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BEHIND THE FACADE

Life in a regeneration hot spot.

ICEBERGS IN THE THAMES

Debunking the myths about water shortages.

THE RIGHT TO FLOAT

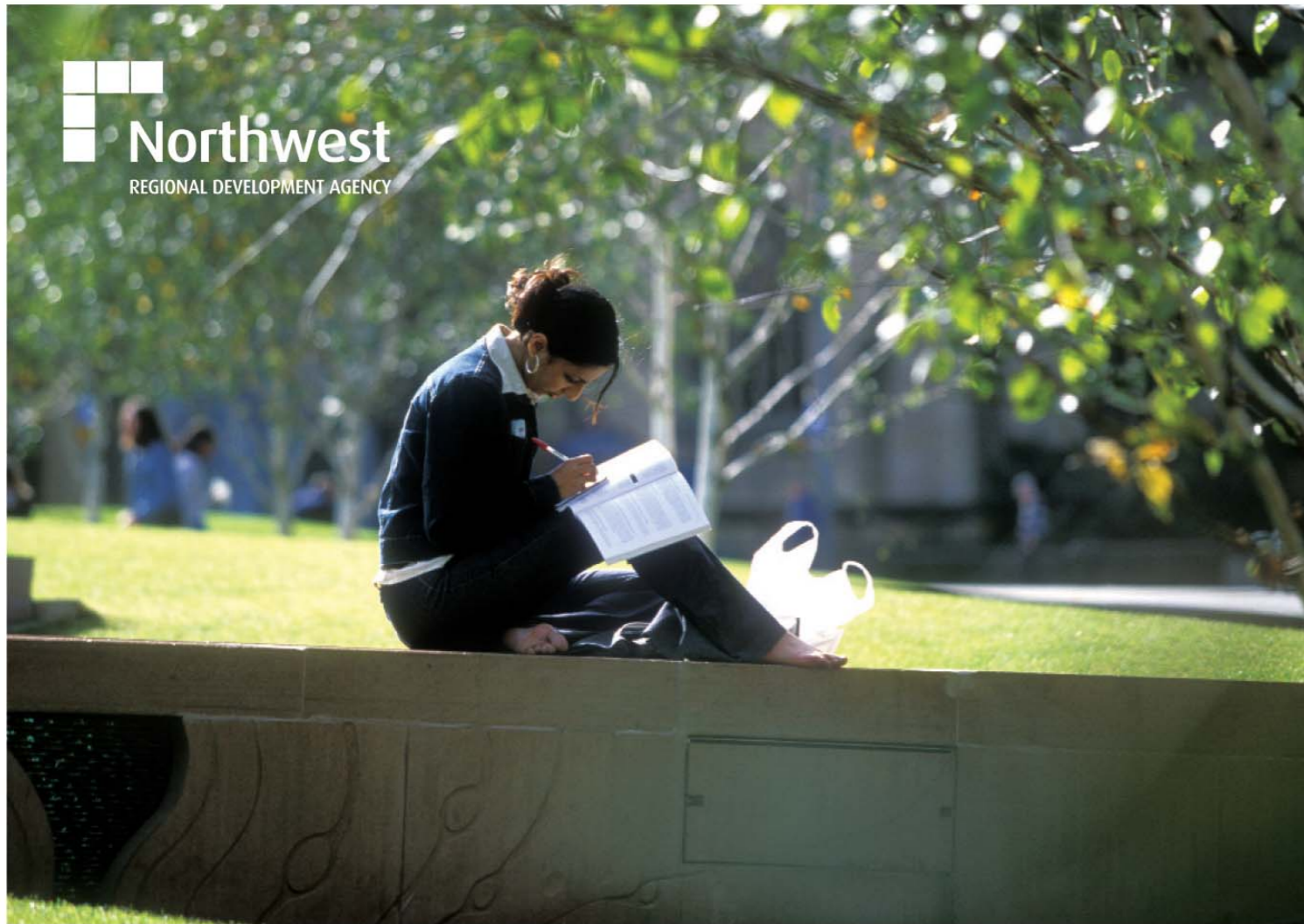
A groundbreaking scheme that floats our boat.

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news, reviews, interviews
and comments.

WHAT'S IT WORTH? £

How the environment drives the economy.



Creating a better environment for England's Northwest

The Northwest Regional Development Agency is ensuring that England's Northwest becomes a leading region for sustainable development by:

- Signing up to England's Northwest Climate Change Charter, an initiative to encourage the public and private sectors to commit to reducing energy consumption and reliance on fossil fuels.
- Developing a Climate Change Action Plan to prepare the region for the impacts of climate change.
- Supporting initiatives such as BREW and ENWORKS, which are helping small to medium sized companies increase their competitiveness by making environmental improvements.
- Promoting the use of renewable energy through the CIS Solar Tower project in Manchester, which aims to create 180,000 units of renewable electricity each year.

For further details please contact **01925 400 100**
or visit www.nwda.co.uk or
www.englandsnorthwest.com

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Climate change has gone mainstream. Headlines scream it on an almost

daily basis. Newspapers that once treated environmentalists as lefty-loonies now have environmental correspondents.

It's one thing to go mainstream; it's another to go legitimate. In years to come the moment that will be seen as the turning point, when many people first understood what climate change really means, will be the opening titles of *Are we changing Planet Earth?* Lord Attenborough, the greatest of natural history film-makers, has laid his seal of approval on the science of climate change. There can be no doubts.

Which is all well and good, except that once again the mainstream media is playing catch up. Environmental leaders are already attempting to bring more new ideas into the public forum. What is required, they say, is not just hand wringing over the extent of global warming, but a shift to a whole new relationship with nature. There's no need for alarm, no one is suggesting a barren lifestyle shorn of all mod-cons. But at the same time, don't expect those stories about the environment to go away any time soon.

For more on the changing attitudes towards the environment, see our story on pages 10-13.

Matthew Sutcliffe, editor
m.sutcliffe@merseybasin.org.uk

Source^{NW} is the magazine of the Mersey Basin Campaign. The campaign works towards better water quality and sustainable waterside regeneration for the rivers and waterways of England's Northwest.

Cover *What's it Worth?* Page 10. Ullswater lake in The Lake District. ©Richard Klune/Corbis

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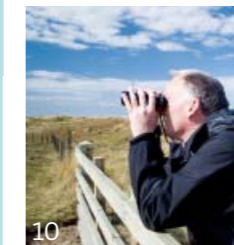
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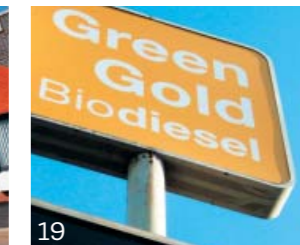
Comment: Great cities have great waterfronts and there are plenty of world-class examples to inspire the Northwest, says **Lewis Biggs**.



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Progress along the prom

Merseyside takes Pride in our Promenades.

Otterspool Park and Promenade in South Liverpool is getting a major facelift this summer thanks to funding from Mersey Waterfront and the ideas of local people.

The partnership has earmarked £1.4 million through its Pride in our Promenades initiative to revitalise a 1.9 km stretch of coastline from Jericho Lane to Beechdale Road, near the site of the 1984 Garden Festival.

Otterspool is the pilot project for the programme, which aims to regenerate three of Merseyside's historic promenades. Work gets underway this month, and is due to be completed in the spring of 2007.

Improved seating, lighting and signposting, as well as new railings, litter bins and information boards are being installed along the prom. Visitors will also see a redesigned entrance area at Jericho Lane, and the historic 'otters' plaque' seating area in the park is to be restored.

The park itself will benefit from a new landscaped area, providing better accommodation for organised events such as open-air theatre. Otterspool has already hosted successful arts events, including the popular Theatre in the Park plays, and the new 'stage' will make it a key venue for local, national and international performances during Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture in 2008.

Local people took the lead in planning the project, participating in a series of People's Panels to determine what improvements they wanted to see. The panels

are based on the US model of Citizens' Juries, and have been pioneered in the UK by Mersey Waterfront.

Louise Hopkins, director of Mersey Waterfront, said: "Our People's Panels are the cornerstone of public involvement in developing ideas and canvassing feedback from residents and waterfront users, and have played a key role in developing these improvements.

"Time and time again residents along Mersey Waterfront have told us they want better basic facilities – and that's what they'll be getting at Otterspool."

"Time and time again residents along Mersey Waterfront have told us they want better basic facilities – and that's what they'll be getting at Otterspool."

Work at Otterspool will complement further million-pound plans that are currently being developed for the renewal of key parts of the seafront between Seacombe and New Brighton, as well as improvements to the Sefton section

of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal towpath.

Iain Taylor of the Mersey Basin Campaign, who led the consultation process, commented: "The vision of Pride in our Promenades is to restore all the promenades in Merseyside to the highest possible standard. The Mersey is a tremendous asset,

and this project has the potential to make it a great experience.

The improvements at Otterspool are the first step towards achieving this aim."

MORE INFORMATION

www.merseywaterfront.com/pride_promenades

Our home in the North

Salford trumps Manchester to attract BBC.

Salford MediaCity: UK has won preferred bidder status to be the BBC's new £400 million home in the North.

The proposed waterfront site is close to the Lowry arts centre and the Imperial War Museum in Salford Quays and could eventually become home to a host of creative industries with the BBC at its heart. Supporters are calling it the country's first Media City.

A brand new state-of-the-art building has been designed as a creative and technical hub that will be the corporation's powerhouse in the North. A custom-built recording studio for the BBC Philharmonic,



floating stages for theatre and concert venues, plus studio and technical facilities are just some of the offerings for media industries.

Plans for the site would also mean space for other creative industries to sit alongside Auntie, with affordable workshops available to both established independents and start-up companies.

It is anticipated that the BBC's move to Salford's waterfront will create 15,500 jobs. Around 1,500 trainee posts will also be available each year, nurturing the Northwest's creative talent and offering ambitious youngsters the chance to build a rewarding career in the region.

However, although the BBC has selected its preferred site in the North, the move is still far from certain. It is highly dependent on the outcome of the licence fee settlement this autumn, with the BBC wanting a higher fee to help pay for the move while still insisting on value for money and affordability from the deal with Salford.

"The development of a media city isn't just about engineering a creative environment for broadcasters," said Felicity Goodey, chair of Central Salford Urban Regeneration Company and the bid's co-ordinator.

"It's about building a creative hub which stimulates the growth and innovation of media and media-related companies across the North and beyond.

"This is a global industry. We've nowhere like it in the UK. Media City allows this creative energy to explode into a thousand applications and has the space to nurture hundreds of businesses and thousands of talented people for the future."

Salford City Council Leader, councillor John Merry said: "This is the most important day for the city for a long time, but this is also a great time for the whole of the region.

"There is clearly a job of work to be done for both the city and the BBC to take us through the next stage and towards the licence fee settlement."

The Northwest Regional Development Agency, which has already committed an investment of around £30 million to Salford, also welcomed the BBC's announcement. Chairman Bryan Gray said: "The creation of a world class creative and digital business sector has the potential to add £170 million to the regional economy, with additional benefits throughout the North of England."

MORE INFORMATION

www.salford.gov.uk

SOUND BITES

Spot the plop. Eagle-eyed rambles are being recruited to 'spot the plop' as this year's National Waterway Wildlife Survey gathers pace. The 'plop' in question is made by a diving water vole. "Identifying exactly where water voles live is crucial to their survival," said Mark Robinson, British Waterways' national ecologist. Water voles are often mistaken for the more common brown rat – to identify them, look for small hidden ears, silky mid-brown fur, a blunt nose and a short furry tail. Water voles are one of the country's most endangered species, but the survey is also interested in hearing about kingfishers, swans, mallards, frogs and dragonflies. www.waterscape.com/wildlife

Save the Ribble. Opposition is mounting to ambitious plans focused on the River Ribble in Lancashire. A campaign group, Save the Ribble, has set up a website, organised protest walks and attracted the interest of the local media. They fear that proposals for a new electricity-generating barrage on the river would starve it of vital silt and that wildlife would be affected by plans for a £350 million central park on the site of a nature reserve. They also object to Preston City Council's Riverworks project, which includes plans for up to 4,000 new homes, a promenade, shops and offices on open land and allotments on the south bank of the river.

Online crystal ball. A new website has been launched that allows users to predict how much of the world's resources might be used by the seven million residents of the Northwest by 2050. The Eco-Region North West project – the first of its kind in the UK – employs

interactive database technologies developed by a team of researchers at the University of Manchester. Using topical questions, on-screen prompts and real life data, users get to make major policy decisions on vital issues such as climate change, waste or transport. The current regional eco-footprint works out at more than three times our fair planetary share. www.eco-region-northwest.com

Water efficiency awards. The Environment Agency is inviting entries for the Water Efficiency Awards 2007. The biennial awards allow the country's top water-saving companies to show their customers and competitors how environmentally aware they are. Last year's overall winner, Sheepdrove Organic Farm, now saves over £200,000

a year after installing a system to recycle wastewater. The awards cover seven categories and are open to organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors that are making savings on both water and money. The winners will be announced at a ceremony in London in March 2007. Entries are due in by August 31st. www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Blackpool's green winner. The Solaris Centre on Blackpool seafront has been crowned the Northwest's best environmentally friendly building in the region's most prestigious property awards, run by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. The renovated and redesigned 1930s Art Deco structure was the first 'zero energy'

building in the region – it produces all the energy it uses – with wind turbines and photovoltaic cells placed all along its roof. Any overproduction of electricity is exported to the national grid, and all the water used in the building is recycled. Solaris is one of four regional prize winners which go forward into the national awards, to be announced in London in October. www.rics.org

Shining examples. Have you been part of a regeneration project that overcame seemingly insurmountable obstacles? Do you think others could learn from your experience? If so, submit your project to the RENEW Northwest Exemplar Learning Programme 2007. These awards with a twist showcase examples of good practice in regeneration. If successful, you'll be invited to a showcase your activities to others at a special event, and be in with a chance of earning Exemplar status. The judges are especially interested in the

challenges you faced and what you learned. Closing date for entries is 15th September, further information at www.renew.co.uk/exemplar.

Back in the Chair. Ruth Kelly, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, has appointed Professor Peter Batey for a second three-year term as chair of the Mersey Basin Campaign, the organisation that publishes Source NW. Professor Batey is a leading academic who has been Lever Professor of Town and Regional Planning at the University of Liverpool since 1989. His appointment to the chair in 2004 followed twelve years of influential work with the Campaign. "It is very important that the Campaign continues to evolve, responding to emerging issues such as climate change, and focusing its efforts where it can make a real difference," said Professor Batey. "I am convinced the Campaign has a vital and influential role to play in the years to come."



Walking back to happiness

More than 200 enthusiastic ramblers marked the opening of Speke Garston Coastal Reserve in Liverpool, part of the international Artery programme. The £5 million project has turned a six hectare patch of wasteland on the banks of the Mersey Estuary from a graveyard for burned out cars into

a haven for wildlife, with a wetland area, wildflower meadows and new paths for walking and cycling. Project partners included Peel Holdings, Mersey Waterfront, Liverpool City Council, the National Trust and the Mersey Basin Campaign.

Top marks for NWDA

Regional Development Agency achieves top rating in independent review.

Theme	Assessment	Score
Ambition	Performing strongly	4
Prioritisation	Performing strongly	4
Capacity	Performing well	3
Performance Management	Performing well	3
Achievement (doubled)	Performing well	3 (6)
Overall score	Performing strongly	20

The Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) has achieved top marks in its first ever performance assessment, designed to establish how effectively the organisation is working to improve the region's economy.

The NWDA scored 20 out of a possible 24 in the Independent Performance Audit carried out by the National Audit Office, placing it in the highest ranking category – “performing strongly”.

The NWDA and the East of England Development Agency were the first Regional Development Agencies to be assessed in this way, with the EEDA rated as “performing well” with 15 points. All eight agencies outside London will be audited by March 2007.

The agency undertook a self-assessment with auditors using over 100 information sources, including documents, site visits, interviews and focus groups to gain a rounded picture of performance. The assessment

judged that the NWDA has “a clear vision of what it wants to achieve as an organisation”, and praised its achievements to date. Most notably it has succeeded in attracting private sector and foreign investment into the region, restoring over 2000 hectares of derelict land to effective use, and investing in knowledge-based projects such as the national bio-manufacturing centre in Speke.

Steven Broomhead, NWDA chief executive, said: “Importantly, the assessment showed that strong progress has been made in agreeing and identifying the priorities for the region.

“The building blocks are firmly in place – our next challenge is to ensure that we sustain our achievements in the future.”

Joule Centre launch energises research sector

The Northwest's sustainable energy research sector received a huge boost this summer, when The Joule Centre for Energy Research was officially launched at Manchester's Museum of Science and Industry.

The NWDA funded centre will pioneer low carbon technologies, such as wave, tidal and micro-hydro technologies, as well as ‘smart’ technologies for improving energy efficiency in industry and homes. It will also develop

a programme of research to support the work of the North West Energy Council.

Professor Nick Jenkins, director of the centre, says: “Our aim is to create an internationally-leading energy research centre in England's Northwest. It will significantly increase the region's research capacity and activity in the areas of new sustainable energy technologies,

supporting science and technology, energy efficiency, demand-side management and integrated assessment of the energy system.”

The centre is a partnership between universities in the Northwest, regional industry, commerce and energy users. Hosted by the University

Power of the Mersey

Study is first step towards harnessing wave and tidal power.

A new study is underway that could place the River Mersey at the forefront of the battle against climate change, with cutting edge technologies used to generate renewable energy on the river.

Many of the technologies being evaluated in the far-reaching study are so new that they are still under development. They include underwater turbines driven by tidal currents and several designs for wave power machines.

The River Mersey is potentially one of the best sites for tidal stream energy anywhere in the world. Its very large tidal range of 8-10 metres produces powerful currents that could turn out to be ideal for driving underwater turbines. One big attraction is that the tide – and therefore the energy produced – is entirely predictable, reliable and regular.

The study was commissioned by Peel Holdings and the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA). It is being carried out by engineering consultants Buro Happold, which has put together a world-class team including Professor Peter Guthrie, the highly respected professor of Sustainable Engineering at Cambridge University.

The team made its first public presentation on the scheme to the Mersey Estuary Forum earlier this summer. Ian Leaper, who is leading the study for Buro Happold, told the forum: “The energy is there. It's a question of how, as engineers, we can capture it.

“The Mersey has enormous potential for marine renewable energy – as much as anywhere in the country, possibly the world.

There are no preconceived ideas about what kind of technology will be preferred and a wider range of engineering solutions you could not wish to see.”

The study will look at how the new initiatives will contribute to economic and sustainable energy generation while respecting the coastal environment. It is an entirely new study rather than a return to the old idea of building a tidal barrage on the Mersey. It will also build on the work already undertaken by Peel, a leading private sector promoter of renewable energy.

Tim Bownes of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company is also on the study team and commented: “This project is not in any way going to ignore the environmental issues of building in the river.

“We have a lot of recent experience of the environmental issues from the projects for the Seaforth river terminal and the new cruise liner terminal.

“We have learned to work closely and early with partners in the these projects.”

The study was first announced at the Mersey Basin Campaign's annual conference last year and the initial results are due to be announced at this year's annual conference in November.



September 3 Manchester 100 Bike Ride

A 100 mile or 100 km ride through Cheshire, starting and finishing at Wythenshawe Park. The 100 km route takes a short cut across Middlewich, while the 100 mile route takes in Delamere Forest.

Venue: starting from Wythenshawe Park

More Information: 0161 234 3157

www.bike-events.com

From September 5 The Friend Ship

Embarking on a voyage of discovery, the Friend Ship will explore friendship as a cultural stimulus with schoolchildren in Liverpool and nationwide. With a cargo of exciting learning materials from cultural partners including the Mersey Basin Campaign, the Friend Ship will promote tolerance and diversity.

Venue: Schools in Liverpool and around the UK

More Information: 0151 233 2008

www.liverpool08.com/friendship

September 7 Constructing the Sustainable Way:

Promoting best practice in East Lancashire

An event for anyone involved in construction in Lancashire.

A chance to learn more about sustainable construction through a series of workshops and exhibition stands.

Venue: Burnley FC, Turf Moor

More Information: Kathryn Bolton 01282 411320

Kathryn.Bolton@be-effective.co.uk www.elevate-eastlancs.co.uk

September 12 3rd Sector 1st North West

The first in a series of events in support of the ChangeUp initiative, bringing together partners from the voluntary, community, charity, public and private sectors to learn, discuss and network.

Venue: University of Manchester

More Information: Jan Foster 01625 628082

From September 16 Liverpool Biennial 06

Liverpool Biennial is the UK's largest contemporary visual arts festival. Over ten weeks you can experience the work of several hundred of the world's most exciting artists, in more than forty locations across Liverpool and Merseyside. Entry to most exhibitions is free.

Venue: Various locations, Liverpool and Merseyside

More Information: 0151 709 7444

info@biennial.com www.biennial.com

September 24 – 28 Labour Party Conference 2006

After the success of holding its 2004 Spring Conference in Manchester, the Labour Party returns to the city for its annual conference, the first time in living memory that the event has not been held at the seaside.

Venue: G-Mex and MICC

More Information: 08700 435533

www.labour.org.uk/conference2006

October 4 Northwest Regional Development Agency annual conference and AGM

Details to be announced over the coming months.

Check the NWDA website.

Venue: TBC

More Information: www.nwda.co.uk

Löve

I love... longhorn cattle

By Paul Kemp, grazing officer,
Cheshire Wildlife Trust



“ We’ve just agreed with Shell UK to graze longhorn cattle on 400 acres of their land at Gowry Meadows. Why longhorns in particular? Well, because like all cows they eat in a particular way, wrapping the grasses round their tongues before ripping them out to chew, but unlike modern breeds of cow, they’ll eat a wide range of vegetation rather than just the soft juicy young stuff.

What this means is that longhorn cattle – which have just come off the rare breeds list – will chomp their way around this massive site unevenly, leaving bare patches and long grassy patches. It’ll create micro-habitats all over the site, which is

a Site of Special Scientific Interest; little pockets of long grass will become superb habitats for certain wildlife that needs a bit of ground cover, and the bald bits will be good for insects that like bare earth.

The land that Shell UK leases to us is lowland grazing marsh, and we’re working with the Environment Agency to recreate it as a natural flood defence, much as it would have been before the Second World War. That means managing the site so that it becomes capable of soaking up vast volumes of water in times of heavy inundation.

The way the longhorns graze will help with that, so we’re buying them from wherever we can source them at the moment. We were at a livestock auction in Bristol just recently bidding for more. We’re hoping to get around a hundred, with funding from our membership and corporate partners. They’ll breed, so there’ll be a sustainable population. A lot of older people remember seeing them in their youth, when they were used as draught horses for dragging ploughs, and are very fond of them. They’re a traditional British farm animal, and it’s great to see them back.”

Hate

I hate... giant hogweed

By Sarah Whitman, project
co-ordinator, Action Darwen Valley



“ Giant hogweed is a dangerous plant, especially to kids who might play with it without realising the damage it can do. The sap is caustic, and if it touches bare skin that is then exposed to sunlight – not that unusual if you’re outdoors – you can get very bad, scarring burns and blisters. Kids are often tempted to use the hollow stalks as peashooters, and I’ve seen awful pictures of a child with seeping burns all over his lips and chin from doing just that. If it gets in your eyes, it can even cause blindness. You need to wash it off as soon as it touches you and cover up your skin from the light.

It’s an invasive species and usually grows as a weed on waste ground or along riverbanks and canalsides, areas that aren’t heavily managed. The plants can get enormous, up to four metres high, and they’re very distinctive; the leaves are a limey, luminescent colour and the flower-heads look like a giant version of the lovely white frilly meadowsweet that we’re all familiar with in hedgerows and verges. Each flower-head releases around 1500 seeds, which are easily carried by moving water and so spread by way of river networks.

The other problem it causes is an environmental one; when the plant eventually does die back, it leaves bare earth which can cause dangerous slippage and flooding along a river bank.

The only way to manage giant hogweed is to kill it off, and for health and safety reasons, that’s best done with weed killer sprays, otherwise the people who are there to sort out the problem could easily get skin burns themselves. It grows at certain spots along the River Darwen, and I get really angry when I see it flourishing. The Darwen runs through three local authority areas, so even if people do know what it is, they don’t necessarily know whose responsibility it is to get rid of it.”



THERE'S IRON IN THAT THERE SOIL: VOLUNTEERS HELP OUT WITH INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY AT STANLEY BANK TRIANGLE

A conservation project to restore the remnants of one of the country’s few remaining iron ‘slitting’ mills is underway in St Helens, with a major lottery application pending for the autumn.

Situated on a triangular sliver of land, the Stanley Bank Triangle project is bounded by the East Lancs road to the north, the Sankey Canal to the west and Clipsley Brook to the east. The site is home to an old forge situated beside a millrace. During the industrial revolution, raw iron travelled to the forge by canal, ready to be rolled into thin sheets and then ‘slit’ into strips for use as nails.

Brendan Cassin of Action Sankey Waters explained: “There is a similar slitting mill quite nearby in Lymm in Cheshire, but other than that there are only a few such industrial relicts left standing anywhere

in the UK. So its heritage importance is considerable.” It is thought that a copper works is also located somewhere on the site and industrial archaeologists are searching the area to determine exactly where it is and assess its state of repair. Action Sankey Waters has been awarded a project-planning grant of £50,000 by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), which it is using to assess the heritage potential of the site. Once the evaluation is complete, a full application will be made to the HLF to fund extensive improvements.

St Helens Council, which owns most of the land in the area, has developed a broad environmental scheme aiming to provide biodiversity, heritage and community benefits through a range of projects, including the construction of a bypass to relieve chronic traffic congestion. A sustainable drainage scheme will reduce the risk and severity of flooding, whilst farmland birds in the area will benefit from wildlife-friendly farming practices.

Discover the Mersey Estuary

Learning about the Mersey Estuary is now easier than ever with the release of the newest edition of the Mersey Estuary Book, published by the Mersey Estuary Conservation Group.

Designed to celebrate one of Northwest England’s greatest natural assets, the pocket-sized guide includes a range of full colour photographs illustrating the wealth of migratory

Restoration forges ahead

Stanley Bank Triangle is home to unusual industrial heritage.

The rich industrial heritage of the site has already led to a community archaeology project being set up. The current HLF grant is funding five archaeology weekends where volunteers can take part in an archaeological dig.

To help recognise the full potential of Stanley Bank Triangle, Action Sankey Waters has appointed a project officer, Peter Keen, to oversee all the work currently underway at the site. An access strategy is being drawn up and environmental consultant Wardell Armstrong is creating a conservation plan. Meanwhile, Vision 21, which specialises in community consultation, is talking to local residents so they can help build a case for the entire industrial heritage of the area to be restored.

MORE INFORMATION

Action Sankey Waters
b.cassin@merseybasin.org.uk

The remaining community archaeology weekends at Stanley Bank Triangle will take place on September 2-3, September 9-10 and September 30-October 1. To take part, contact Christine Pope on 01744 739396.

and indigenous bird life that lives along the foreshore.

It also tells the history of the waterway since the industrial revolution and pinpoints the best places for angling, bird watching, walking, cycling and sailing. Visitor attractions include nature reserves, the famous Mersey ferries and the World Clipper Race.

MORE INFORMATION: www.merseyestuary.org.uk

SOUND BITES

S Choppy waters. Approval has been granted for a new marina on the Trent and Mersey Canal in Northwich, but planners threw out proposals for another marina located just along the canal. Developers wanting to build a 150-berth marina at Park Farm first had their decision deferred before the final go-ahead was given earlier this summer. But council officials decided to reject a bid from Ripple Developments Ltd for a 250-berth marina near Billinge Green Flash in Whatcroft. The company said it would lodge an appeal. Director Nigel Wilder said he was ‘astounded’ at the decision. “We had a full environmental statement which addressed all the issues,” he commented.

S Have rope, will litter pick. World Environment Day saw a specialist clean-up team abseil down the sheer walls of Manchester’s Palace hotel to tackle a notorious grotspot on the River Medlock. The stretch of river had been so littered with rubbish that water had backed up and flooded the basement of the hotel. Hotel management had been frustrated for years by the unsightly rubbish – luxury bedrooms overlook the River Medlock, which is canalised as it runs through this part of Manchester – and contacted Action Manchester Waterways for help. They brought in contractors Up and Under, who specialise in using climbing techniques to get into hard to reach places.

S Wildlife haven. Water company United Utilities has teamed up with the RSPB to manage a Lancashire reservoir and its surroundings for the benefit of birds and wildlife. The five year project will cover United Utilities’ 20,000 hectare estate in Bowland, and will be paid for partly through customers’ water bills. The project is part of the Sustainable Catchment Management Programme (SCaMP), which aims to benefit wildlife, deliver improved water quality and support rural economies. Graham Wynne, chief executive of the RSPB, said: “Our

partnership with United Utilities shows how much can be achieved for both wildlife and people when business and the conservation community work together.”

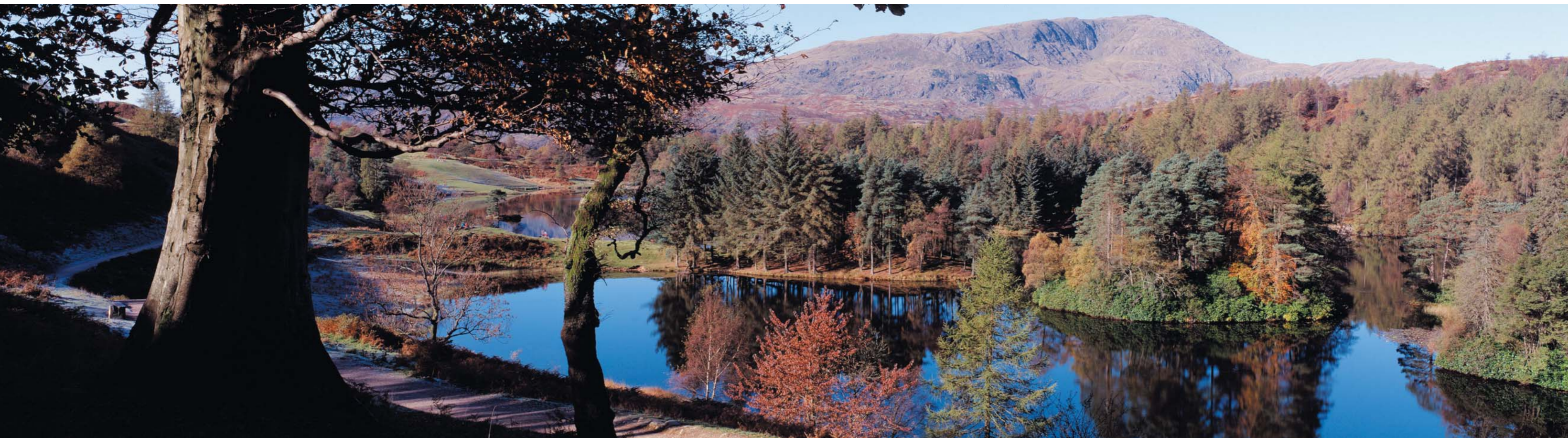
S Rochdale canal repaired. England’s highest canal has re-opened after a landslide last year made it too dangerous to use. The embankment of the Rochdale Canal collapsed at the River Irwell aqueduct at Mills Hill, and engineers have been working ever since to repair it. The accident happened due to a previous repair 79 years ago, when the canal

wall was backfilled with sand, and a small area gradually became eroded by water. The bank finally burst under the pressure of tonnes of sand, rock and rubble. The wash wall has been rebuilt using recovered materials from the breach and now, £1.2 million later, it is safe once again.

S From dump to delight. Celebrations marked the transformation of a former landfill site on the banks of the River Irk in North Manchester into a haven for human residents and wildlife alike this summer. It has taken £100,000 to improve the dump at Blackley Vale in a project that involved community groups and contractors in removing tonnes of rubbish, cleaning the river bed of

debris, planting more than 1,000 bluebells and creating 500 metres of footpath. Part of the Irk Valley Project, which is connecting a ‘green corridor’ through the heart of North Manchester, the site runs alongside the River Irk and its tributary Moston Brook.

S Cultural corridor for Glossop. Over £30,000 of grant money will fund cultural schemes based on and around Glossop Brook as it runs through Harehills Park. Action Etherow & Goyt has appointed an artist to design signs and information notices leading residents and visitors through the natural environment of the area, after receiving a £21,000 grant. Another £11,000 went to Glossop Heritage Centre to create a video history of the experiences of local residents who worked in the town’s cotton mills.



It seems the environment is a dirty word in some circles. There is a suspicion amongst environmentalists that fat cats and thrusting young entrepreneurs too often associate the 'E' word with higher costs and red tape – that even ordinary business people regard it as an economic spoilsport.

But a new study has set out to turn that perception on its head by showing business leaders that, far from being a barrier, the environment can be – and already is – a money-spinner.

“The environment has been treated as something that stops you doing what you want to. It is only latterly that people have seen it as a trigger, and as a way of making money from protecting it,” says the Environment Agency’s Dr Peter Fox.

This one statement indicates a fundamental shift in the direction environmentalism is now taking. After years of playing ‘hard-to-get’, environmentalists are now courting business leaders – and they know the way to a managing director’s heart is through the balance book.

Research in the newly published study, The Environmental Economy of England’s Northwest, suggests the region’s environment already supports at least 109,000 jobs and is worth around £2.6 billion to its economy. But the paper, overseen by Dr Fox, also reports that if we unleashed our environment it could do so much more. He is among a growing army of thinkers asking us to consider whether the cotton wool

we often seek to wrap around our natural heritage really protects it, or simply stifles it.

He believes that while other industries have been quick to demonstrate their economic value, the infant environmental sector, which is fragmented in terms of its nature and location, has lagged behind.

A working group chaired by him and made up of representatives from Envirolink Northwest, the Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) and English Nature has been fleshing out that very argument in pounds and pence.

For example, the financial advantage – if any – of having rare birds of prey nearby has been hard to quantify. But, astonishingly, the team uncovered RSPB research showing that the presence of ospreys in the Lake District, nesting there since 1997, directly supports £126,000 of local tourism income and the equivalent of eleven full time jobs.

Dr Fox’s team dug out and consolidated such obscure data from a variety of ‘green’ sectors – environmental technologies, organic farming, countryside sports, tourism – and brought them together to form a more accurate picture of just how much the environment is worth to the region’s economy.

A similar study in 2000 gave them a baseline to work from, but the 2006 figures indicate that the change since then has been dramatic. For example:

- the environmental tourism industry alone is estimated to earn the region £770 million per year.
- organic farming now accounts for 2.5 per cent of all agricultural land compared with 0.4 per cent in 2000.
- turnover in the sewage and waste disposal sector rose 49 per cent between 1998 and last year to £1.3 billion.

This is proof, say the report’s authors, that far from being a brake on development, the environment is the fifth gear the regional economy never knew it had.

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WHAT’S IT WORTH? £

Does money really grow on trees? A new report looks at the true value of the Northwest’s environment.

Words [Jason Teasdale](#)

Photographs [Environment Agency](#), [Northwest Regional Development Agency](#)



Mark Atherton, head of sustainable development at the NWDA, explains: “The government, particularly the treasury, is asking people to prove the benefit of the work they are doing, so the environment, like any other sector, is doing that.

“There is a body of thought that the environment has an inherent value and should be protected, but my role is to promote sustainable development. My argument would be; the environment has an important role and should be protected, but there are aspects of it that contribute to the economy and social well-being and that should be recognised.”

He firmly believes there are ways the economy can benefit from a strong environment, but insists they need to be more fully understood:

“Economists, developers and businesses should recognise there is a value to the environment that may not be immediately apparent to them, and it is also important that organisations responsible for environmental management recognise that the environment has more to give than just being beautiful.”

Jackie Seddon, chief executive of the report’s co-sponsors, Envirolink Northwest, hopes data like this will help business leaders see the wood for the trees: “There will be people who think the environment is all about people knitting yoghurt and hugging trees. But environmental industries are one of the fastest growing business sectors, with a global market bigger than aerospace or chemicals. I think people will be surprised by these figures.”

Her work in the environmental technologies sector has convinced her that many large businesses now acknowledge that energy efficiency and the expense of wasted water can affect their bottom line, but seeing the wider environment as a generator of cash is something entirely new.

Fifteen years ago Salford Quays had a negative land value. It now supports 13,000 jobs, sees around 3.7 million visitors a year and was recently chosen above Manchester city centre for a historic BBC relocation deal. Walter Menzies, chief executive of the Mersey Basin Campaign, says environmental improvements like those seen in the Quays have long been an economic

driver, but are only now being quantified: “The Northwest was the first region to industrialise on a big scale and that left a legacy of problems. Just twenty years ago the Mersey Estuary was described as a disgrace to civilised society. But now, due to major investment, it has been substantially cleaned up. “We would not have had the Salford Quays

The environment is the fifth gear the regional economy never knew it had.

development or the changes on the Mersey Waterfront had we still had polluted water. That might be obvious to some, but we are still in a situation where not everybody gets it. “So rather than just make these grand statements there is now the evidence to back this up.”

Will Williams, English Nature’s representative on the report’s steering group, says the findings answer big questions about the size of the region’s environmental economy and give the NWDA figures it can work with if it is to take the previously ‘unseen’ environmental economy seriously: “We want a rethink on the region’s future economic strategy. Traditionally it has been about business infrastructure, housing and social services. This document puts the natural environment in as part of that.

“We want to see more people enjoying the natural environment and more businesses seeing that it can give economic benefits. There are lots of people working in different sectors, so this report is about trying to get people to talk to each other and see added value in working together.”

Walter Menzies says all interested groups must work to see the alternative perspective: “A lot of the green lobby has made a mistake

in making the environment out to be a problem – it has whinged, and that has been unhelpful. The Confederation of British Industry has also whinged saying there is too much environmental regulation – but nobody has ever left the UK because of those regulations.”

Dr Fox sees repackaging environmental information in a more business-friendly form as an essential part of the ‘propaganda’ war: “There is a proportion of society that will fight to protect wildlife for its intrinsic value, but there is a large proportion that will have to look at being hardnosed and ask what the value is. So there is an element of propaganda in this.

“It is fair to say a growing proportion of business people and decision makers recognise the environment as a driver, and that has taken place over the last five to ten years.

“There are still those who see it as a barrier to innovation but, as things like climate change become an issue, they are recognising that the environment will be an opportunity.”

He believes larger organisations, with their well-funded long term plans, have been quick to grasp the opportunities afforded by the green economy, but he admits: “That luxury is not available to small

businesses which live from day to day. But the message is now filtering through to them through their contractual relationships with larger companies who ask them for their environmental credentials.

He says: “That is the kind of wake-up call they are getting and it can be a shock. Environmental concerns could put the unwary out of business but they need not. The environment is not a barrier.”

Meanwhile, Jackie Seddon points out that, amongst businesses operating in the environmental sector itself, 95 per cent are SMEs. These are enthusiastically exploiting the opportunities created by environmental legislation and developing innovative products and services for the growing global market. A recent government report predicts that half the environmental products we will need in the next ten years have not yet been invented.

“Science minister Lord Sainsbury described the environmental sector as the invisible industry. But, if we get the message of this report out to key decision makers I think it will change things. I think it will help people understand the wealth and employment potential of the environmental sector.”

Nevertheless, Mark Atherton admits the study, by its very nature, was hampered by the availability of accurate data. For example, although logic suggests a better local environment will lead to a rise in that area’s house prices, it can be difficult to quantify.

That is why the values described in the report are underestimates and should be taken as such: “I think we have gone about this in the right way, we can point to where our figures have come from, and therefore the figures are robust. But this just sets a marker down – it says there is huge potential for the region.”

The report suggests this potential lies in ecotourism, the development of environmental technologies – particularly renewable energy sources – and changes to the way we use our farmland.

He predicts these three aspects of our environmental economy in particular are likely to see dramatic changes within five years. And encouragingly, the report argues entire rural communities – not just big business – can capitalise if the preparation is right. But that preparation must come from well-informed policy advisors, economists and entrepreneurs, who understand the value of a good quality, fully functioning environment.

Dr Fox says that is exactly what the document aims to do: “I think this report will be a trigger for change. The environmental sector is growing up but it needs support.”

MORE INFORMATION:

www.envirolinknorthwest.co.uk
www.nwda.co.uk

Jason Teasdale is the environment correspondent at the Northwest Enquirer, based in Manchester. He has worked on a number of quality regional newspapers including the Liverpool Post and Echo.

60-second expert

- A new report, The Environmental Economy of England’s Northwest, says that the region’s environment supports at least 109,000 jobs and is worth around £2.6 billion to its economy.
- Perceptions in the business community and amongst environmentalists are changing. A growing proportion of business people now recognise that the environment can drive the economy rather than hinder it, while leading environmentalists are arguing for a new relationship with business.
- Turnover in the recycling sector has risen by 141 per cent from £121 million in 1998 to £292 million in 2003.
- Fifteen years ago Salford Quays had a negative land value. It now supports 13,000 jobs, sees over three million visitors a year and was recently chosen as the site of the historic BBC relocation. This wouldn’t have happened had environmental factors such as polluted waters in the Manchester Ship Canal not been addressed.
- The report suggests that there is huge potential for the region in ecotourism, development of environmental technologies – especially renewable energy sources – and changes to the way we use our farmland. It predicts dramatic changes within five years.
- The environmental sector has grown significantly since the first report on the region’s environmental economy was launched in 2000, proving that the pursuit of environmental gains makes good business sense.

Words Mark Hillsdon

Photographs New East Manchester, Joel Chester Fildes, Urban Splash

BEHIND THE FACADE

How local residents are living with East Manchester's massive regeneration project.

With their ornamental gables, multi-coloured brickwork and intricate balconies, the 23 homes that make up Islington Square are a world apart from the monotonous brick boxes of the Cardroom Estate which they have replaced.

These houses – variously described as something between a Turkish ghetto and a set from Balamory – are the first to be occupied in New Islington, a £250 million development in Ancoats, on the edge of Manchester city centre.

“The hairs on the back of your neck stand up when you look at them,” says Liam Ryan, who recently moved into one of the idiosyncratic dwellings with his wife Sandra, after 24 years on the Cardroom. “They’re absolutely brilliant.”

Yet it’s not just the designs that are turning heads, but also the process that saw these surreal homes jump from the studio of an avant-garde London architects to the side of canal in what was once one of Manchester’s most rundown estates.

The last time this corner of Manchester reverberated to the whirr of cement mixers and the crash of the wrecking ball was in the late 1970s, when the council set about building the Cardroom, whose name has nothing to do with gambling, and everything to do with weaving.

As the Observer’s architectural correspondent Deyan Sudjic recently wrote, the Cardroom “represented town planning’s backlash against the tower blocks of the previous decade, which were themselves a reaction against the hideous slums before them.”

Rita Lord was one of the Cardroom’s original tenants. “For the first ten to fifteen years, the estate was all right, everything was fine,” she recalls. “It was only the last ten years or so that it went down.”

During the 1980s the traditional manufacturing units that had employed so

many local people disappeared, unemployment soared and the inevitable depopulation followed.

With few people left to maintain basic facilities such as a schools and shops, they too closed, until in the end over half of the 200 homes were boarded up and unoccupied.

Crime soared until even taxis were refusing to enter the labyrinth.

“The mistake was that they built a row of houses one way, and some going to the side, and some to the side of that one, it was like a puzzle,” says Lord. “There was no direct route. It was mixed up and that was a problem, because people (including criminals) could get access from anywhere.”

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“The hairs on the back of your neck stand up when you look at them. They’re absolutely brilliant.”



ABOVE: FACADES; NEW ISLINGTON AND THE ‘CHIPS’; RITA LORD.



ABOVE: LIAM RYAN; FACADES; 'CHIPS' AND CANAL.

It was mixed up and that was a problem, because people (including criminals) could get access from anywhere.”

But a small community did hang on and in 2002 it was with a sense of trepidation that they greeted the news that the UK’s third Millennium Community, New Islington, was to be built on a 12.5 hectare site that included the Cardroom Estate.

A partnership including the national regeneration agency English Partnerships, the Urban Regeneration Company New East Manchester, lead developer Urban Splash and Manchester Methodist Housing Association (MMHA) took up the challenge. With the failure of the past right before their eyes, they knew that things would have to be done differently this time around.

“If there is one lesson that has been learnt from some of the failures of the last few decades,” explains Tom Russell, chief executive at New East Manchester, “particularly around the slum clearances and rebuilding programmes of the 1960s and 1970s, it is that deciding for people what they are going to have in terms of housing just stores up problems.

“There are no guarantees for success in regeneration and development but the one real safeguard we’ve got is making sure that people that you expect to carry on living in an area... have a direct involvement in how their neighbourhood and their streets are designed and built. It’s absolutely fundamental to everything we are doing across East Manchester.”

The tenants who had chosen to move across from the Cardroom suddenly found themselves empowered. They got organised and Urban Splash’s original plans for a series of waterside apartments were questioned and then jettisoned.

A competition was organised by the Royal Institute of British Architects to find a new set of designs and the residents plumped for FAT (Fashion, Architecture, Taste),

giving them a remit to design 23 social housing units, Islington Square.

On paper it was a partnership fraught with danger – a team of architects whose one major commission was an, albeit startling, security hut in a Dutch bike park, paired with an eclectic mix of Mancunians whose watchword was ‘traditional’. Yet incredibly it worked.

“The reason the residents selected them was that they felt very comfortable with them,” explains Kate Faye, assistant regional manager at MMHA, who manage the social housing on the site.

“What FAT created was a very good relationship with the residents from day one... (they) were very good at communicating and really listening to what people said.”

What happened next was a series of meetings, workshops, focus groups, and even a trip to Amsterdam to allow residents to see at first hand what could be achieved by housing built next to the water.

“At first we didn’t know whether we were going to benefit from it (the consultation) or not,” says Lord, but with much negotiation, and a good deal of compromise on both sides, FAT came up with what Faye describes as “a product that the residents felt really proud of, and were really excited about moving into.”

As well as the eye-catching front facade, the houses met the residents’ desire for a simple interior layout, with large open plan rooms and high ceilings. They have also been grouped as pairs around a ‘courtyard’ space that can be used as a parking bay, an open terrace or front garden.

FAT had successfully interpreted the residents’ ideas, taken on board their concerns and still produced architecture that fitted in with Will Alsop’s much publicised vision for New Islington. The first of the site’s individual plots was now complete, leaving just 24 to go.

In all there will be around 1,400 new homes, around 80 of them for social housing. All will be designed by a variety of architects, loosely based around Alsop’s master plan, and completed over the next ten to 15 years.

Further housing schemes include Chips, Alsop’s first residential scheme in the UK; 12 apartments in the Dispensary, the only remaining section of Ancoats Hospital; and a series of Urban Barns, a new concept in family homes.

Old Mill Street, the main thoroughfare through New Islington, has already been transformed, with pavements and kerbstones replaced by level surfaces, delineated by changes in the colour and material of the road surface. Benches and willow trees now line the street.

Crucially there will also be a new school, health clinic, bars, restaurants and office space, all vital elements if New Islington is to become a truly sustainable, mixed community.

Water will also play its part. “The most important thing (that

came) from Alsop,” says New East Manchester’s Russell, “was in a way the simplest.

“He looked at the area with a fresh pair of eyes and said: ‘you’ve got two fantastic bits of heritage here in the waterways, why don’t we bring water through the estate, take fingers of land off it, and build round the water.’”

And that’s what they did, with one of the first new waterways to be built in the UK in over 200 years. It links the Ashton and Rochdale Canals across the front of the site and offers developers the chance to build on some 3 km of prime waterside land.

There’s also a new water park, which will be open to the public and is central to the development. It will include islands, decking and boardwalks, all framed by a reed bed, as well as a beach, community orchard, follies and an area of public open space containing a range of trees and wildflowers creating a variety of habitats for wildlife.

There’s also a mooring ‘island’ for up to six narrow boats, rowing boat hire, fishing and picnicking areas.

But ironically, it’s the water park that has recently driven a wedge between the developers and the tenants. Liam Ryan, a leading light in the tenants’ steering group explains:

“I don’t think they (the developers) have listened enough to the people. That’s one of the reasons why we no longer attend the meetings.”

Ryan believes that the site’s social housing has been marginalised, pushed to the edges to make way for more lucrative private apartments. And that wasn’t made clear in the original plans. “We’re on the periphery,” he says, “we’re not in the middle of it.

“I’ve always loved the idea of the lake... but we’re stuck at the back not being able to enjoy it.”

The development has also come in for criticism from outside the area, most notably the Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development (OISD), which warned that developments like New Islington were creating transient rather than sustainable communities.

The report’s author Professor Tim Dixon also argued that there was a danger that regeneration areas could become victims of their own success, with local people priced out of the market as the drive to higher densities leads to ‘apartment living’ dominating over affordable housing. This would continue to force families out to the suburbs and away from the city centres that local councils are trying to regenerate.

But while Russell agrees with Dixon’s sentiments he denies it’s something that’s happening in East Manchester, where initiatives such as the ‘Right to Return’ have striven to keep old communities together. “We did a guarantee which basically said that any resident (from the Cardroom) who stood to lose their home as a result of improvements

to the area would be guaranteed a place within their existing neighbourhood and, what’s more, we would make it affordable for them, with no significant increase in their housing cost.

“I suppose when we got started a lot of people were suspicious about gentrifying the area and bringing in higher income groups. And while the improvements of East Manchester does involve attracting people with medium and higher incomes to come and live here, it’s not at the expense of the existing community, and those guarantees have made it clear to people that that’s not what we are about.

“We’re not designing housing estates here, we are designing neighbourhoods.”

And Russell believes that the new school is testimony to this. “(It) isn’t just an estate school, it’s intended to cater for the whole city centre population. And specifically it’s for the next generation. It’s how you keep people who enjoy city living in the city when they start having families.”

It will be years, if not decades, before New Islington can be deemed a success or a failure. But whatever the outcome, it’s certainly had a better start in life than the developments that preceded it.

And while Ryan may have gone lukewarm on the developers, he’s in no doubt as to the improvements that have already taken place in Ancoats. “I’ve lived most of my life in this area. And it’s absolutely brilliant what’s happened to it... the people have embraced it.”

MORE INFORMATION:
www.neweastmanchester.com

[Mark Hillsdon](#) is a freelance journalist specialising in the environment and regeneration.



Words Matthew Sutcliffe

Margaret Fletcher

A fond farewell to the woman who led the fight to restore the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal with patience and determination.

When work began late last year to reopen the first section of the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal, one of the Northwest's most dedicated and successful campaigners was able to savour a moment of personal triumph.

Restoration of the 500 m stretch of canal will link into the booming national canal network and allow boats to return for the first time in 40 years. It is also the first step in the planned Middlewood Locks development in Salford, which includes housing, hotels, restaurants, bars and leisure facilities and which is estimated to be worth around £600 million of investment. In the longer term, the full restoration of the entire 15.5 mile canal could be worth millions to the local economy and create thousands of jobs.

What is surprising is that the lynchpin in these ambitious plans was not a developer or council chief executive, but a retired nurse from Bolton. Margaret Fletcher was the chair of the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal Restoration Society for almost two decades. Sadly, Margaret passed away earlier this summer, but not before realising her dream of seeing the restoration of the canal finally get underway.

By all accounts what made Margaret Fletcher so effective in the long campaign to breath life back into the canal was a potent mix of steely determination and a canny understanding of the bigger strategic issues. As Chris Findley, head of planning and development at Salford City Council says, she had "commitment, stamina, intelligence, pragmatism and patience."

Dave Evans, who also works for Salford council, is closely involved with the Middlewood Locks development and first started working with Margaret in 2003. He says: "Margaret was the dynamo behind the restoration project. Her enthusiasm was catching."

No less important was Margaret's unflappable ability to influence the right people. Her husband John, who is himself the chair of the Inland Waterways Association (IWA), tells the story of when the couple were at a conference and found themselves seated behind Alun Michael, then a minister at Defra. In no time Margaret was bending the minister's ear to the importance of restoring the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal.

John and Margaret met on the night shift at the West

Cumberland hospital in Whitehaven in February 1971. John was a psychiatric charge nurse and Margaret a newly qualified staff nurse.

Both were vegetarian, so to make it easier for the night cook they ate their meals together, and it was over these late night vegetarian meals that they first got to know each other.

They came to a love of the canals together during the 1970s. In the spring after they were married they holidayed on the Norfolk Broads and became hooked on boating. A few years later they took their first canal boat holiday on the Leeds Liverpool Canal from Addlington to Skipton. Ultimately, they had two of their own narrowboats – the first of which, the Tomar Joleen, was built in their back garden with the help of friends.

"Margaret was the dynamo behind the restoration project. Her enthusiasm was catching."

Soon they were becoming active in the fledgling canal restoration movement of the time. Eventually they moved to Bolton, where they helped the IWA set up a group of volunteers to look into restoring the local canal. Margaret soon challenged its lack of progress. The response, much to her surprise, was an invitation to become the chair of the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal Restoration Society.

In its heyday in the nineteenth century the canal was a busy waterway used to transport coal from local mines to the mills, factories and hearths of Manchester and Salford. But as rail and road competition increased and the mines dwindled and shut down, the canal fell into disrepair and finally closed in 1961.

These days it's a different story. The popularity of canals for leisure is soaring at the same time that towns and cities are willing to invest in them as powerful drivers of regeneration. It is estimated that canals are

now being reopened faster than they were constructed during the canal building boom two hundred years ago.

Yet the Manchester, Bolton and Bury is the last of Greater Manchester's canals to be restored. When John and Margaret first took an interest in it, much of it had already been filled in. You get a sense of the scale of the challenge from the fact that they had to trace its route by walking the streets looking for clues and drawing it onto an A-Z map.

It turned out that Margaret was the perfect person to lead the restoration campaign. Derek Cochrane, regeneration director for

the Northwest at British Waterways, says: "One of the special things about Margaret was that she understood that for the restoration to happen it had to be seen as part of a bigger regeneration agenda."

He adds: "The force of Margaret's personality put the Manchester, Bolton and Bury Canal high on our agenda at a time when it had a much lower profile than many competing schemes."

"She went out of her way to build very good relationships with all our employees and that was a huge factor in gaining support. To do all of that and still be such a pleasant person was an achievement indeed."

MORE INFORMATION:
www.mbbcs.org.uk

Words Joanne Birtwistle

Flower power

The UK's first biodiesel garage hopes to strike Green Gold.

Green Gold Biodiesel, the UK's first dedicated biodiesel garage, does its business on the forecourt differently. "It's not just about trying to promote the use of a lower impact and renewable fuel. It's about doing business in a different way, a more democratic way." So says Matt Favier, founder member of the Manchester Biodiesel Cooperative that runs Green Gold Biodiesel.

It may be a social enterprise, but the cooperative is operating in what can only be a growing market. According to government figures, biofuel sales were around 10 million litres per month in summer 2005 – only 0.25 per cent of overall road fuel sales. However, the government's Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation demands that five per cent of all motor car fuel must come from renewable sources by 2010.

"It may be a social enterprise, but the cooperative is operating in what can only be a growing market."

Green Gold started life as a bulk-buying club for Favier and some friends, as they struggled to find a reliable biodiesel source. The plan to make biodiesel available to the general public on the forecourt grew from there. Favier received help from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and the Manchester Environmental Resource Initiative to set up a biodiesel garage on Fairfield Street in Manchester (close to the back of Piccadilly train station).

Most of the biofuel for sale on the Green Gold forecourt is made by mixing ordinary diesel with five per cent plant-based biodiesel. Green Gold points out that it sources used cooking oil and virgin rapeseed oil for its biodiesel, explaining that biodiesel made from palm oil is often sourced from tropical rain forests. Using Green Gold's 'Basic 5' mix is like using any other fuel. There's no need to convert the engine or join the Green Gold co-operative.

But a car driven with a biofuel mix of as little as five per cent emits 4.5 per cent less carbon dioxide. This mix meets the EU standard for diesel, is accepted by all vehicle manufacturers and does not affect the vehicle's warranty.

In fact, biodiesel actually improves performance. "Even with the five per cent blend you can see the difference from ordinary diesel – the engine runs more smoothly – possibly prolonging the life of the vehicle," says Favier. Green Gold staff say regular customers are reporting increased fuel efficiencies too.

Customers who want to use a higher percentage of biodiesel are asked to become members of the cooperative for £10 a year. As members they also receive guidance on the optimum blend for their particular vehicle, depending on its age.

But Green Gold doesn't just want to reach the general public. "We're calling on Manchester's businesses to fill up their company vehicles with biodiesel, to reduce the environmental impact of their operations and to help meet their business's environmental policy," says Favier. Businesses such as Bullocks Coaches, Manchester Van Hire and Manchester Community Transport, to name a few, are already filling up their fleets at Green Gold.

It works out a bit cheaper too, typically a few pence per litre. Biodiesel does benefit from a 20p per litre tax rebate but Favier says that the higher processing costs compared to conventional diesel mean that most of that gain is eaten up. He'd like to see greater government involvement in the whole renewable fuels agenda and thinks a further



Biodiesel

5-10p tax break is needed: "It would allow more farmers to grow crops specifically for fuel. This would push on the scale of the industry in the UK and reduce our dependence on foreign oil."

Although it's still early days for Green Gold, which opened its forecourt in December 2005, Favier says he hopes to expand the business to also provide bioethanol in the future – allowing his forecourt to service both diesel and petrol cars.

PETROL HEADS

There are two basic types of biofuels: biodiesel and bioethanol. Commonly, these plant based fuels are mixed with traditional fuels. Green Gold biodiesel takes used cooking oil, processes it, and adds it to ordinary diesel.

Bioethanol is produced from crops such as sugar cane, sugar beet and grain. Petrol cars can safely use a bioethanol/petrol mix of 5 per cent without the need for conversion.

Tesco was the first major retailer to incorporate biofuel into its petrol and diesel. In May 2005 it introduced a five per cent bioethanol mix to its unleaded petrol at 185 stations and in January 2006 all of its filling stations in the Northwest and Southeast were converted to biodiesel.

In November 2005, Saab launched its 9-5 BioPower flex-fuel car, which can run on either bioethanol E85 (a blend of 85 per cent bioethanol and 15 per cent petrol) or on pure petrol, without any adjustment by the driver. Saab says a 20 per cent gain in brake horse power and 16 per cent growth in torque can be gained when the car runs on E85 compared to regular unleaded petrol; and the carbon dioxide emissions are typically 50-70 per cent cleaner than when running on petrol.

In March this year, Morrisons opened the UK's first E85 filling pump in Norwich, followed by another four sites in the East of England and five sites in Somerset.

MORE INFORMATION:
www.greengoldbiodiesel.co.uk

Joanne Birtwistle specialises in business journalism and is a staff writer for the region's leading business magazine, Northwest Business Insider.

ICEBERGS IN THE THAMES

Shooting down the top ten myths about water shortages.

TEST YOURSELF

Recently there's been so much advice in the media about how to save water that Source has got confused. Can you help us un-jumble our mixed up messages to reveal some top water saving tips?

- Wash your fruit and veg in a bowl instead of flushing them down the toilet.
- Always use a bucket instead of a hosepipe to wash your teeth.
- Soak the roots of your plants a few times a week using a dual flush toilet.
- Put cotton wool buds and the like in the rubbish bin instead of washing them under the tap.
- Don't run your water butt for the sake of just a couple of t-shirts or a few dinner plates.
- Never leave the tap running while washing the car.
- Have a shower in the evening using a watering can filled with 'grey' water.
- Fit a washing machine or dishwasher in your garden to collect rainwater.
- Use mulch in your toilet cistern to save water with every flush.
- Water the garden instead of having a bath.
- Put a 'hippo' on your flowerbeds to keep the soil moist and cool and keep away water-sapping weeds (a brick works just as well).
- Save water by giving your toilet a good flush a few times a week instead of lightly watering it every day.

MYTH NO. 1

Britain is so rainy, there should be plenty of water for everyone.

This myth deserves to be the first to be shot down, not least because the belief that water is plentiful makes it harder to persuade people to use less. In fact, the UK has less water per person than any other European country apart from Belgium and Cyprus. To make matters worse, we use more water per person than almost any other European country – an average of 150 litres per day.

Worse still, some of the driest parts of the country also have the most people and the fewest reservoirs. Areas such as London rely heavily on piping underground water to the surface.

All this has been highlighted by this summer's drought in the Southeast, which has seen the introduction of hosepipe bans for the first time since the long hot summer of 1976. Two consecutive winters of below average rainfall have caused water reserves to plummet and some areas have endured the driest period since 1921. Certain rivers, such as the River Pang in Berkshire, are beginning to run dry.

Myth No. 2

This is a Southern problem – here in the Northwest we don't need to bother saving water.

It's true that rainfall varies significantly across the country – broadly speaking the North gets about 50 per cent more than the South – and the current drought in the Southeast may seem a long way from the Northwest. But it's only three years since we faced similar problems. In the summer of 2003 a drought order was in place and the threat of hosepipe bans hung in the air. Villages that were long ago flooded to create our normally well-stocked reservoirs were rising once more from the receding waters.

So there's no room for complacency. It's worth noting also that climate change experts are predicting hotter, drier summers, which will increase the likelihood of water shortages. Another drought is just a matter of time.

Myth No. 3

A national water grid would solve the problem once and for all.

Proposals for a national water grid have been around since at least the 1970s and by some reckonings since the Second World War. They received a boost this summer when the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) said the government should consider the concept.

Like all the best myths, at first glance it seems to make perfect sense – the idea is to pipe water from the wet parts of the country, most likely mid-Wales, to the drier South and Southeast. What could be easier?

Well, first of all even the engineers at ICE say that a national water grid would take at least 20 years to build. And it would be so expensive that no one yet seems to have come up with even an estimate for the cost. On top of that, water is very heavy, so moving it around the grid would require a lot of energy – right at a time when we're supposed to be cutting energy usage to reduce greenhouse gases, which cause climate change, which leads to...droughts. If that's not enough, there are concerns that the scheme could cause the River Severn to dry up.

Myth No. 4

Britain is surrounded by sea, so desalination plants can supply all the water we need.

This myth joins the national water grid in the 'sensible until you actually think about it' pile.

Existing desalination plants are expensive to build and use large amounts of energy to produce drinkable water. In London, Ken Livingstone has blocked proposals for a desalination plant over concerns about the energy demands. And the need for lots of energy also makes desalinated water expensive.

New technologies are on the horizon that might make desalination cheaper and less energy intensive, but according to water efficiency experts at Waterwise, it's unlikely that desalination has much of a future in the UK.

Myth No. 5

We shouldn't have to save water when leaky pipes waste so much of it.

It's hard to defend leaky pipes, at least at first sight. Around 27 per cent of the water supply simply leaks away, and in some parts of London the figure is closer to 40 per cent. But this isn't unusual – compared to rates of leakage in other European countries, England actually does quite well.

Consider also that the water system we use was largely built by the Victorians. It's given years of sterling service, but not surprisingly, it needs constant repair.

The water companies are in fact investing hundreds of millions of pounds in replacing miles of aging pipes around the country, including here in the Northwest, and leakage has been cut. A more strategic, less 'find and fix' approach would help, but ultimately it all comes down to money – the cost of replacing all the leaky pipes would be astronomical. At a certain point the costs outweigh the benefits and the money is better spent in other ways.

Myth No. 6

Water just falls from the sky so it's completely environmentally friendly.

Odd as it may seem, turn on your tap and you're contributing to global warming. That's because it takes a lot of energy to purify rainwater into the half tonne of drinking water the average home uses every day and even more to treat the half tonne of sewage produced by the average home each day.

The water industry uses about three per cent of the UK's energy. So saving water helps reduce energy use and therefore climate change.

In addition, areas like the Northwest have natural ecosystems that rely on surface water, so any water we take out for human use has an impact on the natural environment.

Myth No. 7

We'll all be forced to use water meters, which will end up costing us more.

Why the panic over metering? Most of Europe is fully metered and in fact around 25 per cent of homes in the UK already have meters. All new houses have them. We are comfortable with the idea of paying for the electricity and gas that we actually use, so why not water?

The important point is that meters make people aware of the water they are using and so encourage them to use less – usually around 10 per cent less. And contrary to popular wisdom, meters tend not to lead to higher bills. Estimates suggest that around 70 per cent of customers pay either less or the same when switching to a meter. However, if the use of meters increases there will need to be special protection for people on low incomes.

Myth No. 8

The more water they sell, the more money the water companies make.

The water industry is highly regulated and doesn't operate like a normal market. The price of water is fixed by Ofwat, the government's regulator, and can't be put up by the water companies. At the same time, they have a legal obligation to supply all the water people demand. If water becomes more expensive to produce or demand goes up, the water companies are out of pocket. So ironically, the water companies are actually encouraging people to use less water.

Myth No. 9

So...saving water only helps the water companies. There's nothing in it for me.

There is more to saving water than the warm glow of good citizenship and the comforting knowledge that you are doing your bit to save the planet. You could consider reducing the amount of water you use and having a water meter installed. Take advice from your water company, and you could end up saving money.

Myth No. 10

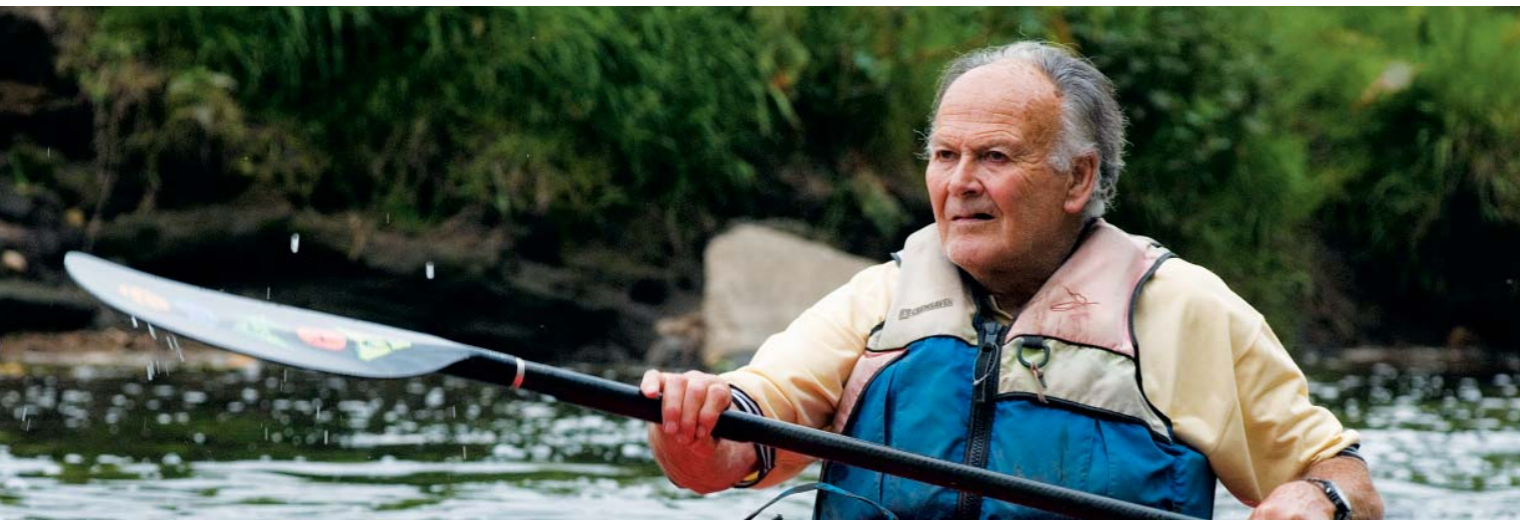
Ships can tow icebergs south from the Arctic to provide huge amounts of cheap water.

Icebergs drifting past the Houses of Parliament? It would doubtless be a spectacular sight, but not one we're ever likely to see, even though the idea seems to have been around for years. Maybe one day...

MORE INFORMATION:

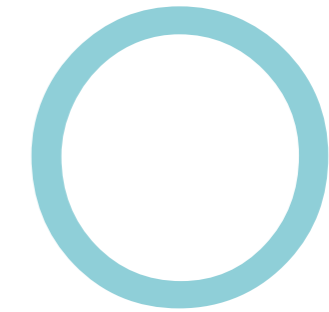
www.waterwise.org.uk
www.environment-agency.gov.uk
www.unitedutilities.com

BELOW: CHRIS CLEAVER



ABOVE: DEK DAVIE PADDLES THE RIVER MERSEY IN STOCKPORT

One man's campaign to open up the River Mersey to canoeists.



RIGHT TO FLOAT

Back in September 2004, an army of ramblers pulled on their Gore-Tex windbreakers and walking boots to take their first legal footsteps onto privately owned land across the Pennine moors.

Armed with flasks of tea and slices of fruitcake, it was an emotional moment for those who had fought for the right to walk freely across some of the most beautiful and rugged landscapes in the country.

A year later, more of the Northwest's privately owned land was opened up to the public as the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 rolled out across the rest of the country. It was the culmination of a long and hard fought campaign by the Ramblers Association to gain access to countryside without prior written consent from often unpredictable landowners.

Now, 2.5 million canoeists are lobbying for the same rights to paddle on rivers, lakes and canals.

In England, canoeists are banned from using the waters without prior permission from landowners, unlike in Scotland and the majority of other countries in the world where they can paddle freely. In a series of unpleasant episodes, canoeists have reported having warning shots fired at them by disgruntled landowners. Canoeists currently have direct access to only two per cent of waterways in England and Wales, and face the daunting prospect of tracking down and contacting dozens of landowners in order to legally float along even a short stretch of water.

[CONTINUED OVER]

Words [Anne Arnold](#)

Photographs [Dave Willis](#)



So last year the British Canoe Union (BCU) handed in a manifesto, backed by 100 MPs, to rural affairs minister Jim Knight calling for primary legislation allowing canoeists to paddle legally. More than 70 canoeists ranging in age from teenagers to old age pensioners also carried out a mass protest paddle on the River Thames, calling for a change in the law. The BCU says legal clarity would promote canoeing as an outdoor sport – thus helping boost British success in the Olympics – and encourage healthier lifestyles among swimmers, boaters and gorge walkers.

But a number of influential anglers groups are lined up in opposition, claiming canoeists could damage fish stocks and bird-nesting sites on small streams and non-navigable rivers.

Now, in something of a conciliatory move, the government has called for the country's rivers to be opened up in a series of voluntary agreements with riparian landowners. But despite brokering a number of voluntary agreements on short stretches of rivers across the UK, the BCU remains sceptical. It believes instigating voluntary agreements across the country would be a huge undertaking and would face opposition from some people owning land alongside rivers.

Nevertheless, it has put its reservations to one side to back a series of schemes that dip a metaphorical toe in the water. Sections of the River Mersey and three other rivers across the country are being opened up to canoeists in pilot projects carried out by the Environment Agency. The rivers Mersey, Waveney, Wear and Teme were each selected to examine the different problems that could arise from opening up rivers in rural and urban areas, or which have large fish populations. The River Mersey project was the brainchild of Chris Cleaver, the BCU's voluntary Northwest officer, who has campaigned since 1999 for a canoe trail over an 18-mile stretch from Stockport town centre to Carrington. Cleaver says: "We consider canoeing to be the same as walking; we pass by without leaving any trace.

"Some rivers are paddled on with no objections, but it is an unsatisfactory situation if we are going places illegally, it reduces the enjoyment of the sport. We want rights of access to all rivers above a certain size; fishing rights have been subject to legislation for years."

In the late 1990s, Cleaver realised he would have to establish an access agreement for the stretch before he could ask local authorities and the Environment

Agency to back a canoe trail. But juggling his investigations with a busy full-time job, he found it "almost impossible" to track down the more than 100 landowners for the relatively short stretch of water.

Initially, Cleaver contacted golf courses with land along the stretch and gained their permission, but he hit his first hurdle when he asked permission for rivers bordering land owned by Stockport, Manchester and Trafford local authorities.

"I realised with hindsight that I had been somewhat naïve," he says. "The councils said they could not tell me what riverside land they

In a series of unpleasant episodes, canoeists have been shot at by disgruntled landowners.

owned, but said I could go and look at the plans of their land ownership, which meant time off work.

"They seemed reluctant to give permission... I realise now they may have been concerned over liability."

Yet there was some progress. Importantly, the Environment Agency backed the scheme, and later so did the people behind the Mersey Flood Alleviation Scheme, although they could offer no financial support. In 2002 the Environment Agency agreed to build some access steps for canoeists at Northenden Weir as part of the flood alleviation scheme. Stockport Council also agreed to support an access point at the start of the trail, which is on its land.

But it was only several years later when the national debate on river access reached its peak that the possibility of Cleaver's trail became a reality.

In 2001, the government commissioned Brighton University to find out just how many

rivers in the country canoeists already enjoy automatic access to. The answer was just two per cent.

Next, the academics in Brighton carried out feasibility studies on stretches of the four chosen rivers, the Mersey, Waveney, Wear and Teme. The River Mersey was picked to demonstrate how a series of voluntary agreements could be used to open up access to canoeists in an urban setting.

The project began in earnest in 2004, when university researchers and the Environment Agency began to track down the landowners along the river. Eventually more than 100 were contacted, including golf club proprietors, utility companies, local authorities and members of the public. Process and policy adviser Roger Goulding, from the Environment Agency's Exeter office, oversaw the project.

"It has been a big undertaking," Goulding admits. "We are dealing with around 100 landowners along the Mersey. As you can appreciate arranging agreements with that amount of people is a lengthy process."

Some landowners dedicated "high rights" for unpowered crafts to use the waters, new legislation under Section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. Others simply made no objections to the waters bordering their land being used.

Only one landowner objected to his land being used – claiming he had suffered from years of problems due to flood defence programmes. But there was a 'get-out' clause – the objector only owned one side of the riverbank, so canoeists could simply paddle on the other side of the river.

Goulding adds: "In general, we had few problems getting landowners to agree to access on the River Mersey, primarily because most of the land is owned by utility companies like water boards, or by councils or golf clubs.

"Other parts of the river border onto areas of regeneration, and there were no concerns raised there by landowners either. Even the anglers agreed to it."

He points out that in other parts of the country on the other three rivers, residents living in large town houses with gardens bordering riverbanks had raised concerns about privacy, but says: "With the Mersey, we have had a huge amount of positive interest, perhaps because of the improving river quality and the fact there are signs of salmon and trout in the waters.

"The route from Stockport town centre to Heaton Mersey is actually very attractive; there's a nice sandstone gorge. Apart from the occasional telephone wire, you wouldn't realise you were in a heavily built up urban area."

The Environment Agency has also put a number of signs along the riverbanks advising canoeists of their rights, along with health and safety advice. Steps are being built along the riverbanks, and the Environment Agency is funding portage for canoeists to carry their vessels around weirs. Once the scheme is underway, canoeists will also be able to download a guide of the route from the Environment Agency's website.

One project that has already benefited from better canoe access is the new Mersey Vale nature reserve, a former piece of industrial land that is being transformed with

the help of the Mersey Basin Campaign. In January the Environment Agency built steps for canoeists to access the river from the nature reserve near Burnage Rugby Club in Heaton Mersey, Stockport.

Sarah Wallbank, European Project Manager for the Mersey Basin Campaign, explains: "We have been working in partnership with Stockport Council to develop the park, which has included a big community consultation with local people.

"The idea is for people to be able to go for walks on what was deserted industrial land, and to be able to use the river bordering the reserve for canoeing.

"As the Environment Agency were building flood defences on the river along this stretch of the river anyway, we managed to agree for the steps to be built at the same time. It is a good example of a joint project between Stockport Council, us and the Environment Agency." Wallbank adds that further steps will be built at a nearby weir to allow canoeists to climb out of their boats and assess the water conditions further down the river.

By August, the whole 18-mile stretch will be legally open to canoeists for the first time. And when this happens, Cleaver has ambitious plans for the Mersey. He wants to organise a 12 mile canoe descent race to celebrate the achievement. As things stand, canoeists in the Northwest use canals for long marathon races, or instead enjoy shorter sprint races. Cleaver is certain that in time the new race will become a major addition to the region's sporting calendar.

MORE INFORMATION:
www.bcu.org.uk
www.riveraccess.org

Anne Arnold is a Manchester based journalist working with the Northwest's new quality weekly, the Northwest Enquirer.

60-second expert

- Canoeists, swimmers, boaters and gorge walkers currently only have lawful access to two percent of waterways in England and Wales. The British Canoe Union (BCU) wants automatic legal access to all rivers, lakes and canals – a right already approved by the Scottish Executive.
- A number of countries across the world have laws allowing unpowered craft to use rivers and other waterways. But under UK law, riparian landowners must agree to access to the rivers for watersports enthusiasts to legally use the waters bordering their land.
- The government is reluctant to bring in a new Bill and instead wants to instigate a series of voluntary agreements between the BCU and landowners. But the BCU is sceptical and believes it would take too much time and resources. Tracking down landowners can often take time.
- As a test case, an 18-mile stretch of the River Mersey is being opened up after the Environment Agency attained the agreement of more than 100 people owning land bordering the Mersey from Stockport town centre to Carrington.
- Canoeists argue that opening up all waterways would promote the sport to a wider audience and could even cultivate future Olympic stars for Britain. But anglers federations fiercely oppose such a move, claiming it could damage fish stocks. Anglers are subject to regulation and usually have to apply to local authorities for permits to gain the right to fish on riverbanks.

A leader in his field

Source chats to the Northwest's new environmental champion.



David Crawshaw of United Utilities is not your typical green crusader. Sound bites and spin simply aren't his style. Nor is he your typical tree hugger. David is every bit the gentleman, mild mannered, level headed but deeply passionate about the things that matter. Never one to blow his own trumpet, his years of quiet dedication have recently been recognised with a major award and an MBE.

Starting his career as a river pollution inspector on the River Ribble, David has been with the Northwest's water company, United Utilities, for 35 years and was their first regional environment manager. From partnership initiatives such as United Utilities Landcare and ENWORKS to the work of the Mersey Basin Campaign and more recently the ScaMP project, David has been a staunch advocate and key player in the region's environmental agenda for over three decades.

David Crawshaw is currently Regional Catchment Estates Manager for United Utilities and the winner of this year's Environmental Leadership Award at the Northwest Business Environment Awards.

MORE INFORMATION

Details of next year's Northwest Business Environment Awards will be available shortly on www.merseybasin.org.uk

Q Have you received other similar awards? No, the mantelpiece is pretty bare. This was a surprise and an honour.

Q How did you first get into environmental protection? I started as a research chemist. Working in heavy industry really opened my eyes to some appalling environmental practices. After that, I wanted to work in river pollution management to help tackle the issue.

Q How has your job changed in 30 years? I started as a fighter of pollution, but as battles have slowly been won, the focus is now sustainable development. There is more money available than thirty years ago but the challenge now is to spend it wisely. Some expenditure gets rubber stamped without an active dialogue. Space and time is needed to consult properly and make the right decisions. It's easy to spend money, the challenge is to make a real difference.

Q How important is the process of consultation? It's essential to work with local communities; we ignore them at our peril. You just need to listen and understand where people are coming from and work to deliver what the community wants and needs. Our big challenge over the next decade is to focus on what is sustainable, rather than what ticks the right policy box. We must ensure that there is genuine dialogue with stakeholders and fortunately the Water Framework Directive makes this a requirement.

Q How has water quality in the region changed? It has changed absolutely and totally. I worked on the River Ribble thirty years ago. At the time, parts of the catchment around the Calder were some of the worst polluted waters in the Northwest, experiencing serious toxic pollution. I was genuinely shocked at the blatant disregard for the environment. Parts of the catchment were totally devoid of life.

It was extreme, some of the trade effluents were too toxic even to be allowed into the sewer – the scale of the job was tremendous. The change since then has been transformational and dramatic.

Q What is our biggest environmental threat today? Climate change is the most fundamental threat we face. We are still spending money dealing with the impacts not the cause, meanwhile emissions continue to rise. It's questionable whether we will take collective action quickly enough to deal with this threat. We need to act swiftly and decisively.

Q Is nuclear the answer? It would be foolish to have a completely closed mind on nuclear, but it isn't the answer. There are smarter solutions. We must look towards tidal energy and other renewable solutions. Nuclear fusion may one day provide a technical solution but right now we don't have time to wait.

Q What is your dream job? I'm already doing it and wouldn't change it.

Q If you could make one law today, what would it be? If I had a magic wand, I'd require sustainable development and consideration of climate change to be an overriding and ingrained part of all decision-making throughout government. It certainly isn't at the moment.

Q Would you swim off the Northwest coast? I'd swim in the sea with no hesitation. We should be proud of our coastal waters – it's only the temperature that stops us now!

Q I hear you have just been awarded an MBE? Yes, that was totally unexpected. I just hope they don't expect me to retire as a result! I've still got a lot of work to do.

THE RIVER OF WELL-BEING

Opinion: Paris, London and New York all have waterfronts that are beautiful and lively. They demonstrate what is possible along the Mersey.



Lewis Biggs is chief executive of Liverpool Biennial, the largest festival of contemporary visual art in the UK, awarded 'Best Tourism Experience' (runner up) by Visit Britain's 'Enjoy England Awards for Excellence' 2006.

I discovered Paris in the 1960s when London was still an incoherent conglomeration of buildings wearing black overcoats in the fog. The Thames was an industrial artery. If land prices had been a bit higher, it would have been put in a tunnel and built over like the railways. City life was invisible with the exception of Carnaby Street and the Kings Road – the only areas, in consequence, where tourists gathered other than Horseguards Parade.

Paris, by contrast, could not have been more welcoming: people gathered in cafes opening onto wide pavements, and wide boulevards opened onto the Seine, where there were people fishing, reading, playing boules or just enjoying watching the river traffic. Paris never seemed to have lost touch with its reason for being where it is: the river and its crossing places. People who lived there wanted to be there, even at weekends – they didn't rush away to the suburbs or a country home like anyone in London who had the choice.

London has achieved a huge amount to make the Thames accessible and meaningful again: foot and cycle paths have brought people back to the river, and the South Bank from Vauxhall to Tower Bridge has recovered its eighteenth century position as a continuous pleasure ground.

The point of both Paris' historic attachment to the Seine, and London's recent rediscovery

Well maintained, beautiful public spaces benefit everyone, but beautiful places are not easily achieved. Outside the epicentres of New York, London and Paris the value of good design is still insufficiently understood by the people tasked with making our environment as risk-free and low maintenance as possible. "Good design needs inspiration, innovation and experimentation. Minimising risk is important but needs to be balanced with the need to create stimulating environments that can be surprising and educational." (CABE Space, 2005)

The challenge along the Mersey waterfront is to solicit creative ideas from internationally renowned designers that will transform our waterfront spaces into places. At present there are many major private sector developments underway or planned, but with the exception of the Pier Head, and despite very welcome investment in physical access improvements such as Pride in Our Promenades, the Mersey Way and the River of Light, there is nothing of quality, nothing with a distinctive character and strong sense of place. We need to understand the waterfront as a park: a network of beautiful public spaces, destinations and physical structures, where the communities of Merseyside face and engage with each other, a shared space where a shared identity and future can be forged.

Where is the vision to recognise the Mersey for what it is? When will we acknowledge its meaning, for residents and tourists alike? There are some – such as Mersey Waterfront Park – that recognise the values I am describing, but where is the political will to make such a plan happen? We have a City Region Development Plan, The Merseyside Economic Strategy, the Regional

We need to understand the waterfront as a park: a network of beautiful public spaces, destinations and physical structures.

of the Thames, is that these cities recognise the value of treating them as a public asset; part forum, part park. A Roman forum was not just a market, it was a place of discussion, gossip, games, festivals – and especially, it was a place of beauty, dignity and aspiration expressed architecturally. When our British marketplaces were taken over by municipal corporations in the nineteenth century, most of these activities were displaced to urban parks and gardens; although you can still see a juggler in some malls today, these privatised spaces are a far cry from the forum, and no longer contribute to civic life.

Economic Strategy and the Regional Spatial Strategy, but are any of these meaningful without a Ken Livingstone (or even a unitary authority) to turn them into action? Why should something so basic and obvious be dependent on a Living Landmark Lottery bid? Now that political parties on all sides are anxious to stake their claim to be able to deliver quality of life – 'not just Welfare but Well-Being' as the phrase has it - where better to start delivering those things than by giving us back our river to enjoy?

My children have spent their entire lives in Liverpool, but now they are about to leave school, I ask myself how much have I done to make this city a beautiful place where they will choose to live, when the rest of the world beckons?

Having the most museums and art galleries
outside London is impressive.
One of them is breathtaking.



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