

# source<sup>NW</sup>

WATERS | REGENERATION | ENVIRONMENT | SUSTAINABILITY

## LOOKING FOR ANSWERS

What went wrong with New Brighton's £73 million regeneration plan?

## NEW MODEL FARMING

Saving our hills and fells.

## INTERNATIONAL RESCUE

What have our friends in Europe ever done for the Northwest?

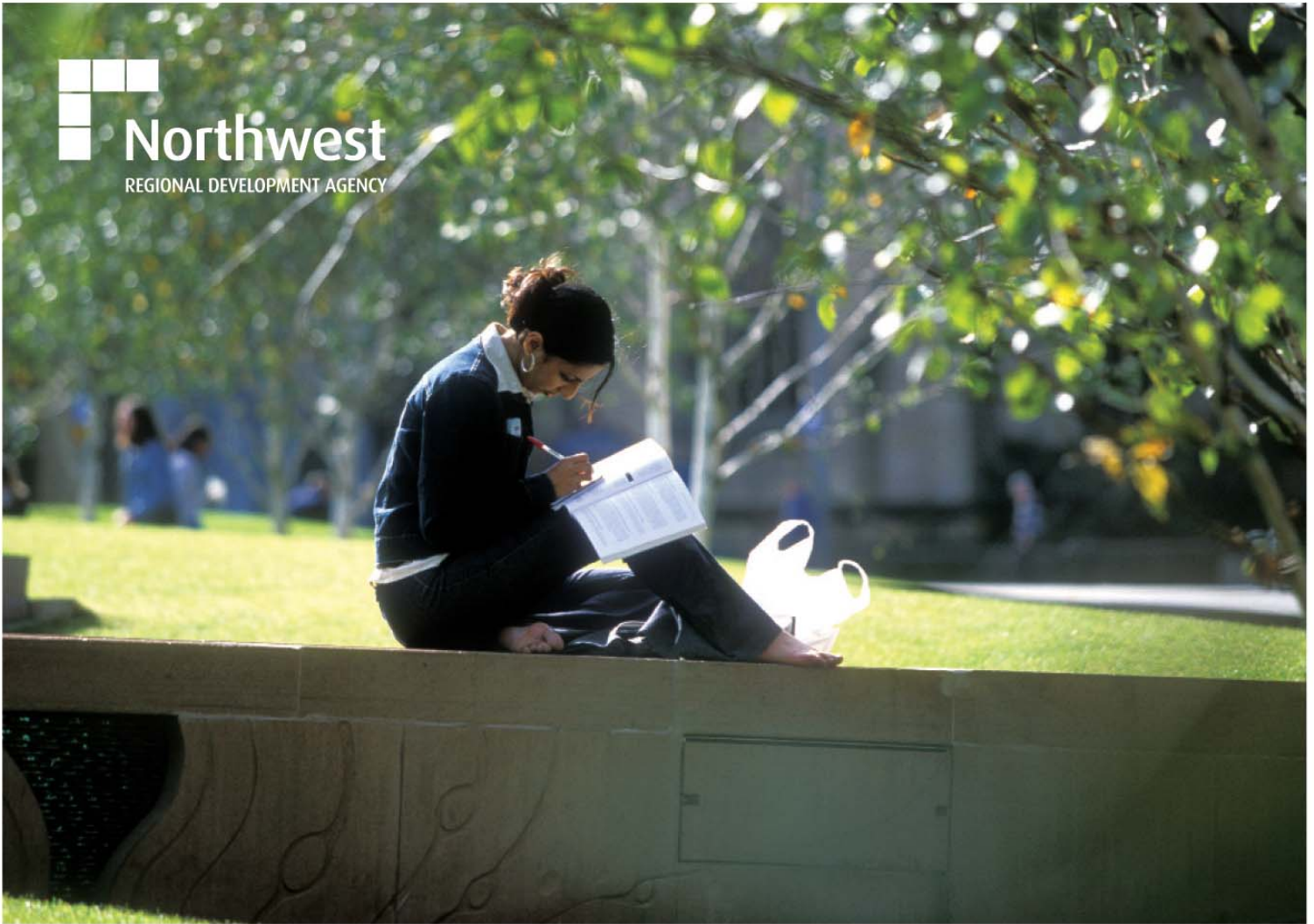
## CANAL MANIA

Cheshire's fabulous waterways.





**Northwest**  
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY



# 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](http://www.nwda.co.uk)** or  
**[www.englandsnorthwest.com](http://www.englandsnorthwest.com)**

INVESTING IN  
**englandsnorthwest**



I recently saw a television report about proposals to generate renewable energy on the

River Mersey. The interviewees enthusiastically pointed out the benefits of renewable energy, while the relevant government minister dutifully espoused his support. The thing is, the report was almost 20 years old. It was an account of the failed attempt to build an electricity-generating barrage across the Mersey.

The initial results of a new study into the potential for renewable energy on the Mersey estuary will soon be announced – at the Mersey Basin Campaign’s annual conference in December.

So what has changed in the intervening years? Well, in some ways, quite a lot. No one talks of barrages on the Mersey any more. They’re yesterday’s technology. A whole slew of new and exciting devices are poised to come off the drawing board, and would have far less impact on the estuary than a massive barrage. Any project on the Mersey could well be the proving ground for one or more of these cutting-edge technologies.

But meanwhile, a new report from the respected Tyndall Centre gives us four years to get to grips with climate change. We’re heading in the right direction, but we need to get there faster. For more on these stories, see pages 18 and 19.

Matthew Sutcliffe, editor  
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Source<sup>NW</sup> 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 New Brighton in the late 1980s, from Martin Parr’s seminal book *The Last Resort* (see page 22).

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# Europe's biggest pipe dream

Huge project will improve water quality for decades.

Engineers are walking from the Lake District to Manchester without ever touching the ground – they are travelling the entire length of the century old Thirlmere aqueduct as part of a mammoth project to clean and inspect 800 km of pipes.

The project is the largest of its kind in Europe and will take eight years to complete at a cost of £350 million, says the region's water company, United Utilities. Six major water mains will be cleaned from end to end for the first time ever and two huge aqueducts will be taken out of service, starting with Thirlmere, to allow engineers to clean and inspect them by hand and eye.



United Utilities says that the project is needed to allow maintenance work and to remove sediments, such as traces of manganese and iron, which can build up in the pipes over time. The company says the work will secure high standards of drinking water for the future, which it points out is the best it has ever been in the Northwest.

Work is already underway on the 135 km long Thirlmere aqueduct, which opened in 1894 but has never before been fully cleaned. Water in the aqueduct takes just over a day to travel

which customers can see, the upgrade project will help improve water quality at the microscopic level, which they can't," said Alan.

The project is the largest of its kind in Europe and will take eight years to complete at a cost of £350 million.

from Thirlmere reservoir in the Lake District to its destination in Manchester, moving downhill at around four miles per hour. The work is expected to cost around £23 million and take two years to complete.

In all, water mains supplying over five million people in the Northwest will be improved, including pipes in Cheshire, Lancashire, Manchester and Liverpool.

United Utilities programme manager Alan Duncan, said: "What we're doing with this job is ensuring that quality is maintained between our treatment works and our customers' taps. "Naturally occurring sediments can settle out and collect in water mains over time and the build-up can start to affect water quality. "As well as reducing the risk of 'discolouration',

Most water companies have already completed two rounds of similar improvements since the industry was privatised in the 1990s.

In the first round of work, United Utilities removed traces of iron and manganese from water at source. The new programme will clean up the pipes that take water to people's homes.

However, the UK's Drinking Water Inspectorate says United Utilities is one of only four companies still to complete this second round of work.

#### MORE INFORMATION

[www.unitedutilities.com/cleanandmaintain](http://www.unitedutilities.com/cleanandmaintain)

## SOUND BITES

**S A bit of bottle.** UK businesses could save over £300 million per year simply by using a bit of bottle. According to statistics from Envirowise, which advises businesses on how to save money by being more environmentally friendly, the nation's 22 million office workers each use about 35 litres of water every day. That's enough to fill the Albert Hall seven times over. But most of the water – 86 per cent – is flushed straight down the toilet. So by simply placing a litre bottle of water into older style toilet cisterns, companies could save enough water to fill 35 Olympic size swimming pools every day, and cut costs into the bargain. [www.envirowise.gov.uk](http://www.envirowise.gov.uk)

**S Promenade park.** Part of Blackpool seafront is to be transformed into a year-round urban park where local residents can mix with visitors, thanks to a £250,000 development grant from the Big Lottery Fund. The money will fund an international design competition

to create a 'People's Playground' for the town's Central Promenade. Submissions are being invited from artists and architects who specialise in re-imagining public space. The aim is to bring together a design team that will work with the community to decide what should go on a series of new headlands that are currently being built.

**S Grid locked.** A huge water grid from the North of England or Wales is not the answer to water shortages in the Southeast, according to a report from the Environment Agency. The report also argues that the £15 billion price tag would be prohibitively expensive – at least four times more expensive than simply building new reservoirs in the Southeast. Instead, the agency advocates sharing water locally between regions, reducing leaks, building new reservoirs and encouraging water savings in households and industry. Acting chief executive, Paul Leinster, said: "In engineering terms,

a national grid is feasible but there's no point in spending money on a big scheme that isn't needed."

[www.environment-agency.gov.uk/subjects/waterres/981441/1464447/?lang=\\_e](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/subjects/waterres/981441/1464447/?lang=_e)

**S Poised for action.** The Northwest Regional Development Agency has launched its new Climate Change Action Plan, saying its mission is to make the Northwest the 'leading region on climate change'. The plan has been developed with input from a range of the agency's key partners, as well as climate change experts. Officially unveiled on November 9th it sets out a vision for the region, specifies outcomes and identifies the organisations that will be critical in delivering the plan and what their roles will be.



# Reach for the sky

## Peel announces epic thirty year vision for Wirral waterfront.

The skyline above Birkenhead Docks will one day rival New York, Sydney and Hong Kong, says the developer behind plans for a massive £4.5 billion regeneration project on the Wirral waterfront.

Unveiling the scheme, which it calls 'Wirral Waters', to an enthusiastic meeting of Wirral Councillors, developer Peel Holdings said it would be anchored by a cluster of skyscrapers, some as high as 50 stories. These have already been dubbed Wirral's 'Three Graces' in reference to the famous triumvirate of buildings they would face across the Mersey on Liverpool Pier Head.

The plans cover a total of 1.7 million m<sup>2</sup> and include space for shops, bars, restaurants, a hotel, thousands of new apartments, a health club and 464,000 m<sup>2</sup> of office space, offering what Peel describes as "surely the best working environment in the country with stunning views over the Wirral, the River Dee and the Liverpool

waterfront." A new pedestrian bridge would at last allow people to cross over the docks and enjoy the riverside.

Peel expects the scheme to create more than 27,000 permanent new jobs with tens of thousands of additional construction jobs and indirect jobs, bringing a massive boost to the area.

The company is also set to announce detailed plans for a second large scale development, this time across the river in Liverpool.

Peel claims that Wirral Waters would be amongst the biggest regeneration projects in the country. That could be seen as Peel trumpeting its own plans, but Frank Field, a local MP for 27 years, says: "I have never been so excited in discussing Birkenhead's future as I was in meeting John Whittaker, the owner of Peel Holdings, knowing that this time the person with the vision has a track record of delivery."

And what a track record. Peel is the name behind successes such as the Trafford Centre, Liverpool John Lennon Airport and much of the development at Salford Quays. It owns the Manchester Ship Canal and Liverpool Docks and Harbour Company. It is one of the region's

biggest companies, and Whittaker is reputedly the region's richest man. Failure, it seems, is not an option.

After the euphoria of Peel's initial announcement comes the nitty-gritty of making the plans a reality. An outline planning application will be submitted next year, which would inevitably be called in by the government for a public inquiry due to its sheer size.

## Plans include shops, bars, restaurants, offices, a hotel, thousands of new apartments, a health club and 27,000 new jobs.

Even so, no one yet seems to be in a mood to let the excitement slip. Wirral Council leader Steve Foulkes said: "It is a fantastic opportunity and will place the Mersey waterfront on a par with the world's greatest cities such as New York and Shanghai. Peel have a great track record for delivering and we will work with them over the coming months to move this forward."

**S Hello sparling.** A rare fish known as the sparling or smelt has been found in the Wyre estuary in Lancashire for the first time in 25 years. Sparling are extremely sensitive to pollution and scientists from the Environment Agency, who discovered the fish over the summer, say they are a sure sign of significantly improved water quality. Sparling used to be a common sight in the region's estuaries but virtually disappeared due to pollution during the industrial revolution. Like salmon, they mature at sea after spending their first few years in freshwater. Importantly, all the fish found in the Wyre estuary were juveniles in good condition, indicating that the water is clean enough to have allowed the fish to breed.

**S Still on route?** British Waterways says it remains confident that a new canal across Liverpool's Pier Head will go ahead despite the decision by city planners to reject its bid to re-route the planned watercourse. British Waterways (BW) already had planning permission for the extension to the Leeds-Liverpool Canal and work was due to get underway over the summer. But BW wanted to shift the route several metres inland to allow more attractive landscaping, filling in West Waterloo Dock in the process. However, local residents objected to the plans, while city planners said their main objection centred on the historic significance of the site.

**S BREWing up online.** A new website that promises to make it easier for businesses to save both money and the environment has been launched by the Northwest partners of Business Resource Efficiency and Waste (BREW), including Enworks and the Environment

Agency. The new 'signposting' service, Environment-Connect, is free to businesses in the Northwest, and can be accessed online at [www.environment-connect.co.uk](http://www.environment-connect.co.uk) or via a freephone helpline on 0800 032 0222.

**S Eau d'Irwell.** Not every river can claim to have been turned into an upmarket scent, but a drop of water from the River Irwell is the secret ingredient in a new perfume created by Duerr's, the Manchester jam-makers. The Old Trafford-based firm has developed L'eau de Marmalade as part of its 125th birthday celebrations. It uses Seville oranges and a hint of cinnamon to capture the essence of marmalade, while water from the Irwell links the product to Duerr's North Manchester roots. So far Duerr's has only produced a sample batch, but if it proves popular, the swanky scent could be on the shelves in time for Christmas.



## Lions and tunnels and boats, oh my

For anyone who has yet to witness the remarkable sight of a bombed out church filled with upturned green boats, the good news is that there's still a couple of weeks left to rectify the situation. The same can be said for stone lions in steel cages and abstract pictures of tunnels.

Not to mention a giant question mark hanging over the River Mersey. It's all part of this year's Liverpool biennial art exhibition, which runs until November 26th, and which continues to gather pace, verve and acclaim in equal measure. [www.biennial.com](http://www.biennial.com)

## Ribble to get massive new nature reserve

The RSPB is to create a huge new wetland nature reserve and undertake one of Europe's largest coastal realignment projects after buying 170 hectares of land on the Ribble Estuary.

The charity spent £2.5 million to acquire the site on the south bank of the Ribble at Hesketh Out Marsh, where it will create a new saltmarsh, lagoons and muddy creeks in which wildlife can flourish.

The Ribble Estuary is internationally important for wading birds and an incredible 250,000 birds make the estuary their home every winter. It is the UK's most important river for wintering birds such as whooper and Bewick's swans, pink-footed geese, wigeons, knots,

dunlins, sanderlings and godwits.

The new lagoon and saltmarsh will also improve flood defences by acting as a natural buffer zone that absorbs high tides and storm surges. They will be created by breaching the existing outer sea wall in four places, and will sit in front of a second, inner sea wall, which will be strengthened.

The RSPB says Hesketh Out Marsh will be one of the biggest coastal realignment projects in Europe, adding that it is the kind of scheme that will increasingly be needed to combat the effects of climate change, predicted to

include rising sea levels and stronger storms.

Hesketh Out Marsh will also form a key part of the proposed Ribble Estuary Regional Park, a plan to attract visitors to the natural assets and landscape of the area. Work is expected to begin next spring.

### MORE INFORMATION

[www.rspb.org.uk/england/northwest/conservation/ribble/hesketh.asp](http://www.rspb.org.uk/england/northwest/conservation/ribble/hesketh.asp)

## Vital signs

Researchers have been taking the pulse of the Northwest in order to measure the health of its social, economic and environmental performance for a new report, and compare it against the eight other regions of England.

Over forty indicators were examined for this year's annual Vital Signs report, the third so far produced, under themes ranging from sport and culture to pollution and community safety.

It reveals that the Northwest saw the greatest improvement in biological and chemical water quality of any region between 1990-2004, despite our region's rivers being generally more polluted at the outset than those elsewhere. However, it also shows that whilst biological water quality in Northwest rivers has improved since 2000, chemical water quality has declined overall.

This year's Vital Signs also sees the Northwest climb to first place amongst the English regions for the condition of its Sites of Special Scientific Interest, after ranking third in the 2002 report. Generally the region scores well for the quality of its wildlife habitats, with many defined as favourable or recovering. On top of which, the Northwest is well endowed with wild bird species, says the report.

The current Vital Signs is the first to look at climate change indicators, ranking the Northwest sixth in terms of its carbon emissions, with levels some 30 per cent lower than those of the worst performing region.

The report is produced by the Regional

Performance Indicators Group, composed of representatives from a wide variety of organisations, including the Environment Agency, the Northwest Regional Development Agency and the Department of Health.

### MORE INFORMATION

[www.gonw.gov.uk/gonw/OurRegion/VitalSigns/](http://www.gonw.gov.uk/gonw/OurRegion/VitalSigns/)

## Iron men ordered off beach... then welcomed back

Outrage forces retreat on decision to banish art installation.



An army of iron men on Crosby beach has won a stay of execution after Sefton Council reversed a decision by its planners to hand the statues their marching orders. The one hundred statues, which make up artist Antony Gormley's famous installation Another Place, are now in line for a £1 million government grant.

The decision in late October to order the statues off the beach immediately provoked a tide of protest and was reversed just a week later.

A ministerial announcement only a few days later revealed that the charitable trust set up to save the statues, Another Place Ltd, has secured a £1 million grant from the government's Northern Way scheme, virtually guaranteeing that the statues can be purchased.

The artwork's fate appeared to have been sealed at a raucous meeting where, in a charged atmosphere, council planners bowed

to pressure from local windsurfers and sea anglers and ordered the statues to be removed.

The iron men had become the focus of intense local wrangling between those who felt they were a huge boost to Crosby and to Merseyside – and would make a fine contribution to Liverpool's Capital of Culture year in 2008 – and those who saw them as a nuisance.

When first erected, the statues had only been granted temporary planning permission, due to run out in November. Without a planning extension, and with shorter days and higher tides on the way, they would have had to be removed at the end of October.

Instead, the statues will now remain in place until at least March, giving supporters time to raise the extra £1 million to buy them, and find ways to deal with the concerns of protesters.

Laurie Peake, speaking on behalf of Another Place Ltd, said: "What we were calling for was time to make a considered decision taking into account a range of local opinion and expert information, not a hasty decision."

## Marque of efficiency

The UK's first water efficiency marque has been launched to help consumers choose more water efficient products. The marque will be awarded by water efficiency experts Waterwise to products that use water efficiently or which reduce water wastage.

Once awarded, manufacturers will be able to use the marque to provide clear, independently endorsed, point-of-sale information to the buyer. A select handful of Waterwise marques will be awarded each year

to the products which best enhance water efficiency or reduce water wastage.

Jacob Tompkins, director of Waterwise, said: "This is the first scheme in the UK to highlight water efficient products.

"Many other countries throughout the world, including Australia, America and other European countries, already provide consumers with water saving information and it is time for the UK to take the lead."

Entries for the marque will be judged by a panel of experts and announced at the Waterwise Annual Conference next March.

## Canal patrol

Police officers and staff from British Waterways are to patrol the Rochdale Canal in North Manchester to help reduce crime, including robberies, vandalism and nuisance behaviour. Over the past six months,

British Waterways has recorded 11 incidents of criminal damage. Regular water patrols and foot patrols in the area will help to reassure local people that action is being taken and will help to reduce the number of incidents taking place.

### November 18-19 North West Bird Watchers Festival

Whether you have an interest in bird watching, photography, conservation or the environment, the North West Bird Watchers Festival is an enjoyable and informative day out. Featuring guest speakers and a range of stands, as well as bird-ringing demonstrations.

Venue: Martin Mere Wetland Centre, Lancashire.

More Information: 01704 895181

[www.wwt.org.uk/visit/martinmere](http://www.wwt.org.uk/visit/martinmere)

### November 22-24 Eurocities Conference and AGM

This international conference will provide a platform to discuss how cities can benefit from the opportunities presented by the knowledge economy, and to explore some of the key issues a 'knowledge city' can face in terms of competitiveness, sustainability and social inclusion. Includes study tours focusing on science, city centre regeneration and the regeneration of Hulme in Manchester.

Venue: MICC, Manchester

More Information: Fiona Gardner 020 7592 3652

[eurocities@connectpa.co.uk](mailto:eurocities@connectpa.co.uk) [www.eurocities2006.com](http://www.eurocities2006.com)

### November 29 – December 2 Symposium on sustainability through construction procurement

The Centre for Construction Innovation is holding this symposium, which will bring together practitioners and researchers from many parts of the world to share their knowledge and experience. Participants will report, review and speculate on the pursuit of sustainability and value.

Venue: Manchester, venue tbc

More Information: Dr Peter McDermott / Steve Jessop

0161 295 5076

### November 30 Natural benefits for business

A cutting edge conference on the opportunities for business in taking action on biodiversity. Primarily aimed at manufacturing businesses, this event will be of particular interest to those involved with regulatory compliance, risk management, environmental issues and corporate responsibility.

Venue: Lingley Mere, Warrington

More Information: Andrew Loynd 0161 247 7800

[a.loynd@snw.org.uk](mailto:a.loynd@snw.org.uk) [www.snw.org.uk](http://www.snw.org.uk)

### December 12 Mersey Basin Campaign Conference 2006

The Campaign's annual conference this year takes an inspiring look at the projects that are either underway or on the way for the region's water environment. From the vision for the massive new MediaCity:UK at Salford Quays, the BBC's proposed new home in the North, to an innovative project on a small farm in Lancashire that has big ambitions to change the way we farm our cherished moors and fells.

Venue: Bridgewater Hall, Manchester

More Information: Fouzia Bhatti 0161 242 8200

[f.bhatti@merseybasin.org.uk](mailto:f.bhatti@merseybasin.org.uk) [www.merseybasin.org.uk](http://www.merseybasin.org.uk)

### April 18-19 2007 8th Annual River Restoration Network conference

A two-day conference focusing on river restoration as a means to deliver sustainable flood risk management and Water Framework Directive objectives. The event will provide a forum for river restoration practitioners to share their experience and expertise. Optional site visits on 20 April.

Venue: University of Chester

More Information: 01525 863 341

[rrc@therrc.co.uk](mailto:rrc@therrc.co.uk) [www.therrc.co.uk](http://www.therrc.co.uk)

# Love

Why I love... the Darwen litter trap

By Kelly Derbyshire,  
dog walker and duck lover



“It all started because I could see that the ducks had nowhere to lay their eggs. There was so much rubbish along the banks of my stretch of the River Darwen that the poor birds literally couldn't wade their way through and settle to build their nests. I tried clearing it up myself but it was mostly really big rubbish, shopping trolleys, chairs, bikes, bits of beds, and then stuff like used sanitary towels.

I'd see it mounting up every day when I walked my dog and it just made me really cross. So I got a petition together with around 150 signatures and took loads of photos before sending the lot off to the

council. And then I waited, but nothing much seemed to happen.

But while I was campaigning on getting it cleared up, I found out about Action Darwen Valley. They were great – I was just stunned and amazed that anyone wanted to take an interest. After me and 15 or so friends went down with them to the river to do a big clean up, it ended up being a bit of a rolling stone gathering moss. The Friends of Witton Park, which adjoins the river, got involved too and together we managed to get the capital funding for a litter trap. Once it's installed it's going to make such a difference.

The trap stretches right across the river and stops all the gubbins flowing down and collecting on the banks. Which means that next spring when I take my dog for a walk, the ducks will have been able to find somewhere to nest and lay their eggs, and there might be ducklings swimming along the river! After all, we can come and go as we wish along the riverbank, but the ducks have to live there in our filth, and it's about time we made a bit of an effort to stop dirtying up their lives.”

# Hate

Why I hate... the Old Firestation

By Michael Taylor, Editor,  
Northwest Business Insider



“I actually love the building on the corner of Whitworth Street and London Road in Manchester, which used to be known as the London Road Fire Station. I mean really love it. I love its majesty and its history. I look at it when I walk from Piccadilly Station to work and marvel at its obvious potential. But I hate the waste of that potential that the building's present state symbolises.

Since it was built in 1905 it has been through many changes, not least its incarnation as a symbol of defiance. During the Second World War, when the Luftwaffe was attempting to flatten parts of the city (and Old Trafford), fire fighters would prepare and refresh there. It was a mini-city.

But what I really hate is that it has been nothing but a shed for the last 21 years. This fantastic Grade II-listed triangular structure at the heart of Piccadilly is on the English Heritage 'Buildings At Risk' register and is now near the top of the city council's agenda. Yet it shouldn't be so. Following the publication in February 2006 of the Piccadilly Partnership's plans to redevelop the whole site as a mixed-use scheme based around a music venue, Manchester City Council's executive committee empowered its chief executive Sir Howard Bernstein to see the job through. Only one problem stood in the way - neither the council nor the regeneration partnership owns the Firestation.

Bernstein has warned that if cooperation is not forthcoming the council will obtain its own survey without the owner's consent. I am a strong supporter of property rights and the rule of law. But in this instance I have come to believe the only solution is for a Compulsory Purchase Order to save one of the city's treasures from the ravages of further neglect.”

## SOUND BITES

**S Underwych gets underway.** The story of Vale Royal's unstable past is being brought to life thanks to a £47,000 Heritage Lottery Fund grant. The Northwich area of Cheshire is plagued by subsidence as a result of its long history of salt mining. The 'Underwych' project is the brainchild of local writer, Robert Meadows, and will see the stories and memories of local people who worked in the salt mining and brine pumping industry, as well as those whose lives have been affected by subsidence, turned into songs and drama. A play based on these will be performed in Northwich in July 2007. The work will also be preserved for posterity on DVD and in print.

**S Breeding boost.** Salmon and sea trout in Lancashire have been given a boost with the completion of improvement works on the River Dunsop, a tributary of the River Ribble. The Environment Agency and the Ribble Catchment Conservation Trust created a series of low stone weirs and off-stream spawning channels in the river at Dunsop Bridge. The weirs will provide more spawning areas in the river's main channel and create a more diverse habitat for young fish, while the off-stream channels have been seeded with spawning gravel for salmon, sea trout and brown trout, and will increase the nursery area for young fish. The Ribble Catchment Conservation Trust has previously completed

similar works on Langden Brook, also in Dunsop Bridge.

**S Reservoir revival.** A successful partnership between Action Irk and Roch, Middleton Angling Society, Rochdale Canal Society and Groundwork Oldham and Rochdale has delivered much-needed improvements at the formerly neglected Myrtle Road Reservoir in Boarshaw. Between them the partners managed to secure £20,000 to overhaul the site, from sources including the Environment Agency, Greening

# Access all areas

People with disabilities find ways to enjoy the countryside.



MERSEY BASIN CAMPAIGN STAFF JOIN VOLUNTEERS AT WITTON COUNTRY PARK

Spending time just messing about on the river was how Ratty loved to chill out in Kenneth Grahame's much-loved story, *The Wind in the Willows*. But if you can't even get to the river, then there's not much chance of being able to enjoy the tranquil setting that characterises much of the Northwest's water environment, as disabled visitors had found to their dismay on arriving at Witton Country Park near Blackburn over the past few months.

Though 'tramper trains' – specially adapted outdoor vehicles – were available to take people with mobility difficulties down to the lakeside, the paths had become too overgrown for even this type of transport to negotiate.

Having assessed the problem, MWH Mersey Basin Week provided the perfect opportunity to solve it. Volunteers from United Utilities, the Environment Agency and the Youth Offending team from Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council embarked upon a concerted campaign to clear the lakeside routes and banks of the River Yarrow, which runs through the park. Rhododendrons were bashed and overgrown vegetation

removed, so the trampers can now drive their passengers in safety as they tour the park's extensive grounds.

Enhancing disabled access to leisure activities beside and on the water has been a feature of this year's MWH Mersey Basin Week. Following a popular fishing taster session



'TRAMPING' THROUGH THE PARK

for disabled teenagers at Yarrow Valley Country Park last year, run by Action Darwen & Yarrow and the Environment Agency, it was decided to get the fishing rods out again this autumn.

"Wigan Anglers, which own the fishing rights to the park's lakes – old restored mill 'lodges' – gave us permission to fish the waters during Mersey Basin Week," says Gemma Tomlinson of Action Douglas & Yarrow.

"Two sessions with ten places each ran morning and afternoon for local teenagers who had physical or learning disabilities. Fishing coaches from the Environment Agency once again led the sessions, giving the teenagers guidance on how to set their rods, thread maggots onto hooks and reel in the fish.

"Surprisingly enough it turned out that they weren't in the least bothered by the maggots! We really hope this opportunity to learn new skills – and the fishing rods they were given to take away with them – will mean the youngsters continue to enjoy and value their local waterways into the future."

#### MORE INFORMATION

[g.tomlinson@merseybasin.org.uk](mailto:g.tomlinson@merseybasin.org.uk)

Greater Manchester and the Big Lottery Fund. The extreme makeover included new pathways, access gates and angling platforms, as well as the planting of over a thousand hawthorn trees. Local anglers and Groundwork volunteers got together to carry out a clean up and address flytipping problems at the site.

**S** **Vole patrol.** An elusive local celebrity has returned to the Wirral – a water vole has been spotted in the Babb's Meadow area of Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve. The

sighting follows a four year habitat restoration project coordinated by ranger Peter Miller and Paul Corner of Action Wirral Rivers, funded by the Environment Agency and Unilever. A series of pools and banks were created, forming ideal habitats to tempt the once thriving – but now endangered – voles back to Dibbinsdale. Paul Corner reports: "While conducting my regular check of the area, I discovered a fresh burrow and some poo. As I went to investigate, I heard a plop and turned to see a vole appear from beneath the water." A survey and population study are now planned at the site.

**S** **Walking on water.** The Irwell City Park project has received a £250,000 grant from the Big Lottery Fund to help transform the Irwell by means of continuous walkable river frontage. The funding will be used to develop a business plan for the project, which has the potential to turn the Irwell into an attractive area for locals and visitors alike. This initial grant has been awarded to Salford, Central Salford Urban Regeneration Company, Manchester City Council and Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council. These partners have already submitted a further joint bid for £25 million, which would fund the overall rejuvenation of the waterfront. The project's ultimate aim is to create a footpath along the length of the river, incorporating public spaces and a new bridge, and re-establishing the Irwell as a focal point for Manchester and Salford.



Words **Mark Hillsdon**

Photographs **Courtesy United Utilities**

**Despite their rugged appearance, there's a delicate environmental balancing act being played out across the nation's moors and fells. For years farmers and conservationists have argued over the need to preserve the heath and blanket bog, to limit grazing and to protect the land for wildlife and recreation.**

Now, a small farm nestled in a picturesque fold of the Lancashire hills is showcasing a new model for managing upland farms that offers to restore the balance between farming and nature.

Even before the new model is proven, however, there are fears that recent changes to the type of subsidies farmers receive may have gone too far, with potentially disastrous results.

Over the last fifty years, huge swathes of moorland have been artificially drained, with gullies, known locally as grips, dug out in a push to make marginal land more productive and suitable for grazing.

At first this was down to a post-war need to feed hungry mouths, a need that manifested itself in other areas of the UK with the grubbing-up of hedges and the merging of fields into vast, featureless tracts. But gradually the subsidy, not the need to put food on the table, became the incentive.

Under that legislative leviathan, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), farmers were encouraged to get as much produce from their land as possible.

Livestock farmers were given a subsidy based on each animal, so from a financial if not an environmental point of view, it made sense to keep increasing the size of their flock or herd. But often the land couldn't cope, and over-grazing was the inevitable outcome.

One result of this was a damaging loss of habits for wildlife, especially birds. Another was that the hills gradually became less effective in their role as a vast natural sponge, soaking up the rain that lashes the fells before releasing it into rivers and reservoirs.

Neil Johnson is a farming and countryside advisor for the National Trust and meets regularly with farmers across the Northwest. Around 60 per cent of the charity's land is classed as upland, so it's little surprise that he's concerned about the plight of hill farming and the continued ability of the National Trust to manage its land.

"Traditionally over-grazing has been encouraged by economic pressures and by headage subsidies," explains Johnson. "As margins became tighter, the way to get more money was to keep more sheep, and that meant more grazing."

Historically the number of sheep a farm could carry was determined by the number of sheep it could support through winter. Then came quad bikes and four-wheel drive tractors, which meant farmers could get winter feed up to the moors. "The fell went from supporting the sheep to becoming just an area of ground where the sheep were kept," says Johnson.

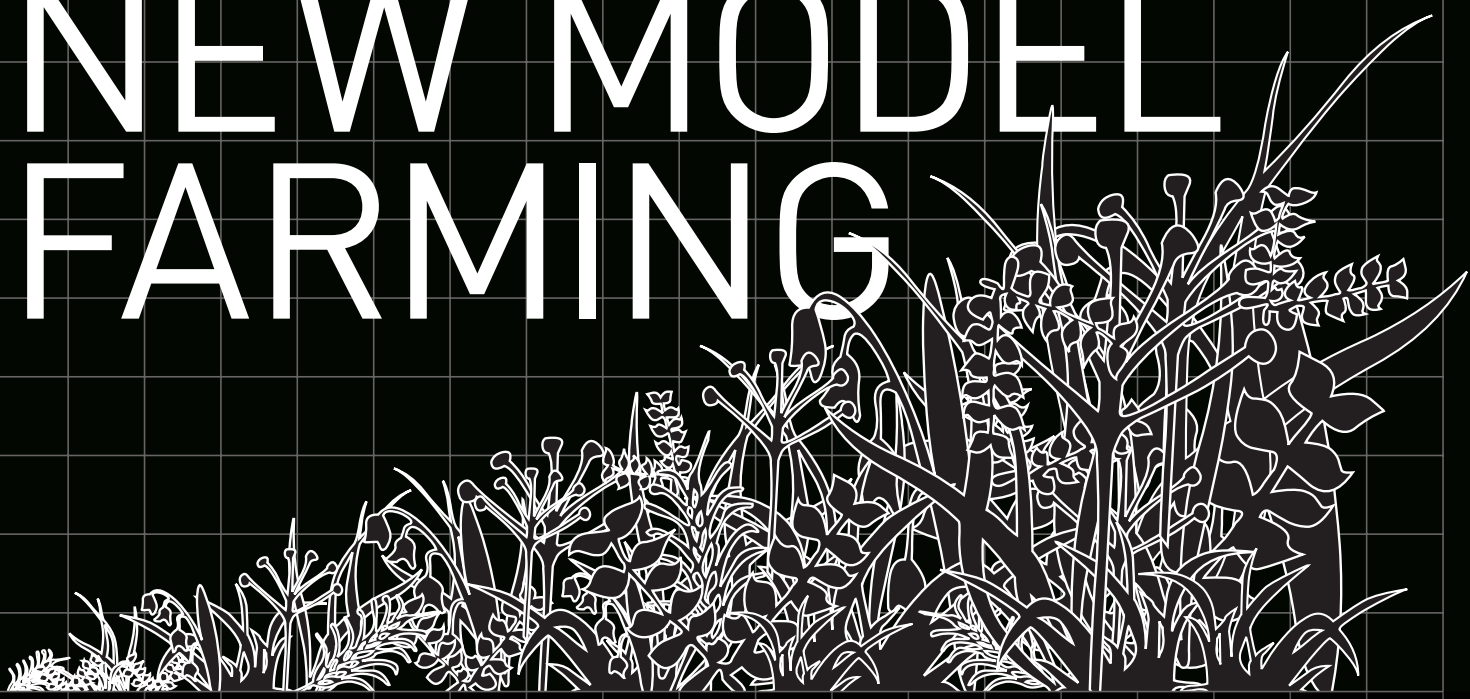
Managing the land for shooting, which can require intensive and frequent burning, put further strains on a once robust ecosystem that was by now struggling to provide the mosaic of habitats needed to maintain the moors' rich biodiversity.

At the same time, the drainage grips were drying out the peat and heavy grazing was killing the sphagnum moss that acted as a sponge for the rain. The land began to wash away, no longer able to cope with the brown, discoloured torrents of water.

**[CONTINUED OVER]**



# NEW MODEL FARMING



Farmers

The search for a new way of farming a precious landscape

Conservationists



**RIGGINDALE**



**TOURING WHITENDALE FARM**



**BLOCKING DRAINAGE 'GRIPS'**

“If the bog becomes degraded and dries out, then the peat starts oxidising,” explains Peter Wilson, the RSPB’s project manager for Bowland in Lancashire. “Then when it rains the water flushes out all the organic carbon, turning the water brown... (so) there’s an obvious correlation between good vegetation quality and water quality.”

And it was this that first alerted the region’s water company, United Utilities (UU), to the fact it had a problem on its upland estates. The company had taken over responsibility for the land when the industry was privatised in the 1990s. Much of it is still occupied by tenant farmers.

“We can never do without treatment works – they keep the water safe to drink – but by managing our land as best we can, we avoid adding more and more levels of treatment,” says UU’s sustainable catchment manager, Martin McGrath.

Last year UU launched the Sustainable Catchment Management Programme (SCaMP), a highly innovative scheme that brings together a raft of ideas for improving the upland environment into a single workable package.

The five-year pilot project covers more than 20,000 hectares of estates in Bowland and the Peak District. Farm plans for each of the 22 tenant farms have been worked up by staff from the RSPB and UU, with advice from bodies such as Lancashire Rural Futures, funding from agri-environment schemes and backing from the water industry regulator, Ofwat. Key to the scheme’s success will be whether or not it manages to provide a viable and secure income for UU’s tenant farmers whilst simultaneously helping wildlife and improving water quality.

The place where that question will first be answered is Whitendale Farm in Lancashire, the farm that is currently at the heart of the SCaMP project. On the hills above the farm the drainage grips have already been blocked and the blanket bog is returning. Efforts to repair areas of eroded and exposed peat, heather moorland and hay meadows are underway. Cash has also been found to repair and improve farm buildings for indoor wintering of livestock and lambing, and new waste

management facilities are reducing run-off pollution into nearby watercourses.

SCaMP will also help some tenants to benefit from the high revenue income available under agri-environment schemes. For instance, at Whitendale SCaMP has paid for a new 84 hectare oak woodland that will help to reduce erosion on a plot of marginal land, create new habitats for wildlife and provide the farmer with an annual Forestry Commission grant for 15 years.

## As it stands at the moment you can’t profit from entering an agri-environment scheme, so why bother?”

But this is only part of the picture. There are so many changes taking place in the type of subsidies available, that even the most hardened hill farmer could be forced to give up the unequal struggle of eking a living from the degraded land. And when agriculture goes into retreat, nature steps in.

Reforms to CAP mean that support payments for farmers are no longer related to agricultural production. This new Single Farm Payment was initially welcomed by many conservationists as the death knell for a system that, by encouraging over-grazing, had caused so much environmental damage in the first place.

As Johnson says: “There is very much a trend away from agriculture based on production support, which in general is something that the National Trust and others broadly support, but it’s also about recognising that there are some inherently important landscapes which are important because of agricultural management.”

He fears that the fact the EU has stopped paying farmers based on the number of animals they keep has taken away the incentive to keep livestock at all, with potentially devastating effects on the landscape.

“Agriculture has done some damage to upland environments but the overriding benefits of the uplands still exist, and they

exist because of agricultural management,” says Johnson.

“Ultimately if you remove grazing livestock altogether then you are going to lose the habitats that we are trying to preserve,” says Wilson. “The land would become wooded.”

Margaret O’Kane, an environmental advisor at Lancashire Rural Futures, agrees. “The bigger picture is that lots of these upland habitats require grazing and livestock as a management tool to keep them looking as they currently do, or indeed to restore them back to the types of habitats we’d like to see. They are managed, grazed, farmed landscape.”

Last year the Environmental Stewardship Scheme (ESS) was brought in to replace the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. The scheme’s entry level (ELS) is open to all, and awards are based on achieving



**BRENNAND VALLEY**



**EROSION ON BLACK HILL**

30 points per hectare of land. The points are based on implementing basic environmental standards, in return for £30 per hectare for five years. A second higher level (HLS) is awarded on a competitive basis but only applies to land perceived to have benefits to high priority species and habitats.

But Johnson is again sceptical about how the scheme will help many farmers, because it is paid on an ‘income foregone’ basis. This means that a farmer who reduces his flock from 100 to 60 to lessen the effects of over-grazing will only receive a subsidy for the 40 sheep he’s lost.

“As it stands at the moment you can’t profit from entering an agri-environment scheme, you just get compensation for a loss of production. So why bother?” asks Johnson.

And all this at a time when the Hill Farmers Allowance, an important income stream that recognised the difficult economic climate in the uplands, has been axed in favour of a new programme, the Upland Reward Scheme, which Johnson says is likely to receive much less funding.

Lancashire Rural Futures is trying to help farmers make some sense of all the paperwork. “What we try and do is make farmers aware of the wildlife habitat they have and explain the best way to preserve and enhance it,” explains O’Kane, although she concedes that agri-environment schemes don’t suit everyone.

“The new ESS doesn’t always offset the amount of subsidy that farmers used to receive,” she says.

However, John Alpe is one farmer who has made agri-environment schemes pay. With the price crash on meat in the late 1990s, Alpe recalls: “We decided to change direction completely and use the environment as an income stream.”

First of all he turned his 200 hectare farm over to organic production and reduced his stock numbers drastically, before taking over a second 200 hectares which he put into stewardship.

Alpe, who had always appreciated the benefits of conservation, investigated what subsidies and grants were available and realised that he: “could make it stack up.”

He was able to draw on money from an organic conversion scheme, as well as woodland and heather regeneration programmes. He then became involved in Forward Farming and monitoring changes to the land, and from that he was able to introduce farm walks and educational visits.

“It’s no use being a zealot,” he says, arguing that farms run in this way must still be done so on a commercial footing. “It [the environmental subsidy] only lasts so long and then you’ll just haemorrhage to death.”

Alpe is adamant that this kind of diversification is the way forward. “It depends on how entrepreneurial you are,” he says. “It is going to be very difficult for small farms in the future. They have got to get involved in environmental schemes to bulk the cash up.”

O’Kane agrees. Many of the farmers she works with have diversified into areas such as farm shops, bed and breakfast, and even catteries. “In the old days being a progressive farmer meant working out how to get the highest amount of production per hectare,

whereas now it means looking at what’s available and making the best use of it. It’s still about pounds per hectare but not necessarily product per hectare.”

For years hill farming has been propped up and subsidised, the odd crust tossed at it in order to keep it going, largely so that difficult decisions about people’s futures and livelihoods could be put off for another day. But now things are coming to a head. The whole subsidy system has changed, and so, potentially, has the hill farmers’ role.

“These farm businesses aren’t viable in any long term way. We need a scheme that recognises that and the importance of these habitats for nature conservation and water quality,” says Johnson. “But it comes at a price. So there needs to be a system in place that actually provides financial incentives for landscape management.”

And perhaps therein lies the future for Lancashire’s hill farmers. Water is a precious commodity these days, its collection and storage crucial. In Lancashire there is a vast, natural landscape that soaks up, stores and finally releases this liquid asset. And who is better placed than the hill farmers to take over the role of custodians?

**MORE INFORMATION:**

[www.unitedutilities.com/?OBH=3227&SCH=scamp&ID=0](http://www.unitedutilities.com/?OBH=3227&SCH=scamp&ID=0)

Mark Hillsdon is a Manchester based freelance journalist specialising in the environment and regeneration.

Working with Europe can teach us  
a thing or two about regeneration.

# INTERNATIONAL RESCUE

LIVERPOOL SAILING CLUB TAKES SHAPE NEXT TO THE RIVER MERSEY

Words Mark Lupton

Photographs Terry Mealey, Dave Willis

This September saw people from three European countries converge in Herdecke, Germany, for a chance to reflect on three years of regenerating riverside sites under the EU's Artery project. At the Hotel Zweibrücker Hof delegates met to consider their achievements, their mistakes, the lessons they have learnt and the friendships they have formed. And to think about where their attempts to breathe new life into four waterways might go from here.

During the conference, Klaus Mandel, regional planner at Germany's Rhine Neckar region, treated delegates to a presentation on the common themes which had united delegates working under the umbrella of Artery since 2003.

Mandel explains: "My final slide was a picture of all the members of Artery under the description: 'Artery: you'll never work and walk alone!' I think that summed up the success for me of Artery; that when problems arose we all had the basis and the will to overcome them. It really felt like it wasn't an assembly of egoists but of actors who each wanted to build and add value for all of the partners involved."

Artery set out to assist the process of regeneration alongside four key waterways in England, Holland and Germany. Each has its own unique challenges but all had seen a number of common difficulties that had emerged during the industrial decline of the second half of the twentieth century.

When the old uses for the waterways – transport and industry – had been lost, decline had set in. Each was characterised by neglected, overgrown and inaccessible embankments, the destruction of natural habitats for wildlife, poor water quality and local people who had turned their backs on the rivers. Most people seemed hardly aware that the river in their midst had once been their region's 'artery'. Under Artery, riverside regeneration would have one overriding aim: getting people to 'turn back to face the water'.

Artery has covered 10 projects over its short lifespan – across five regions, three countries and four rivers. With a budget of £12.5 million it set out to

transform river landscapes in the Ruhrtal, Rhine Neckar and Stuttgart Neckar in Germany, the Mersey Basin in the UK, and the Hollandsche IJssel in the Netherlands.

Here in the Northwest the key driver has been the loss of the transport, shipping and distribution industries which once dominated the River Mersey, leaving a legacy of environmentally damaged land and derelict sites. Two projects have been underway for some time but have truly taken off under Artery: Speke Garston Coastal Reserve in Merseyside and the Mersey Vale Nature Park in Stockport.



Across Europe the loss of traditional industries is still being felt. Riverscapes that were first brutalised and then abandoned by industry are a barrier to investment and do little to improve the quality of life for local people.

For some time now turning around the fortunes of these areas so they become a resource for local communities – an artery once more – has been a priority for regional and spatial development strategies. Indeed before Artery a number of ambitious projects had been started in each of the regions. What Artery has succeeded in doing is bringing the different organisations involved in these projects together at a European level to share best practice and find common ways of working which can be to the benefit of all.

Klaus Mandel, whose Rhine Neckar

region has initially concentrated on building up sustainable river landscape developments, says: "I think Artery shows that what the EU can do best is to bring people together to build up networks. The problems we faced were wide and varied: some had environmental issues, some social problems such as the vandalism at Speke Garston, for others economic concerns were paramount, and for us it was quality of life issues and promoting access to water.

"What we've learned therefore is a whole range of lessons which can be applied to a wide range of riverside regeneration projects which are very different indeed. Ultimately we would all have probably done a lot of these things alone. But in the end the investment of each partner was influenced by the knowledge of each of the others."

The key way this was achieved was through Artery's adoption of four common themes which each of the projects would utilise to deliver its objectives and to ensure their sustainability. These 'strategic approaches' were: public participation, public-private partnerships, regional strategies and public awareness. Each of the themes shared a common objective of reaching out to include local communities, local business, and local councils/authorities.

[CONTINUED OVER]

“Only now the project is over can we fully appreciate how much we have learned from each other, and how we have inspired each other.”



“It’s about working together on projects with unique local circumstances but which have a great deal in common – all underpinned by these four common strategic approaches,” says Sarah Wallbank, European projects manager at the Mersey Basin Campaign. “Sharing experiences and establishing contacts in other countries has been crucial to Artery’s success. We’ve worked with partners from different cultural and political backgrounds, which has definitely led to more creative thinking.

“The German partners have told us that they really learned from the way in which we work in partnership with business – for example Peel Holdings at Speke Garston Coastal Reserve. And I’d say we have definitely learnt from the creative thinking of one of the projects which involved the restoration of a windmill in Holland – rather than just restoring a windmill they have linked in a social enterprise and housing company to manage the project in the long term.”

The four regions were each designated as lead partner in one of the thematic areas; with the corollary that they were ‘learning’ regions in each of the others. Interaction and learning was facilitated by workshops, reports and personal exchange.

“It’s all brought about much greater understanding between the countries involved and the creation of a truly cross-regional network,” says Wallbank. “And the end result is the successful realisation of 10 truly European pilot projects which can have important lessons for future EU regional development projects.”

The Northwest was an expert region on the theme of public-private partnerships (PPP) with the lessons learnt here being seen as of great value to the other Artery partners. The Mersey Basin campaign has worked closely with Peel Holdings, which owns much of the 65 hectare site around the site of the Speke Garston Coastal Reserve on the site of the former

Speke Airport. This potentially attractive coastal area at the mouth of the River Mersey had been in a badly vandalised, neglected and dangerous state for many years.

Initial work, which has been overseen by a steering group made up of the Mersey Basin Campaign, The Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA), the National Trust and Liverpool City Council, has seen the area fenced off and cleaned up and paths, car parks, signage and waymarkers put in for recreation. Funding has come from the NWDA and Artery, and the project will also see a new home built for Liverpool Sailing Club. Additional funds of £100,000 were secured from Peel to create a wildlife meadow.

“The involvement of the private sector was critical here,” says Iain Taylor, research and development director at the Mersey Basin Campaign. “Peel are building a business park on the edge of the site and for them getting planning permission or attracting investors wouldn’t have happened if the environment here wasn’t improved. We, meanwhile, thought it wasn’t right that Liverpool’s only stretch of natural coastline had become a no-go area for the public. So having the will there on all sides really helped: and Artery helped make it happen.”

At the other end of the Mersey, the creation of the Mersey Vale Nature Park has seen the return of privately owned derelict land to create a community green space next to the river. Public consultation has been a crucial element of the project, which is currently nearing completion and has involved the creation of wildflower meadows, footpath

improvements to link residential areas to the Trans-Pennine trail, an entrance sculpture designed by local primary school pupils and a new footbridge.

“It’s all so new perhaps it’s too early to say if it’s a success,” says Wallbank. “But we’re confident that through regular reference group meetings with local residents and interest groups what has been achieved reflects the aspirations of the local community.”

While Artery has led to real change on the ground, its achievements are also about facilitating the exchange of ideas and co-operation between nations with sometimes very different ways of working.

For Mandel the international workshops proved an excellent forum to share, debate and discuss.

“The workshops we did on public-private partnerships in Manchester were excellent,” he says. “Someone said the first thing you should answer is: you need to first establish who should talk, with whom, at what moment and at what place. I’ll never forget that phrase and the extremely instructive explanations of PPP I took away from them. You can learn from other partners some of these golden rules of how to work.”

Mandel adds: “Throughout



“You need time to facilitate team building in a project. We started out as partners, at the moment we are friends.”

the process I’ve found everyone to be very open minded – which gave us the basis for a common understanding. So we began to take an interest in how the other partners were working, what their circumstances were. That doesn’t mean you have a blueprint for regional development – because the circumstances and the actors are different for each region.

“But we all have the same aims: a good environment, good quality of life for people, an economic basis for the future of these riverside regions. The way you realise those goals is sometimes different.

“I think ultimately this has improved the competency of those working in Artery – and that’s not competency bought by an external consultant, but competency won by the organisations and staff involved in the project.”

Albert Koffeman of the Hollandsche IJssel project says many of the benefits of the ‘learning’ and ‘expert’ regions approach are yet to be felt: “The fact that each of the three pilot projects were part of a European project increased the pride of local groups and municipalities for the sites. It fostered the motivation to successfully implement the pilot projects.

“But in my opinion not many

of the lessons and experiences of our transnational partners were implemented in the three pilot projects, because all pilot projects were being implemented at almost the same time. The real result of the “learning” regions is only now noticeable.

“So these lessons will probably have more influence on our coming projects than on the pilot projects within the Artery project. That’s not necessarily a bad thing. As a matter of fact, I sometimes think that only now the project is over, can we fully appreciate how much we have



learned from each other, and maybe even more importantly, how we have inspired each other. In my opinion this transnational learning is as a result more visible at the level of the regional lead partners and less at the pilot project level.”

Ironically Koffeman also says the different nature of each area proved to be both an advantage and a disadvantage.

“The regions were always analysing if it was possible to implement the advice and best practices of other regions in their region or if they were just too different to be successful. A big advantage of this structure, was that an ‘expert’ region of a certain theme were themselves forced to really dig deep into that specific theme, not only in

theory, but also in practice. I sometimes had the feeling that the ‘expert’ partner himself learned even more about a theme than the learning partners.

“In my opinion the best example of the use of the lessons we learnt, is the preparation of a possible Artery 2. In the discussion it is now very obvious how far we have come; not only as regions but also the persons working on the project.”

Artery is now approaching a period of transition with funding due to end in October 2006.

Sarah Wallbank adds: “This is the end of the first phase of the project but there are plans to do more – you’ve not heard the last of Artery. We’re doing funding applications at the moment for what will essentially be a quick fix to keep us going for an extra year. We then hope this will lead us on to a large, joint funding application next year which will enable us to do a further three or four years of the project.”

“It’s a time of bridge building – from Artery 1 to Artery 2” says Mandel. “We are in the process of establishing what the guiding idea will be for Artery 2. I’m confident it will continue. I think the common theme in Artery 2 will be how to maintain the standards of the investments we have already begun – how will we get the action plans and instruments to keep the ball rolling.

“What it has showed is you need time to facilitate team building in a project. We started out as partners, at the moment we are friends. And what’s important is we want to stay that way.”

#### **MORE INFORMATION:**

[www.artery.eu.com](http://www.artery.eu.com)

A guidebook on the Artery project is available to purchase. Contact Sarah Wallbank 0161 242 8217

Mark Lupton is a freelance journalist with a special interest in the environment. He lives in the North West.



Words Matthew Sutcliffe

## Low carbon living

Dr Kevin Anderson, Research Director at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research.

**Imagine the year is 2050.** You live in a comfortable house that looks more or less like a house does today, except that it costs a fraction to run by comparison. Your heat and electricity come from power stations that run at 80 per cent efficiency instead of the current 45 per cent, or from solar panels, wind turbines or combined heat-and-power units. You work from home or commute to work on clean, efficient public transport.

At work and at home there is less need to travel because advanced electronics mean you can hold meetings or go shopping ‘virtually’. Because we’re less reliant on cars, there are fewer traffic jams, and the cars we drive are fuelled by electricity or clean-burning hydrogen. The air you breath is correspondingly cleaner. You can choose a slower pace of life and you have more time off from work. Sleek double-decker trains whisk you and your family off for unhurried holidays, often in the Northwest’s own revitalised resorts, and there is even a decent dining car on board. You occasionally still fly for work or leisure and when you do, it’s likely to be on a hydrogen powered aircraft.

“We can move to a low carbon economy, but the journey will become much more arduous the longer we leave it to act.”

More startlingly, the values that underpin and drive our society have evolved, and for the better. We no longer measure personal success solely in pounds, and national progress in GDP. We live stabler lives amongst stronger communities.

This is one vision of the future, as imagined by Kevin Anderson. Perhaps, more accurately, it is his dream or aspiration for the future.

Anderson is one of a handful of people in the Northwest – indeed, the country – who has the expertise required to glimpse this tantalising vision.

He is research director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at the University of Manchester.

With bases around the country, the centre’s scientists have won a reputation for objectivity and insight that ranks them amongst our most respected experts on climate change.

Such is the centre’s renown that Anderson is a man much in demand. He’s managed to squeeze in an interview for Source between speaking at both the Conservative and Labour Party Conferences and fielding questions from the national press. Rarely does he work less than 60 hours a week.

The press want to talk to Anderson about a new report from the Tyndall Centre, which warns that the government must act within the next four years to drive down carbon emissions, if the UK is to play its part in mitigating the worst effects of climate change and meet its own targets for 2050.

“We have very little time to bring into place a suite of policies that will start to reduce emissions,” says Anderson. “Our emissions are actually going up. We’ve got to not only stop that rise, but turn it down very dramatically by about 2010 or 2012. That’s no time from now.” If we fail to act quickly and decisively, Anderson is clear that we will pay a heavy price. Taking the water environment here in the Northwest as an example, he warns, “There are huge water implications because the rainfall will probably be quite different. There might be almost monsoon-like conditions where everything grinds to halt, and then very hot periods where the railway lines expand.” At worst, the consequences will be alternating periods of drought and floods, and problems with the sewage system.

So with the Northwest Regional Development Agency set to unveil its Climate Change Action Plan in November, Anderson is calling for strong leadership regionally as well as from London. “I want to see the Northwest lead on both renewable energy production and also on reducing demand for energy, which is

about clever, sophisticated ways of integrating behaviour and technology. It is one of the important issues the Northwest should be leading on because we have excellent expertise at our universities.”

It is because the challenge of climate change will force us to rethink not only how we live our daily lives, but also the values that underlie modern life, that Anderson’s vision of a brighter future comes into view.

So is he optimistic? Looking at the lack of action so far, unfortunately not very.

“But there’s a small thread of hope that I cling to, and if enough other people join that thread of hope then perhaps we can make significant changes. Our message is one of hope as well as showing the real scale of the problem.”

### TURNING POINTS

1978 – Leaves school at sixteen & joins the merchant navy, working as a marine engineer for P&O.

1982 – Leaves Manchester University with a degree in Chemical Engineering. Joins Marathon Oil as a project engineer, & also works on North Sea oil rigs.

1990 – Graduates from the University of Manchester with an MSc in Environment and Pollution control.

2001 – Joins the Tyndall Centre at the University of Manchester.

2005 – Becomes research director of the Tyndall Centre’s energy and climate change programme.

Words Joanne Birtwistle

Photograph Karen Wright

# Twenty-first century alchemist

A Northwest inventor aims to make money from the elemental forces of wind and tide.

An Ellesmere Port company is well on its way to meeting the challenges of marine renewable energy and thinks its tidal technology is perfect to harness the power of the Mersey Estuary.

The UK's tidal resource is about half the entire European resource and one of the most concentrated tidal stream resources in the world, so the UK is well placed to become a world leader in the marine renewables industry.

But haven't we been here before? The same thing that makes the UK ideally suited to harnessing tidal and wave power – lots of coastline – made it suitable for developing offshore wind power. The UK took an early lead in developing renewable energy from wind, but ultimately dropped the ball. Denmark and Germany picked it up and are now reaping the benefits.

Chris Bradley, managing director of Oleotec, whose breakthrough device for harnessing wave power won the Emerging Technologies award at the Northwest Business Environment Awards in June, is confident this won't happen again. "We would be mad if we made the same mistake twice. I don't think we will. We have such a good combination of expertise and resource in the UK, as we did with wind. But when wind was slipping through our fingers there was not a big demand. There is huge demand for renewables now, not only because of emissions issues but also in terms of independence of energy generation, and the sea is such an obvious source."

With a number of technologies finally on the cusp of viability, Peel Environmental and the Northwest Development Agency have commissioned a study into the potential for marine renewable energy on the River Mersey, the results of which will be announced at the Mersey Basin Campaign's annual conference in December. A team of international experts is assessing a wide range of technologies in detail and for now Peel is keeping an open mind about them all.

Bradley's wave device, called Orca, is made from flexible, free-floating structures that utilise the circular movement of water within a wave. A full scale 60m by 80m device has the capacity to produce a constant maximum output of 1 megawatt.

## The UK is well placed to become a world leader in the marine renewables industry.

But according to Bradley, a wave device isn't the best way to harness the Mersey Estuary's power. "The distance the wave has to build up is very short and the water is fairly shallow in the Mersey," he explains. "These conspire to mean the wave energy resource is fairly low."

However, Bradley's story doesn't end there. A trained electronic engineer, he has set up a new company – Environmental Motion Engineering (E-motion Engineering) – specifically to develop renewable technologies and already has a prototype for harnessing tidal energy.

A tidal device would particularly suit the Mersey Estuary as its narrow entrance produces powerful tidal currents, and the faster the tidal flow, the greater the amount of energy that can be produced.



CHRIS BRADLEY (R) COLLECTS HIS NW BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT AWARD

Bradley's vertical axis turbine – the Vortex – overcomes many of the issues facing other experimental tidal technologies. "The turbine I've developed has a rotating blade section," he explains. "It transforms the efficiency and gives the device the benefits of the vertical axis and the low speed of the drag effect without the cost of the up-flow losses."

The Vortex is scalable (at 20m by 20m, it would generate about 1 megawatt), so it can be used both at sea and in rivers. It is free-floating, so can cope with any depth of water, and there is no risk to marine life because the blades rotate slowly. Bradley says a big advantage is that the power comes out of the water on the shaft and generation equipment can sit on the platform on top. There are cost advantages too: "The energy coming out of the shaft is similar to that emerging from the shaft of a large wind turbine so we can buy the gear box and generation sets off the shelf," says Bradley.

The Vortex is in the final stages of tweaking and Bradley will soon be ready to make a pre-production prototype. That, he says, will cost tens of thousands of pounds, which helps explain why tidal and wave technologies have taken so long to develop.

"In the past, electricity was cheap and people weren't bothered about how they generated it. When there isn't substantial demand there is no incentive to develop a product because marine technologies are expensive to launch. Wind turbines can be very modest in size but things like wave energy devices have to be big or they don't work," says Bradley.

Bradley wants to find a joint venture partner that would bring the capital and large engineering fabrication facilities to the table. With all this in place, things could move fast. Bradley says because of the Vortex's simplicity, there isn't much work needed to get it ready for market and reckons the device could be commercially available as early as 2008.

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

Cheshire's beautiful and fascinating canals are at the forefront of the nation's canal renaissance.

# CANAL MANIA

Cheshire's canals are perhaps the most diverse in the country. From the fascinating industrial heritage of the mighty Manchester Ship Canal, which cuts across the Northern edge of the county, to the dramatic Pennine scenery of the Macclesfield Canal in the east, and the serene beauty of the Llangollen Canal in the south-west corner, they not only cover most of the county but also span the history of British canal building.

Cheshire's proximity to Liverpool and Manchester, the hub and heart of the industrial revolution, and to the River Mersey, meant that it was quickly criss-crossed by canals in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was the lockless Bridgewater Canal, running from Worsley to Manchester, that set off what came to be known as 'canal mania' when it opened in 1761.

In their heyday, Cheshire's canals carried millions of tonnes of goods, including crude oil, coal and salt. But that didn't last long. By 1830 the railway age had arrived. The canals, slow and sure, were no match for the exhilarating 30 mph speeds notched up by the new locomotives. Their role in the country's economy went into terminal decline and investment fizzled out.

During these wilderness years, the Inland Waterways Association and other dedicated groups campaigned to save canals from closure and promote them for recreational use, with volunteers giving up their weekends to repair and reopen lost and dilapidated waterways.

Now, after decades of under-use and neglect, the national canal network is flourishing again, and Cheshire, with its 135 miles of interlinked, navigable waterways is at the heart of this new canal mania.

A new generation of holidaymakers has been attracted by the colourful narrowboats and slow pace of life on the waterways. Everyone from Hollywood superstars Harrison Ford and Calista Flockhart – spotted on the Llangollen Canal a couple of years

ago – to young and distinctly urban landlubbers are negotiating the locks. Boating holiday companies are doing great business.

The Cheshire Ring, a 97 mile long circular route which is made up from parts of the Macclesfield Canal, the Peak Forest Canal, the Bridgewater Canal and the Trent & Mersey Canal, has never been busier.

"There's a weird and wonderful mix of features specific to Cheshire's canals," explains Peter Birch of British Waterways (BW), which owns most of the county's canals. "They were designed by different engineers and built by local teams of navvies using local materials."

Constructed prior to the modern concept of standardisation, locks, weirs, sluices, walls, bridges, tunnels, towpaths, wharves and aqueducts are all different, not only from each other but also from the rest of the country. At Beeston, for example, an unusual cast iron lock was built in 1805.



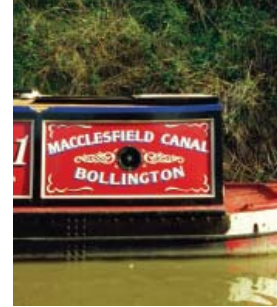
"We're so used to conformity now...that this local distinctiveness is another reason for the popularity of the canals," says Birch. There were also incredible engineering feats, as the canals were hewn through hills or carried across valleys and even existing waterways.

The Peak Forest Canal touches Cheshire only briefly, but has one of its most spectacular features: the Marple Aqueduct and the flight of 16 locks that lift the canal 46m above the Goyt Valley. The Trent & Mersey Canal, built to link the River Trent and the River Mersey, was one of the earliest canals to be completed, in 1777. It runs for 92 miles and has even more locks – one section with 30 locks raises the canal by 90m and is sometimes known as 'Heartbreak Hill'.

At the unique Anderton Boat Lift, boats are lifted between the Trent & Mersey Canal and the River Weaver. This imposing metal structure was built in 1875, at a point where the two waterways run parallel about 120m apart but with a height difference of 15m. It was built to ease the movement of cargoes, particularly salt, to and from the Mersey.

The boat lift was in use until 1983, when it became a victim of the post-war decline in the waterways. Seven million pounds from the heritage lottery fund allowed it to be restored and it reopened in 2002 to lift leisure boats. Today it is one of the most successful tourist attractions on the canals.

Crucially, Cheshire's canals are open for business as well as pleasure. Having recognised the



power of canals to bring in money and drive regeneration, everyone from property developers to heritage organisations and local councils are now involved in restoration. The business of making canals and their infrastructure commercially as well as culturally viable once again is booming.

Boat builders have seen business soar. As well as recreational use, more and more people are buying boats to live on, too. From retired people to first timers looking for an alternative lifestyle or those who have been squeezed out of the housing market, a well equipped canal boat is now a much desired floating home.

Boatbuilder John Dowsett, director of Northern Marine Services in Lymm, has seen a tremendous increase in demand over the past five years. "It started to build up about ten or twelve years ago but it was gradual until the last four or five years when demand shot up," he says.

"The downside is that many boat owners are having difficulty finding moorings and marina spaces," he warns.

To address this problem, British Waterways is encouraging landowners to consider new uses to support the canals. Farmer Michael Cope noticed the big increase in canal boats passing along the

Llangollen Canal, which borders his fields at Swanley Hall Farm near Nantwich. A dairy farmer struggling to stay in business, it made sense to Cope to try to diversify.

"Opening a marina is our answer as it will provide another source of income that will allow us to carry on other farming activities" says Cope. Forty per cent of the marina's 315 moorings were booked before it opened in September 2006.

But it's not all just about boats anymore. Alongside the canals, schemes include everything from repairing towpaths to building new canalside pubs and housing.

Tower Wharf in Chester Basin on the Shropshire Union Canal is a collection of old buildings, in poor repair. It houses Taylor's Boatyard, one of the last boatyards to build wooden boats. BW is working with Chester City Council and a range of other individuals and organisations to secure the ailing fabric of the yard's buildings and restart the business.

On the other side of the county at Macclesfield, a conservation area has been created on the Macclesfield Canal. Working with BW and English Heritage, Congleton and Macclesfield Borough Councils have put together a grants programme for heritage structures within the area.

British Waterways is also working with Cheshire County Council and local borough councils to create the Weaver Way for walkers and cyclists, featuring footbridges and paths that intersect with the canals. On the heritage side, Lion Salt Works on the Trent & Mersey Canal at Marston is being developed as a museum. For some people, it's canalside living that

holds the appeal. People have lived overlooking canals since they were built, though in the past it was mainly because they worked there. The Duke of Bridgewater built a fine house at Runcorn to oversee the building of a flight of locks on his new canal in the 1760s. It's now tucked in-between new apartments. Also at Runcorn, Urban Splash is working with Halton Council to develop two sites next to the Bridgewater Canal.

**"A new generation of holidaymakers has been attracted by the colourful narrowboats and slow pace of life on the waterways – including Hollywood superstars Harrison Ford and Calista Flockhart."**

For the people that have lived and worked on the canals all their lives, their renaissance is welcome. Maureen Shaw grew up on the working barges, loading crude oil at Stanlow and taking it to the gas tar works at Banbury and Leamington Spa. She still lives at Wardle Lock in Middlewich. "It wasn't all castles and roses," she says. "We worked night and day, pulling gates and paddles, walking behind with the horses."

Maureen sounds a warning note about life on the canals, especially the cold winters, taxes and depreciation in the value of the boats. But as she says, "The canals are vibrant now with holidaymakers and you can live comfortably on a 50 ft boat."



# LOOKING FOR ANSWERS

## What sank Neptune's plans for New Brighton?

When secretary of state for communities and local government Ruth Kelly rejected Neptune Development's £73 million scheme to rescue the fading resort of New Brighton this summer, it was the second time in two years that the Liverpool based developer had been very publicly let down by the public sector.

The first, even more high profile disappointment came in 2004 with the dramatic ditching of the 'cloud' building, Neptune's controversial Will Alsop-designed proposal for the key Mann Island site on Liverpool waterfront.

Across the Mersey on the Wirral Peninsula, Neptune's plans for New Brighton were nearly six years in the making and included 13,935 m<sup>2</sup> of leisure, 140 new homes and a 7,618 m<sup>2</sup> Morrison's supermarket for the 28 ha site, alongside an outdoor lido and refurbished Floral Pavilion theatre.

And if anywhere needs a lifeline, it's New Brighton. As late as the 1960s visitors thronged to its delights – its open-air, now vanished swimming baths were once used by over a million people in a single summer season. It was the Northwest's answer to Coney Island. The Benidorm of its day.

These days however New Brighton is at the tail end of a thirty year decline, a litany of failed regeneration schemes having done little to halt the slide. In the 1980s a now classic book of photographs immortalised it as *The Last Resort*. So went wrong this time?

Steve Parry, Neptune's managing director, is adamant his firm's plans were right all along: "We were looking to develop the old baths, which were demolished in the early 1990s after a storm. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) said 'move the baths' and English Heritage agreed, and said 'move the marine lake and build a new lake on the old pool'."

[CONTINUED OVER]



Filling in the marine lake was thus included in the statutory Unitary Development Plan for Wirral and the designs were drawn up.

The land reserved for Neptune’s work in the resort is owned by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council and any public profits from its development would be ploughed back into the area rather than the general council coffers. As the land is owned by the council, the planning application was automatically referred to the Government Office for the North West (GONW) for inspection. GONW then ‘called in’ the project for a public inquiry, which was held in February this year. Ruth Kelly’s decision to reject the application was the eventual outcome, mainly due to the bulky design of residential, retail and leisure buildings on the site of the marine lake. In making her decision, Kelly was upholding the lengthy recommendation of the planning inspector.

## “Perhaps the people in Whitehall confused New Brighton with Brighton?”

Parry suspects the appointed planning inspector was opposed to filling in the marine lake but found other reasons to reject the scheme, ultimately saying CABE and English Heritage were wrong. He explains: “The secretary of state concludes it may be necessary to build on the site of the existing marine lake. She accepts that this could have an impact on the views of the lighthouse and the fort together, but considers that with good design and a reduced massing of the retail and residential elements, the impact could be limited.”

With bitter irony, Kevin Adderley, director of strategic development at Wirral council, points out that Neptune and the council moved the proposed site of the Morrison’s supermarket from the top [west] of the site down to the marine lake to accommodate objections from residents’ groups when Neptune began drawing up plans four years ago.

He goes on: “The lake is unused and we only suggested filling it in because of the community’s concerns that the supermarket was going to be in the wrong place.” Dismayed and bemused that CABE and English Heritage – which, ironically, were consulted for guidance in the first place – were ignored, Parry will fight on.

“The Secretary of State’s letter is the legal response and in that we’ve been given a checklist to work on.”

To that end, Neptune will meet Kelly’s three demands as it sees them: carry out a baseline economic study outlining the existing use of leisure facilities in the area; amend the development agreement with Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council to provide guarantees that all elements of the scheme will be delivered; and redesign the residential, retail and large leisure block on the site of the marine lake to reduce massing and introduce more permeability.

Neptune, which is owned by Parry and his co-directors, including chairman Richard Douglas, a former Amey boss, and retired founder Peter Hynd, seems to relish a challenge.

Despite being disappointed in its bid to build the ‘cloud’ in Liverpool the company resubmitted a revised scheme in a joint venture with Countryside Properties. It expects to receive planning permission for the £125 million project in October and have it complete by 2008.

More recently, Neptune was appointed preferred developer by urban regeneration company Liverpool Vision on a key stretch of city centre thoroughfare between Lime Street Station and the monolithic Adelphi Hotel. A masterplan for the area is set to follow. It has also won planning permission for a waterside hotel and leisure scheme in Southport. Neptune was one of the first property companies to tap into the European-funded bonanza of Merseyside’s Objective One grant programme with the Queen Square mixed-use project in Liverpool city centre in the mid-1990s. The firm is itself based in the square and retains many of the assets on its doorstep, operating the “gold standard” car park and making a juicy profit on the smattering of large restaurants and neighbouring offices. A fifty per cent stake in the Marriott hotel was sold only a couple of years ago.



## 60-second expert

- The seaside town of New Brighton on the Wirral peninsula was once a major tourist destination, but entered a long period of decline after the 1960s.
- Liverpool property firm Neptune Developments was appointed preferred developer around six

years ago by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council to redevelop New Brighton.

- After extensive public consultation a planning application was submitted in June 2005 for a £73 million scheme on 28 hectares for 13,935m<sup>2</sup> of leisure space, 140 new homes and a 7,618m<sup>2</sup> supermarket, lido and refurbished Floral Pavilion theatre.

- A public inquiry into the plans was held at the start of this year, following which Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, rejected Neptune Development's planning application.
- Neptune went back to the drawing board, while submitting a smaller application for a non-contentious first phase of the project.

Parry describes the income of Queen Square as "sufficient". It's a good job too.

Neptune needed all its 'sufficiency' to fund the "at least £500,000" cost of the crusade to save New Brighton.

As for the current Objective One funding round, £13 million had been reserved for the New Brighton scheme. In order to spend as much of that as possible before the plug is pulled by Brussels at the end of 2008, a phase one planning application has been submitted for the town square element, which was not rejected by Kelly.

**“This is the first stage in the regeneration of New Brighton and we have waited long enough to deliver change.”**

This should enable £9 million of Objective One funding to be saved for 585 m<sup>2</sup> of leisure space, aimed at independent restaurateurs, 43 apartments above, and an upgrade of the fading Floral Pavilion Theatre with new conference facilities. Parry says a revised application for the remainder of the site will be resubmitted in the coming months and must win out this time.

“We have to make sure we get it right as we do not want another planning inquiry.”



Kelly's rejection of Neptune's New Brighton scheme is a mystery not just to Parry but to his partners at Wirral council and the various coastal initiatives that are crying out for such landward development, including the Mersey Waterfront Regional Park.

Kevin Adderley at Wirral council, says: “The next planning applications will again be referred to the Government Office for the North West because it is council-owned land. But that does not necessarily mean there will be a public inquiry; that is up to the Government Office. We will take on board the secretary of state's comments and hopefully address all of her concerns and avoid another inquiry.

“This is the first stage in the regeneration of New Brighton and we have waited long enough to deliver change.”

Walter Menzies, chief executive of the Mersey Basin Campaign, adds: “In 1997 Martin Parr, the world-famous photographer, published his poignant photographs of New Brighton. It was both witty and sad that he called his book *The Last Resort*. Endless proposals for revitalising the tired New Brighton waterfront have come to nothing. The Neptune project seemed viable and had all-party support from Wirral Borough Council. Perhaps the people in Whitehall confused New Brighton with Brighton?”

Paul Unger is a Liverpool based freelance writer specialising in property and regeneration.

## Other Wirral Schemes

- 1 Reddington Finance reportedly paid £24 million for 57 ha of the former Cammell Laird shipyard in Birkenhead in two deals in 2001 and 2003. The company, controlled by local meat-packing and biscuit-baking multimillionaire Gerry White and his partner David Day, a shipping and distribution businessman, has an ambitious 15-year, £1.4 billion blueprint for the area. It cites almost every conceivable use in the planning lexicon: 4,500 homes; 111,480m<sup>2</sup> of offices; 55,740m<sup>2</sup> of 'big-box' retail; a bus depot; a canal linked to two marinas; a dual-fired power station servicing the entire development; waterside cafes, bars and restaurants; several hotels; a real-snow indoor ski slope with a toboggan run and snowmobile trail; a conference centre; a rapid transport system to link to Birkenhead; a realignment of the A41 dual carriageway; and a new island to provide car parking, waterfront homes, parkland, river walkways and wave energy. Discussions have been ongoing with Wirral council's planners for over a year to resolve numerous challenges for transport, river movement, environmental impact and residential property markets.
- 2 Further down the coast from the Cammell Laird site towards the Irish Sea, Neptune is leading talks with Woodside Hotel owner Martin Lowe, Peel Holdings, Wirral Council and Merseytravel, over plans for a 12.6 ha site between Hamilton Square and Woodside Ferry Terminal. The partners are planning a “development spine” to link the river to the centre of Birkenhead comprising office, residential, leisure and public spaces.
- 3 Peel Holdings' proposals for a £4.5 billion redevelopment on 202 ha of Birkenhead Docks would take 30 years to complete. Peel is using New York, Sydney and Shanghai as its role models for an area that has seen little improvement for 100 years. It is also working on plans for a similar scheme on the land it owns at Central Docks in Liverpool. Peel wants to alter the skyline around the Mersey estuary beyond all recognition. Wirral Waters would cover 1.7 m<sup>2</sup> and Peel predicts between 20,000 and 25,000 people would live there, and that around 27,000 permanent jobs would be created.

# Garden of delights

Source talks to Ailsa Holmes of the Friends of Platt Fields, overall winners in this year's Unilever Dragonfly Awards for environmental volunteers.



With a herb sofa, a working pizza oven and a customised VW Beetle to hand, Ailsa Holmes could almost live in the eco-garden at Platt Fields Park. Indeed, at the moment it seems that she more or less does. The 26-year-old founder of PowWow Eco Arts is responsible for

the upkeep of the space, which she maintains with help from the rest of the Friends of Platt Fields.

The Friends' impressive achievements in the park, of which the eco-garden is just one, were recently recognised when they were

crowned overall winners of this year's Unilever Dragonfly Awards.

#### MORE INFORMATION

Details of next year's Dragonfly Awards will be available shortly on [www.merseybasin.org.uk](http://www.merseybasin.org.uk)

**Q How did you become involved with the Friends of Platt Fields?** Originally I did arts workshops on behalf of PowWow Eco Arts in the lead up to the first ever Garden of Delights festival, and then almost overnight we were given this whole space to look after. After that I was out here digging every day and got to know people, so my involvement with the Friends came from there.

**Q How did the Friends group first get together?** There used to be a pets corner here in the eco-garden space, which was very badly vandalised and then shut down, more or less overnight. A group of concerned residents came together and formed the Friends group as a result of that. That was in 1997, and we think we were the first Friends group in the country.

**Q Who would be your typical member?** We get absolutely everybody. We host regular open meetings that are really popular, with over 120 members now. We're getting more young people these days, from every ethnic background. This is a multicultural area, and that's reflected in the group. The park itself is like a little community too, you see the same people every day.

**Q What's the most rewarding thing about your work with the Friends?** The way that the group has embraced and supported other community groups that hold events in the park, especially recently,

like the Enchanted Evenings and the Garden of Delights. And local people have written to tell us they've seen marked improvements in the park, from community planting pots to the clean up of the lake. That really makes it all worthwhile.

**Q The eco-garden is your domain, what have you done there?** We wanted to put permanent arts features on the pets corner site, starting with the amphitheatre for performance groups. Local children created a composting unit in the shape of a worm. We've also got a herb garden; raised beds; the beginnings of an insect sculpture; and our latest project, a beautiful cob oven with a growing grass roof. Anyone can hire the oven door and cook pizza and bread in the oven.

**Q What's the idea behind the project?** It's a preventative measure against vandalism. We encourage young people to get involved with projects in the park, because there's a huge issue with ASBOs here, and not much for young people to do. We work with young offenders every week. They created a lot of this space, and they feel a sense of ownership and pride in it. They made a rustic bench, and you should have seen their reaction when it was vandalised!

**Q How have the Friends cleaned up the lake?** Last summer there was a serious algae problem, and the fish were dying. It was partly the

heat, partly people throwing bread to the geese. We try to discourage that, because it's bad for the geese, and aggravates the algae situation. So the Friends really pushed for a pump to aerate the water. It's now in place, and has dramatically changed the lake. We're now looking into draining it completely for a little while so we can install an oxygenation plant.

**Q How would you like to see the park being used in the future?** I'd like to see it being *the* events park in the city. To achieve that we need improved infrastructure, such as power points and better recycling facilities. There are lots of groups who'd like to work in the park, from secular funerals to military fitness groups, and we'd like to support that. Also, to host more community events, treasure hunts, cycling maintenance, concerts. And I'd like to develop a green resource, making everything here as environmentally friendly as possible. Parks are the last open spaces where people come together and interact with one another. It's vital that we look after them.

**Q Congratulations on your Dragonfly Award...** Thank you, it's just the icing on the cake. There are so many amazing, active local people, and we have such fabulous events here. The real reward is seeing people enjoying themselves in the park.

**Opinion:** The government's newest agency, Natural England, must remember that not all nature is found in the countryside, says Chris Baines.

Chris Baines is an accomplished writer and broadcaster who has long championed the cause of urban wildlife. He is writing a chapter on wildlife for the upcoming book, *Mersey: the river that changed the world*.



# ALL NATURAL ENGLAND

**Two cheers for the launch of Natural England!** When Lord Haskins published his report on the future of the countryside in November 2003 it promised an end to half a century of disjointed damage to our natural heritage. Here, at last, was a clear acknowledgement that sustainable management of the landscape demands more joined-up policy and practice, and an end to the divide between rural and urban.

Natural England is the government's response to Haskins. A clue to the call for "two cheers" instead of three lies in the name of the empowering legislation – the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act, 2006 – which suggests Whitehall still clings to the old fashioned view that nature conservation is synonymous with the countryside.

England is essentially an urban nation where it makes no sense to treat town and country as two separate states. Whilst there may be clear differences at the two extremes, for the most part the English landscape functions as an interconnected whole. Certainly our natural heritage is far too vital to be left entirely in the hands of farmers, foresters and rural preservationists. Their litany of post-war habitat loss is undeniable evidence of the need for fundamental change

The new agency has been created by amalgamating three

essentially rural cultures – English Nature is contributing the lion's share of staff and expertise, with additional input from parts of the Countryside Agency and the Rural Development Service. This is a promising development, which in theory should help to end the nonsense of one part of government funding farmers to wipe out wildlife and reduce public enjoyment whilst another strives to improve access or enhance nature conservation.

**Our natural heritage is far too vital to be left in the hands of farmers, foresters and rural preservationists.**

New European legislation will also help, with its commitment to more holistic environmental stewardship. The European Water Framework Directive, for instance, calls for an ecological approach to whole river catchment. This will mean working with natural systems to protect and purify drinking water supply, to moderate the risks from storm water flooding and to create a more absorbent, water retentive landscape from the moorlands and mountain tops to the flood plains and the coast. This new, sustainable approach to landscape management cries out for government agencies that are fit for purpose and, in the rural countryside at least, the establishment of an integrated Natural England must be welcomed as a positive step.

But nine out of ten people in England live in and around towns, and this is the real challenge to the new organisation. Most of its 2,500 inherited staff have little experience of the ducking and diving needed to weave nature into the complex world of urban living.

Natural England endorses the need to work in partnership, and quotes co-operation with health authorities and education authorities as well as farmers, which is encouraging. However when it comes to setting targets for biodiversity itself, there is still a heavily rural emphasis. Farmers and landowners may well be important players, but Natural England needs also to work with managers of city parks, with house builders, docks and harbour boards, water companies, transport authorities and other urban interest groups.

I have no doubt that Natural England intends to

address the complexity of the urban-to-rural challenge. I'm less sure that the organisation is equipped to succeed. But one key factor makes me optimistic. The new headquarters is being moved to Sheffield – an inspired and inspiring choice. Along with Manchester, Sheffield was the place where city dwellers campaigned in the 1940s for the 'right to roam' in order to enjoy the nature on their doorstep. This is a city that was shaped by its natural landscape of hills and valleys, which proclaims itself the most well-wooded city in the country, and where the Sheffield Wildlife Trust has recently developed a world-class conservation model for urban wildlife.

Natural England needs to take much more account than its predecessor English Nature ever did of just how ecologically rich our urban landscapes really are. Mature towns and cities have become the habitat of choice for a host of species that are struggling in the countryside. Goldfinches flock round garden feeders, tawny owls haunt town parks and water voles still survive on the banks of inner city canals. The urban forests that are Greater Manchester, Liverpool, Sheffield, Bristol or Birmingham have come to provide some of the best surviving wildlife habitat in England.



**With increasing pressure on the world's natural resources, we believe that promoting sustainable water use is more important than ever.**

The Water Adventure Centre, winner of a Unilever Dragonfly Award 2006.

That's why we're proud to sponsor the Unilever Dragonfly Awards, recognising the volunteers whose efforts are revitalising the rivers and watersides of the Northwest.

People such as the volunteers at the Water Adventure Centre in Manchester, who make their stretch of the Ashton Canal a place of excitement and learning for all the local community.

It's also why Unilever continues to support the Mersey Basin Campaign, which for 20 years has played a crucial role in the transformation of the region's watercourses.