources have been dealt with, persistent chemicals and heavy metals still end up in the river."

According to Amanda Wright, research and information manager at the Mersey Basin Campaign, "Some urban runoff eventually ends up at wastewater treatment plants where it can be treated to remove much of the pollution. But it is difficult and prohibitively expensive for treatment works to process all urban runoff, especially during heavy rain."

Indeed, during storms they cannot cope with the increased water flows, and some untreated water has to be diverted directly into the waterways. Storm water overflows (especially when they occur without storm conditions) have been a particular problem along the Mersey, but significant investment is underway. United Utilities, the Northwest's water and wastewater company, is building several large storage tanks to hold storm waters and thus limit the release of untreated waters into the river.

Even so, Dr Leah suggests that regulators should make discharge limits more stringent, especially for storm water inputs. "A larger portion of surface water could be treated by the regular wastewater infrastructure. Sewage works are set up to remove almost everything out of the water, including PAHs and PCBs that settle out with the particulate sludges. They can even deal with some amount of oil and solvent contamination. If this was done, then we would begin to get rid of the impacts that ordinary drain water has on the environment."

Terry Hindle, team leader for environmental management at the Environment Agency, agrees that surface water should be dealt with more carefully.

"The Agency always considers diffuse pollution when consulted by planners," he says. "We also work with local authorities to develop sustainable drainage systems such as percolation systems that leave residues on the surface, buffer strips and middle ditches on roads that foster an environment where organic chemicals are naturally broken down." (See also, page 22).

Settlement or balancing ponds and reed beds are a good solution where diversion of

surface water into the sewage system is not possible, such as motorways or new urban developments.

The WWF meanwhile calls for a radical reduction in the use of potentially noxious chemicals. "We don't think in terms of diffuse or point pollution, but simply environmental contaminants," says Matthew Wilkinson. "Once you identify that some chemical in the environment has a toxic effect you can't do a recall. It is too late."

"We want to move away from end-of-pipe regulation," he argues. "We think the problem should be nipped in the bud by stopping the use of the worst chemicals in the first place."

The recent European Water Framework Directive, meanwhile, will help to address the specific issue of diffuse pollution. It sets higher standards for water quality and specifies the drawing up of a list of priority substances to be tackled. Water resources will be managed in terms of water catchment areas, recognising that the quality of water in a river system depends on all the potentially polluting activity within it, not just direct discharges into watercourses.

"We now have to move inland to find the sources of diffuse elements," says Terry Hindle. More often than not, he argues, pollution can be traced to a source, as his experience on the ICREW project illustrates. "We have been monitoring bacterial contamination in Northwest bathing waters. Some contamination comes from sewage, some from sites like caravan parks. It is a question of making lots of site visits and working with the owners to prevent this happening."

Nevertheless, despite the best environmental detective work, some pollution will always remain. "We have a principle that the polluter pays," says Hindle, "but who do you blame?"

Now there's something to think about next time you're in the shower. **S**

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“...there is mounting evidence that a chemical cocktail has accumulated in the environment.”

A RESPONSIBLE POSITION

Corporate social responsibility is still in its infancy, but already it faces a backlash from a sceptical public and a cynical media. In the post-Exxon Valdez, post-Enron world, people find it hard to believe that business can genuinely act responsibly. Most of all, however, people are confused about what corporate social responsibility (CSR) really is.

"I think the backlash is justified in some cases, where companies are just using their profits to sponsor projects in local communities, but are not really concerned about what that project delivers and what the impacts are," says Lesley Brannan, former head of corporate social responsibility at United Utilities (UU), one of the Northwest's biggest companies.

The fact that until three years ago Brannan's job didn't even exist is testament to the rapid evolution of CSR. The conventional wisdom is that CSR was born out of the public relations disaster that followed the Exxon Valdez disaster, when oil giant Exxon managed to alienate huge swathes of the public with its apparently insensitive handling of the crisis. It began to dawn on companies that operating in splendid isolation from the communities and people that supported them was no longer an option.

But CSR has only really come of age in the last four or five years, and for many people it remains a hazily defined concept. In general, it's the idea that companies should operate in a way that is transparent and which takes into account an awareness of the social impact of their actions, as well as concerns about the environment and sustainable development.

One thing CSR is not, says Brannan, is sponsorship. Part of the reason there has been a backlash, she says, is because some companies have been guilty of throwing a little money into the local community, labelling it CSR and milking it for all the PR they can get.

Yet at the same time, Brannan agrees that many companies have been afraid to be seen as too prescriptive. It's as if, having handed over the cash, they might undermine its value if they take too much interest in how it's spent. None of which squares with Brannan's own view of CSR. The fact that CSR is another, admittedly new, aspect of business does nothing to undermine its value, she says.

"Something I am really passionate about is the belief that companies should not be embarrassed or shy about corporate responsibility having a bottom line impact.

"A company is going to make a profit at the end of the day. It's not a charity. It's not a social enterprise. It's a profit making thing. But it can make profits in a responsible way and that responsible behaviour can sometimes enhance profits."

Brannan would like to see the government do more to make CSR better understood and practiced by business. Whilst she opposes regulation, arguing that it would suppress creativity and innovation and encourage a tick box approach, she would like to see more case studies and examples of the benefits of CSR to small and medium sized businesses and large corporations.

Still only in her twenties, Brannan has been with UU since she graduated with a degree in environmental science from Lancaster University in 1998. At first she went around the company as a management trainee on the road to becoming a wastewater specialist, a period she describes as "really good fun and challenging."

Even so, she was on the look out for something less analytical when she spotted a job as a community partnership assistant being advertised within the group corporate centre. It was a big change but one that inspired her. As well as working with community groups, Brannan was soon spending a lot of time on UU's involvement in the upcoming Commonwealth Games. UU were 'Community Partner' to the Games, ensuring people from deprived communities got to see the action.

Then, five months after she'd started, her boss left on maternity leave and Brannan suddenly found herself managing the company's CSR programme.

Those were the early days of CSR at UU and Brannan's understanding of what it is has grown in

tandem with the company's efforts to embed it more deeply in the corporate culture. Which is another of Brannan's central opinions on the subject.

"It's not just about communities and the environment, it's about how we allow people to have a good work-life balance and about how we support their health and improve their working environment." For Brannan, CSR is a two way street, reaching out into the community but also back into the company.

Perhaps the obvious example is Brannan's own experience at UU. Less than a year after working on the company's role in the Commonwealth Games, she was out in the City of Manchester stadium competing for Wales in the women's hammer throwing.

"I've been really lucky," she says. "I get half a day a week off work to train. That has enabled me to travel to a coach in Yorkshire, or complete 2 training sessions on that day, which has had a massive impact."

"If we can support and encourage people and keep them happy in their work then they'll perform better."

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**LESLEY BRANNAN, PARTNERSHIP MANAGER
AT UNITED UTILITIES AND HAMMER THROWER
FOR WALES.**

TURNING POINTS

1998

Graduates with an honours degree in environmental science after studying at Lancaster University and the University of Western Ontario, Canada. Joins United Utilities as a graduate trainee.

2001

Changes direction to take up a position as a community partnership assistant. Within five months she is managing the company's CSR programme after her boss goes off on maternity leave.

2002

Competes for Wales in the hammer competition of the Commonwealth Games in Manchester, just failing to make the finals by 13 cm.

2004

Seconded to Groundwork Northwest, in the hope of extending across the country the close relationship between the two organisations that already exists in the Northwest.



DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE

Pioneering thinking is turning the river that unites Manchester and Salford from a backwater into a development hot spot.

A beach on the River Irwell seemed such an extraordinary idea that it made headlines. Last February, the results of an architectural competition for a derelict industrial site in Salford revealed plans for a new mixed-use development, including a sandy San Tropez-style beachfront. The 1.6 hectare site will become home to apartments, all of which are designed to have a view of the river, with space for shops, restaurants and leisure areas of the sort that have driven the popularity of city living in the north of England.

If a beach raised eyebrows, it is only because the idea of lounging on a summer's day next to a river that only 10-15 years ago was considered a lost cause may have come as a surprise. However, clean up efforts have been ongoing for a number of years, driven by the Environment Agency, water company United Utilities and a local action project backed by Salford, Trafford and Manchester local authorities and the Mersey Basin Campaign. The quality of the water has improved dramatically, transformed from a stinking polluted artery to become home to a variety of fish and wildlife.

The area off Springfield Lane where the new flats will be built has been in industrial use since the 19th century. The "difficult" site, formerly a heavy engineering factory prone to break-ins and vandalism, will be demolished to make way for the new development.

Despite the challenges the site faces, sustained regeneration efforts in Salford means that the triangular plot of land next to the river has become a highly sought after location. Salford City Council, which owned the land, chose urban regeneration specialists Urban Splash as developers of the site.

"It's in a glorious bend of the river with quite a good aspect," says Salford council head of planning Malcolm Sykes. "Urban Splash had a vision to bring that part of the river back to use again and make it a very attractive residential site. Our experience over the last ten or more years in Salford is that people want to be by the waterside once it has been improved."

When the competition for architects was put out in late 2003, 75 architects from 19 countries responded with a design for the site. The winners, London-based Weston Williamson, were chosen not only for the promise of a little beach resort-style glamour, but also their well-realised plans and record of delivery.

"Weston Williamson demonstrated a very thoughtful and intelligent response to the site," said Patrick Sheridan, development manager at Urban Splash. "The open spaces, the landscaped gardens, the use of the riverside and carefully placed buildings on the boundaries of the site, are the makings of what will become a fantastic place to live, work and play."

The Irwell forms the boundary between Salford and Manchester, giving the new flats views across the river and into Manchester proper. The Springfield Lane site will extend the successful redevelopment of Salford's Chapel Street, which over the past five years has enjoyed about £150 million

of private investment including the five star Lowry Hotel, which overlooks the Irwell, just over a mile away from the new development.

"Chapel Street regeneration has been going for about five years now. It has been incredibly successful," says Sykes. "There is demand there, the Chapel Street area is really booming at the moment. We are seeing an amazing number of small businesses establish themselves in the area, one or two of them moving out of the core of the centre."

For years the Irwell, the Manchester Ship Canal and Salford Quays were derelict, and development tended to turn its back on the urban waterways. Since the success of

**SHIFTING SANDS:
A BEACH ON THE RIVER IRWELL
SIGNIFIES NEW OPPORTUNITIES**



redeveloping The Quays in the last decade, this trend has been shifted.

"Only five years ago Calatrava's Trinity Bridge opened up the waterfront off Chapel Street and that has provided the setting for all the developments we see there now, including the Lowry Hotel, the Inland Revenue building, and two prestigious housing developments," says Sykes. "We think there is scope for that at Springfield Lane. The importance to us is that it continues this momentum. Clearly you will want to go along the riverside from Springfield Lane into the city centre. It creates that momentum and boosts all we've been trying to do for a number of years."

As the banks of the Irwell become a development hotspot, Salford has also put in place plans to make regeneration on

"Chapel Street has enjoyed about £150 million of private investment in the last five years, including the five star Lowry Hotel."

the river bank kick start the redevelopment of the inner city as well. Last month architects and designers from across the globe were invited to submit entries for a 20 year regeneration framework, which will address run down areas in Ordsall, Broughton, Langworthy, Kersal, Claremont, Weaste and Seedley. The framework will be backed by a government appointed urban regeneration company.

"We see these early developments such as Springfield Lane within that framework," says Sykes. "We've just gone out to international competition for this vision and framework for central Salford regeneration and the waterside is a key part of that."

RESCUE ME

If you're in trouble on the Mersey estuary, pray someone calls the Mersey River Rescue service.

Words David Ward Photographs Len Grant

We are taking a tour of familiar trouble spots on the River Mersey. The boat noses first round the cattle sheds, decaying, rotting timber landing stages close to the Pier Head in Liverpool. Anyone, alive or dead, swept into here, with its maze of piles and supports, will be hard to find.

Then we swing across the mile-wide, dun-coloured waters of the Mersey to the Birkenhead side, making the most of the view over the boat's wake to the Three Graces behind us. The famous ferries are shuffling across the river and containers are being loaded onto cargo boats, one from Northern Ireland, one from Bari in southern Italy.

We take a close look at the black landing stage at which they are moored. "People can easily get sucked under there," explains Ken Scott, station officer with the River Mersey Inshore Rescue Service, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. "Depending on the current, they could come up at the other side but it wouldn't be a journey I would recommend."

We cruise up river to the oil terminal at Tranmere, where tankers are unloaded every day at a mess of steel in which pleasure boats that slip their moorings can become entangled (often with unaware owners, sometimes sleeping, sometimes drunk, still on board). Two landing stages are still in use; one, derelict with a rusting crane, is redundant and becomes an attractive and dangerous climbing frame for kids in summer.

It's time to return to base, a couple of basic Portakabins

next to the ferry terminal at the Pier Head. Chief operations officer Andy Fell opens up the throttle and the prow lifts. The three of us are tilted backwards as the twin 250-horsepower Honda engines drive the 7.4 m Avon Seairider back across the river at 40 knots.

That's fast: fast enough to propel the rescue team to most casualties within three minutes of call out.

"Time is of the essence, particularly because of the effects of cold water," says Scott. "This boat is set up for a single purpose - to save life on the River Mersey."

It's packed with kit, medical and technical, plus stretcher, blankets and a slide raft - an inflatable boat for 60 or so survivors. "If we had a major emergency such as an aircraft ditching in the river or a ferry sinking, the raft would enable us to help rescue large numbers of casualties very quickly," adds Scott.

The boat skims past the Albert Dock, riding the flat water like a Grand National champion at full gallop, and then glides into its moorings behind the Portakabins.

The 12 staff of the rescue service guard 26 miles of water from Runcorn, round the Wirral and up to Crosby day and night all year round.

Depending on the tide, the river can run at speeds of up to 12 knots. Parts will be navigable, or reduced to stretches of water separated by sandbanks. The worst flows can be on the flood rather than the ebb, with large flat areas covered very quickly. On top of that, there are patches of treacherous quicksand. If you become trapped and are knocked over, the water will keep you there and you won't get up again.

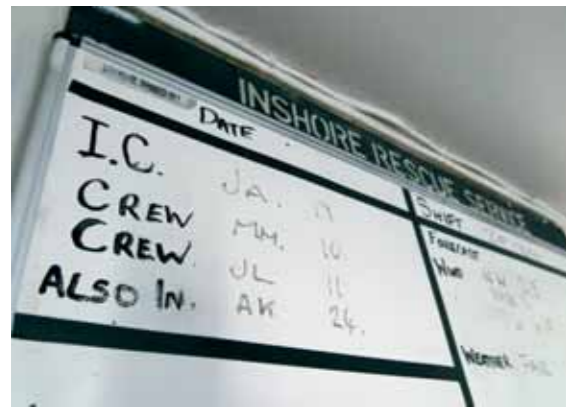
"In winter, it's cold, often wet, and conditions can be very harsh," said Scott. "Wind is the biggest factor when operating on open water. It can be a real test of training and commitment."

Mersey River Rescue is unique - an independent charity with no connection to the lifeboat or coastguard services. Sometimes its finances sail very close to the wind and when Scott is not out on patrol on the river, he is searching for funds to keep the service afloat.

"I had had no experience of boats till I came here," he said. "I did a degree [continued over]



“This boat is set up for a single purpose - to save life on the River Mersey.”



“I get moments, usually in the middle of the night out on the river,

in business studies at [Liverpool John Moores University] but could not find a job for two years. I then fell into a scheme to get graduates into employment and was given a six month placement here to help with fund raising. I wasn't aware of the rescue service till then.

“I was offered one temporary contract after another and eventually I was offered a place as a crew member when one became available. The rest is history.”

“I would never have imagined myself doing this job. Sometimes I get moments, usually in the middle of the night out on the river, when I ask myself, ‘How the hell did this happen?’”

The rescue service was established in 1984 and since then has dealt with 3,500 incidents and 3,500 casualties. It has helped almost 2,000 vessels as well as assisting the occasional ditched hot air balloon and stranded dolphin. Its original function was to protect visitors to the international garden festival on the Liverpool bank of the river. “The organisers were concerned that large numbers of people were going to be visiting Liverpool’s waterfront and thought they would provide a limited rescue service as a temporary measure,” said Mike Cummins, who was there at the start and is now the service’s chief officer.

“During the festival, a number of lives were saved in incidents which had nothing to do with the garden festival. We thought that suggested a need for a permanent rescue service in the area.”

It started with one small boat that cost about £2,000 (today’s speedster will cost £120,000 to replace) and was funded first by a charity and then with grants from the now-defunct Merseyside County Council, the Manpower Services Commission and Merseyside Development Corporation.

When what Cummins describes as the funny money began to run out, he and his team looked to Liverpool City Council for support. The city remains the principal funder, with other grants from Sefton and Wirral councils, Merseyside Police Authority, Mersey Travel and Liverpool John Lennon Airport.

“We have gone from providing a service for eight hours a day to a service that operates for 24 hours a day all year round. And we also provide a water-borne rescue service for Liverpool airport,” added Cummins. “But the grants from local authorities never fully meet the cost of providing the service. So there is always a gap that we have to bridge through charitable donations and fundraising events. This year we will probably have to raise £75,000 ourselves. We are always taking a gamble each year that the money is going to come in.”

“There is a serious problem because the board of directors cannot set a budget based on

variable income,” said Frank Vaudrey, chairman of the service’s board. “It has to be on guaranteed income - otherwise we are breaking the law. So we have come quite close to the wire a few times.”

But there is a glimmer of hope on the horizon. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency, recently criticised by MPs over reductions in its service, is funding a risk assessment of search and rescue capability on the Mersey which is likely to be published towards the end of this year. Its recommendations will not be binding but if it finds gaps and makes suggestions for plugging them, it would be difficult for local councils not to be seen to react. Cummins also hopes those recommendations will help him provide a better service to the airport, which has a booming number of movements on a runway that runs parallel and close to the river.

The potential hazards of the setting were made apparent four years ago when five people were killed when an air

when I ask myself, ‘How the hell did this happen?’”

ambulance from the Isle of Man came down in 20 ft of water on its approach to the airport.

“Recovering the bodies and the wreckage took a long time,” said Cummins. “The aircraft broke up on impact and the area was difficult to work in. There is only access by water at certain stages of the tide.”

This tragedy suggested to Cummins what could happen if a large aircraft with more than 200 passengers came down in the river. “Merseyside fire service has a policy of not going onto the water. This raises the issue of what would happen in the case of a major disaster. Their unofficial position is that they will attend - but they are not equipped for that job nor trained for an incident on the water.”

His message is blunt: “In the event of a major air disaster we are not collectively prepared. Unless you prepare, equip and train for that contingency, you are not going to be effective.”

The rescue service is the smallest

player in all this but prides itself on its innovations. Andy Fell went off to Geneva to see how the airport there coped with the dangers of aircraft approaching and taking off over the city’s beautiful lake. They told him about the slide raft which he introduced on the Mersey and then recommended to the Port of London Authority for use on the Thames after the Marchioness disaster.

Most of the people the rescue service helps have got into trouble through accidents or incompetence and are delighted to see an experienced rescuer.

But those who come to the river in a bid to end it all - about 50 a year - are not always so pleased. “The people of Merseyside also have an emotional attachment to the river and I think that feeling is more intense than anywhere else in the country,” said Scott. “I have spoken to people who have tried to enter the water and they have often said, ‘I just wanted to slip beneath the waves and see the seagulls fly over me’. They have this romantic idea of what it is like to be in the Mersey. It’s almost a child-like perspective.”

The serious ones come at night and their bodies are pulled out of the water the next morning. For others, rescuers have to be counsellors, urging those about to jump not to do


it. And even if they jump, the result may not be what they expected.

“One of my first and most difficult rescues was just at the back of the landing stage here,” said Scott. “At low water in the middle of the night, a woman had jumped into an inlet. But because the tide was out, she fell 40ft into deep mud and lay there unconscious and facedown.

“When we arrived, the fire, police and ambulance crews were all there but no one was in a position to be able to help her. We were the only people who could reach her.

“I left the boat and moved through a mix of deep mud and water, plus obstacles such as scaffolding poles and shopping trolleys. When I reached the woman, she regained consciousness after I dug her out and freed her airway. She was helped by the fact that she was quite drunk. When she came round, she looked at me and I introduced myself and told her why I was there.

“She said: ‘Kenny, you’ve ruined my night. I really wanted to die tonight’. It was quite surreal but it’s often the case that you will get no thanks when you are dealing with people who are emotionally disturbed.”

Scott helped her on her way, cleaned himself up and went back to the river. 

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WATER IN YOUR SUDS

Iain White of the University of Manchester describes the barriers inhibiting the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems.

According to DEFRA the single biggest challenge to improving water quality is the prominence of diffuse pollution. Yet despite this acknowledgement, conventional ways of managing surface water often serve to exacerbate the problem.

The need for research into more sustainable methods of managing surface water is becoming increasingly apparent, especially as increasing demand for housing and the predicted effects of climate change intensify fears of more frequent and devastating flooding.

The Environment Agency estimates that in England and Wales, diffuse pollution from surface water runoff is responsible for up to 50% of poor river water quality. Conventional drainage systems concentrate the flow of water and so increase the speed at which runoff passes through the system. When flooding occurs, the result is a pollution-rich solution that coats the land surface.

A small number of conventional drainage systems do incorporate devices to slow runoff, although the overall pre-occupation is for water to be moved from urban areas to watercourses as quickly as possible. Current techniques for surface water management can also increase damage to wildlife, reduce groundwater recharge and become a hindrance to economic development.

However, there are alternative methods of drainage that have the potential to nullify these negative effects. Sustainable drainage systems (SUDS) are an approach to drainage inspired by more natural processes. They encompass a range of flexible techniques that shifts the focus of drainage designs, so they have a higher consideration for both society and the environment.

SUDS have the potential to prevent surface water having such a negative influence upon both the built and natural environment. They can also help the UK adhere to the incoming EU Water Framework Directive.

There are three main advantages of SUDS over conventional drainage techniques; they can reduce the quantity of runoff; slow the velocity of runoff; and provide a passive level of water treatment. However, before widespread implementation can be assured there a number of barriers that must be overcome.

Research undertaken by Iain White, sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council and United Utilities, focused upon identifying and surmounting the barriers affecting the use of SUDS.

Whilst his research found there was a willingness to use SUDS, barriers were identified across all sectors, even at governmental level. Planning Policy Guidance Note 25, which

advocates the use of SUDS, was identified as lacking both strength and clarity and was therefore not widely enforced. Crucially, significant conflicts and inconsistencies have also been found in legislation and regulations.

SUDS come in a variety of shapes and sizes, but such flexibility can be as much of a disadvantage as it is a benefit. No set design standards or maintenance regimes exist for what is essentially a series of drainage options. Uncertainties also surround the whole life cost of a SUDS enterprise.

The current focus on managing runoff on a site-specific basis means that integrated solutions for whole neighbourhoods are often overlooked. Disputes also exist over whether SUDS can be classified as a sewer (and hence be adopted, maintained and funded by water companies). The result is that developers are reluctant to utilise SUDS as they may have trouble selling a development where it is uncertain who maintains the drainage system.

Planning officers are also reticent to implement SUDS, as they require additional best practice evidence to counter a lack of information and guidance. Other stakeholders, such as the Environment Agency, water companies, developers, consultants and engineers can also present barriers, most due to a lack of knowledge, experience and skills when it comes to SUDS.

It should be noted however, that not all barriers occur in all areas. There are some SUDS sites operational around the country, although these remain very limited.

At present, SUDS are treated as an emerging technique and not widely utilised. If steps were taken to encourage the use of more sustainable drainage and to address some of the barriers to new schemes through guidance, best practice, education and further research, SUDS could become an effective surface water management tool for the twenty-first century.

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IN THE DOCK

Opinion: One of the biggest and most influential organisations on the Mersey estuary is guilty of a cavalier attitude that is in danger of setting back years of environmental improvements, says Claire Curtis-Thomas.



Claire Curtis-Thomas has been MP for Crosby since 1997. From her home in the Waterloo area of Liverpool she has a wonderful view of the Mersey estuary and the Irish Sea.

Recent years have been witness to a steady transformation in the area of the River Mersey and its tributaries. From its inland gathering grounds to the great channel that leads out into the sea, a programme of environmental improvements has changed our estuary, at times almost without our noticing, into one of Britain's most attractive sites and settings. Our beaches, from Southport to Blackpool, are now winning coveted Seaside Award status. The Northwest's beaches are now the least polluted by litter in England.

From being a lifeless river - immersion in whose waters once called for a routine stomach pump - the Mersey now sees the return of salmon, and even families of seals on its sandbanks. The one time 'dirty man of Europe', Britain's rivers and beaches are growing cleaner and healthier year by year - and nowhere is the change more startling than in the Northwest.

The whole Mersey catchment, its hinterland and its tributary rivers, are alive with projects for regeneration. Liverpool once turned its back on the Leeds-Liverpool canal - now it is preparing to extend the canal the last few miles across the historic Liverpool waterfront, allowing canal boats and life into the magnificent Albert Dock complex. And out in the river itself, next year will see a cruise liner facility bringing up to 50 big passenger ships a year into the Mersey and the city.

Liverpool's city seaboard is already a World Heritage Site and by 2008, when the city celebrates as European Capital of Culture, the Mersey will be one of the waterfront wonders of the world.

What a shame, then, that in the midst of this sensitive and imaginative regeneration, one area, the Liverpool Freeport in Seaforth, is pursuing its aims in seeming isolation, putting up eyesore buildings without consultation or consideration of their impact on the environment.

The Mersey Docks and Harbour Board are a law unto themselves: acting independently in their personal fiefdom, this new generation of landed gentry is ignoring existing plans and local representations, and may well be planning to build over the hard-won bird sanctuary on their premises and ban access to the 'terrorist twitchers' who created and who use it.

There is no objection to their worthy aim of encouraging new jobs and inward investment to the Mersey estuary area, even if the vast storage shed they have recently created in Seaforth, dominating the view from Crosby's shores, has yet to create any actual new and significant employment opportunities. But economic prosperity is the goal of us all, and must be pursued in the context of creating and preserving the attractive environment in which it can thrive.

I am now calling, not for the powers to curb such buildings, but for the urgent creation of a statutory requirement for full consultation and sharing of information in such cases, so that all relevant views and objections may be heard and steps taken to reduce the impact of such construction. None of the existing environmental legislation seems able to achieve this end, but it should surely be enabled to do so.

With this in place, the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, and others like them, will be able to work hand in hand with the many groups and partnerships of the Mersey estuary in joint pursuit of their purpose of growth and regeneration, and bring about the completed vision of what is surely destined to be the jewel in the crown of the Northwest.

MORE INFORMATION:

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