

source^{NW}

WATERS | REGENERATION | ENVIRONMENT | SUSTAINABILITY

SPECIAL ISSUE REGIONAL PARKS

Sponsored by Regional Parks Xchange
Pages 11–27

PARK LIFE

Why 'regional parks' matter.

ART IN HIGH PLACES

Where art meets the environment.

THE GREEN POUND

Uncovering the economy's green roots.



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Welcome to our special issue on regional parks. Never heard of them? Few people

have. But regional parks are a Big Idea for the environment and regeneration in the Northwest. We have more of them than any other region – nine – and there's at least one in every county from Cheshire to Cumbria. The largest, Mersey Waterfront, has a three-year budget to 2010 of £20 million.

The inspiration comes from the continent, where regional parks were pioneered and where several have become powerful engines of regeneration. They are a test bed for ways of investing public money in environmental protection and improvement. We think it's time more people knew about regional parks, and the issues they raise.

Not only is this one of the first ever 'special issues' of Source, it's also the first ever sponsored issue. Last year's reader satisfaction survey revealed very strong support for Source in championing environmental issues in the Northwest, as well as a willingness for advertising to help pay for it. Our sponsor for this issue is Regional Parks Xchange, an ideal partner given our focus.

Sponsorship won't change the stories Source covers or the way it covers them, but it will help us to keep supplying the magazine to you free of charge.

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

Cover *Singing Ringing Tree*, Burnley's Panopticon, photographed by Ian Lawson. Story on page 16.

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This issue of Source^{NW} is supported by Regional Parks Xchange. To find out more visit www.rpx.co.uk.

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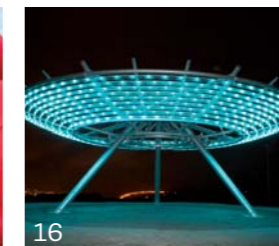
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Climate change choice

Climate change could cost Manchester £12 billion – or bring opportunities.

How businesses in Manchester and the Northwest respond to climate change will impact the economy by billions of pounds, warns the world's first 'mini-Stern' report.

Manchester is in a "strong position" to turn the challenge of climate change into economic opportunities, says the report from consultants Deloitte. But it warns that failure to act could cost the city's economy as much as £12 billion over the next 12 years, with the Northwest as a whole losing out by a projected £72 billion over the same period.

The report – the first in the world to examine the impact of climate change on a single city – follows the groundbreaking report from economist Sir Nicholas Stern in 2006. Stern influentially concluded that the cost to the global economy of failing to tackle climate change would be far greater than the cost of taking early action.

The new report, *The Economic Impact of Climate Change*, was commissioned by the city's economic development agency, Manchester Enterprise. It says there are "substantial economic opportunities for the Manchester city region" as it responds to climate change.

These include new niche markets in environmental technologies and services, innovations in tackling

carbon emissions and efficiency improvements as businesses adapt to climate change.

It points to the city's strong universities, successful urban regeneration, improving transport and infrastructure, positive economic structure and capacity for innovation as key strengths. And it highlights the integrated political leadership provided through the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities.

Growing demand for environmentally friendly products and the rocketing cost of non-renewable energy are also

strengthening the case for going green, says the report.

Environment minister Phil Woolas, who launched the report in Manchester, said: "Climate change is an important issue for us all and businesses have a significant role to play in the climate change agenda.

"The report emphasises that if businesses make changes in response to the government's drive for more renewable energies and take advantage of the opportunities to improve their energy infrastructures they could become more competitive, which would benefit the region's economy."

But the report predicts that significant new environmental legislation will redraw the economic landscape over the coming decade. Companies that are not prepared could lose money or even go out of business, it warns.

The report calls on businesses, local authorities and central government to join forces and seize the opportunities from climate change. Manchester, it says, can be at the "forefront of a positive response to climate change and...develop an international reputation in this area."

Scientists issue warning

Politicians have significantly underestimated the scale of the climate change challenge, according to scientists from the Tyndall Centre in Manchester. In a strongly worded paper, Dr Kevin Anderson and Dr Alice Bows say that this year's pledge from G8 countries to cut global emissions by 50% by 2050, in an effort to limit global warming to 2°C, could lead to "dangerously misguided" policies. They say that focusing on long term targets has ignored the importance of current trends and their impact on cumulative emissions. They say policy must focus on climate change impacts associated with 4°C or more.

Artist's impression of an 85m tall Ecotricity wind turbine at Sportcity in East Manchester



Virtual disaster

Shocking, isn't it? This is how Liverpool would look after catastrophic floods. The troubling scenes were created by digital artists at computer game maker Playgen. Its Floodsim game challenges players to take control of the crisis when floods swamp Britain each year – success is measured by reducing the impact on people and the economy. Scientists predict that the threat of flooding will increase due to climate change. Environment minister Phil Woolas praised the game: "The floods of 2007 show just how serious flooding can be, and I am glad to see that this project has been developed to enable people to have a greater understanding of the risk of flooding. A number of decisions need to be taken when we look at managing the risk of flooding – including our annual spend on flood defences, where and how we build new houses, and the emergency response procedures we have in place for times of flood." Floodsim is sponsored by Norwich Union.

SOUND BITES

S Recycle, recycle, recycle. Merseyside's biggest recycling plant is to be built on a 22-acre site in Gilmoor, Liverpool. Capable of processing up to 100,000 tonnes of dry recycling each year, the £20m centre will be the largest of its type run by the Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority. The site could also house a composting facility for organic kitchen and garden rubbish.

S New power generation. A £330m power plant fuelled by waste will be built near Runcorn, despite local opposition. The combined heat and power plant with a capacity of 100mw will supply the Ineos Chlor chemicals plant beside the River Mersey – the company spends around £100m per year on energy and the plant uses about the same amount of electricity as the entire city of Liverpool. The new power plant could be fuelled by waste from Merseyside, Halton, Cheshire, Warrington and Manchester. Energy Minister Malcolm Wicks made the decision to allow the development despite ongoing opposition from those living in the shadow of the factory.

S Green top. The Northwest's first grass-roofed restaurant has opened in Chorley. Nineteen Duxbury Park boasts a living roof made of sedum grass and mosses to retain warmth and minimise the need for additional heating. Its cladding is made from European larch, a fully renewable source of wood. Despite its unusual appearance, Nineteen has been designed to complement its neighbouring listed buildings.

S Environmentally friendly religion. A former Methodist chapel in Levenshulme has become Manchester's first eco-mosque, boasting solar heating, rainwater harvesting, under floor heating, natural ventilation and low energy light bulbs. Mustafa Abdul Hussein, vice-president of the Al-Markaz Al-Najmi mosque, said: "The eco element arises out of what a mosque is meant to be. It is meant to be friendly in every aspect, which includes being friendly to the environment. It hasn't really been any more costly than if we were to do it any other way and there is a much greater gain to be had with a mosque that creates its own energy."

S New chair. Sir Martin Holdgate has been appointed chairman of the Cumbria Renewables Panel, which will advise the newly established Energy, Environment, Technology and Specialist Manufacturing Industry Forum, and other stakeholders, on turning opportunities in renewables into results. A former lecturer at the University of Manchester, Sir Martin followed a distinguished career in the civil service and NGOs by chairing the government's Renewable Energy Advisory Group.

S Blowing through. Two new wind farms off the coast of Cumbria and Lancashire have received the green light from the government. A 500mw wind farm eight miles off the coast of Walney Island, made up of 139 turbines up to 180m high, will generate enough electricity to supply 370,000 homes. It will be one of the three biggest wind farms in the UK, creating hundreds of jobs during construction and around 30 full time jobs thereafter. Meanwhile, the smaller Ormande windfarm will see 30 turbines built closer to the Walney coast.

S Full marks. A new school in Cheshire is being built using at least 20% recycled materials, double the usual target. Contractors have used steel reinforcement

that is 100% recycled, a steel skeleton made from 60% recycled content and concrete blocks that are 93% recycled. The building also features rainwater harvesting and sustainable drainage. Construction company Willmott Dixon is a founder member of the UK Green Building Council. The specialist arts and technology school near Crewe will welcome over 1,000 students aged 11–16 starting in September 2009.

S Thinking big. A £4 billion investment plan to meet tough new environmental standards, protect against flooding, secure water supplies and improve drinking water has been released by Northwest water company United Utilities. The plan – submitted to industry regulator Ofwat – must balance the pressure to hold down price increases with the need to meet new environmental standards set by the EU and improve water services. United Utilities says its draft proposals would see £1.6

Where there's muck...

A pioneering £13 million waste recycling plant, the first of its kind in the UK, has been officially opened on Merseyside and could open the door to similar plants across the country.

The plant will process up to 50,000 tonnes of non-hazardous waste per year, reducing the amount sent to landfill by over 80 per cent and saving an estimated £1.5 million annually.

But the key innovation lies in what the plant produces. Using household waste as its raw material, it creates a high quality biomass fuel that can be sold as a sustainable alternative to fossil fuels.

Run by engineering company Orchid Environmental, the plant relies on a patented low temperature process known as mechanical heat

"...an invaluable part of the overall solution – and not just for Merseyside."

treatment. The waste is first shredded before being moistened and passed into a large rotating cylinder, where it is dried, sanitised and broken down. The organic waste, such as paper, cardboard and vegetable matter, is then turned into fuel, while recyclable materials such as metals, plastics, glass and stone are also recovered.

Carl Beer, director of Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority, said: "Merseyside produces almost 700,000 tonnes of waste a year. We see this as a valuable resource and we want to recover some of that value...This is a unique demonstration project and we're confident it will prove to be an invaluable part of the overall solution – and not just for Merseyside."

billion spent on water services and £2.4 billion invested in better wastewater treatment. Final plans covering 2010–2015 will be agreed with Ofwat by November next year.

S Second best. Northwest businesses are amongst the best supported in the UK when it comes to funding for environmental improvements. A recent survey of 150 local and regional funding schemes found the Northwest and Southeast tied in second place, each with 20 separate schemes available to local businesses. The East Midlands came top with 25 funding schemes. The report comes from new website Green Grants Machine, which helps private sector organisations find funding to improve their environmental performance and reduce energy costs. Its free online database lists more than 200 local, regional, national and European environmental schemes. www.greengrantsmachine.co.uk

Lôve

Why I love... Wigg Island.
By Mark Hillsdon,
freelance journalist.

“It’s not just Wigg Island that I love, it’s what this green, lush nature reserve actually stands for that I find really inspiring.

Not that long ago this 25 hectare patch of land, where the River Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal meet, was overgrown, contaminated and, let’s face it, loved by no-one.

Now, with patience, vision and hard work, it was been reclaimed, regenerated and reborn as a much-needed local green space.

Wigg Island opened as a new community park in 2002, with none other than TV’s favourite birder, Bill Oddie, cutting the ribbon. Since then the park has flourished, with wildlife and humans flocking back.

Goldfinches, reed buntings and song thrush are all regaularly seen flitting among the trees, while out on the river, osprey have been spotted fishing for the fat, healthy salmon that have returned to the once polluted waters.



As Carol, who works at the park, told me on a recent visit, they still get old folk who used to work at factories on the site coming down to have a look around, and they’re always absolutely amazed at the transformation.

Many will also raise an eyebrow at the new visitor centre that has ‘landed’ at the entrance to the park. It’s been called all kinds of futuristic names since it opened a year ago, although apparently the Tardis remains the most popular.

The brainchild of Keith Andrew at Knutsford based Hot Architecture, the centre is certainly a departure from the traditional ‘log cabin’ more commonly found at nature reserves.

It’s circular for a start, with its own moat and drawbridge, features which hark back to the day when an ancient Saxon fort stood

on the site. The outer walls are made of wire mesh, which give great views but don’t require much maintenance, while many other materials used in the construction are both locally sourced and recycled.

They’ve also overcome the fact they’re not on the water mains by using rainwater to flush the loo, while a wind turbine provides the centre with its own energy.

The architects also wanted to limit the environmental footprint of the building, so they built it on a concrete pedestal, which meant they didn’t have to dig deep and remove tonnes of contaminated soil.

And this exemplary green pedigree certainly wasn’t lost on the judges at last year’s Northwest Business Environment Awards, who gave it top billing in the Best Built Environment category.

But the other beauty of Wigg Island is that this is a community park in every sense. Not only is it a Mecca for birdwatchers with high-powered binoculars, but school children relish day trips here too, as do families who can take part in events from spooky bat walks to learning the ancient art of worm charming.

Wigg Island – what isn’t there to love? ”

Wigg Island visitor centre was part-funded by £200,000 from the Mersey Waterfront regional park. The island is owned and managed by Halton Borough Council.



WORDS + NUMBERS

97

Percentage of Northern businesses that had heard of the government’s Carbon Reduction Commitment, according to research that revealed Northern businesses have the most responsible and realistic attitude to energy efficiency in the UK.

29%

Amount of household waste recycled in Merseyside this year – up from just 12% four years ago, but still trailing the national average of 33.9%.

730,000 tonnes

Amount of plastic waste created in the Northwest each year, 70% of which still goes to landfill. Worse, the region’s plastic recycling industry can’t get enough of the stuff, importing recyclable plastic from elsewhere in the UK and even Europe.

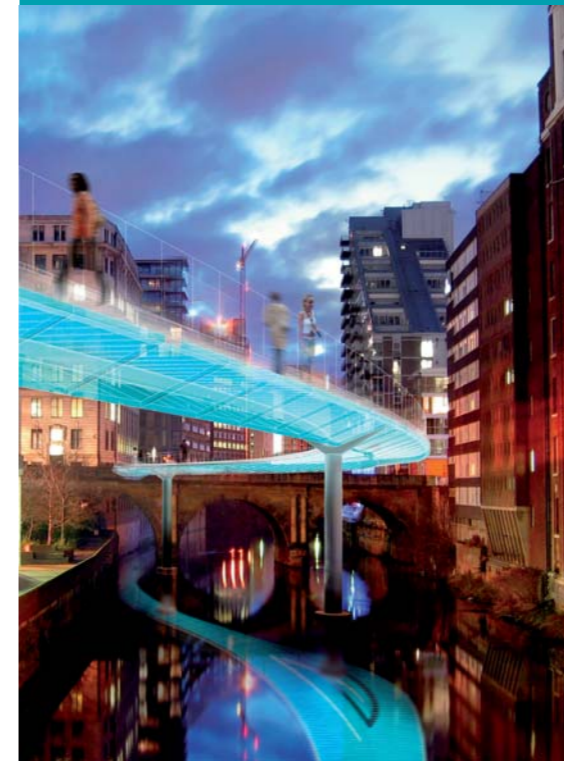
11,000 miles

Distance flown by bottled water brand Latitude 40 Degrees from its source in Tasmania to arrive in the Northwest. Campaigners labelled the practice “madness”.

£15 million

Savings for Northwest businesses thanks to the Business Resource and Waste Minimisation (BREW) programme over the last three years, according to a report for the NWDA.

Talking of...walking on water



Getting a bit messianic, aren’t we? Not when you consider the plan to build a boulevard-style walkway along 8km of the River Irwell, replete with new cycle paths, bridges and lighting, parts of which would ‘float’ above the river. Irwell City Park, as it’s known, promises a vibrant link from Salford Quays to Salford University via Manchester city centre, the five-star Lowry hotel, the huge Spinningfields development and Manchester cathedral.

So we could all walk on water? With all the development springing up along the river, it’s the next obvious step.

I’m praying for success. So were the three councils behind the project when it was short-listed for £33 million of funding last year.

Praise the Lottery! Did it giveth? Sadly, it tooketh away.

So the end is nigh? Not a bit of it. Salford, Manchester and Trafford – the three councils that usually eye each other suspiciously across the Irwell – have rallied behind the project, so convinced are they of its merits.

It’s a miracle! It’s enough to restore your faith.

You gotta have faith. And so they have. They’ve kept the ball rolling by acquiring a key site along the route for development, issuing joint planning guidance and applying to the Northwest Regional Development Agency for new funding. But then the idea of a vibrant walkway at the heart of the city, linking green spaces, offices and apartments and encouraging walking and cycling, is truly a glorious vision.

Amen to that.

Remembering...Tony Bradshaw

My first memory of Tony Bradshaw was of him striding along Otterspool Promenade in Liverpool, animated, excited, arms waving and making it crystal clear to me and my landscape architect colleague that we had better sort out our ideas. This was in the heightened atmosphere following the Toxteth riots of 1981, in the lead up to the successful Liverpool Garden Festival, when Michael Heseltine was an inspirational presence on Merseyside.

We were designing the riverside walk to extend Otterspool Promenade and it was to be constructed by men on a job



creation programme – one of the first projects financed by the new Merseyside Development Corporation.

It had to succeed. But Tony Bradshaw would not countenance a conventional approach to greening a reclaimed site. In place of traditional engineering and landscape architecture he insisted on a low input approach, designing with nature. He was, of course, quite right.

Then there was Groundwork, another positive result of the riots. What might have become a constipated public sector initiative gathered a remarkable constellation of people, including John Handley, who became the first Groundwork executive director. John had been a student of Tony’s. Tony was one of the original trustees of Groundwork and served for many years. He was never deterred by bureaucratic or political nonsense. His brilliance, energy, enthusiasm and humour infected everybody he encountered. He made us raise our game.

As chair of botany at Liverpool University, Tony became an internationally distinguished academic, the world expert on ‘restoration ecology’. He published extensively and amongst his many distinctions was his election to the Royal Society in 1982. He inspired countless undergraduates,



postgraduates and researchers. He made land reclamation exciting.

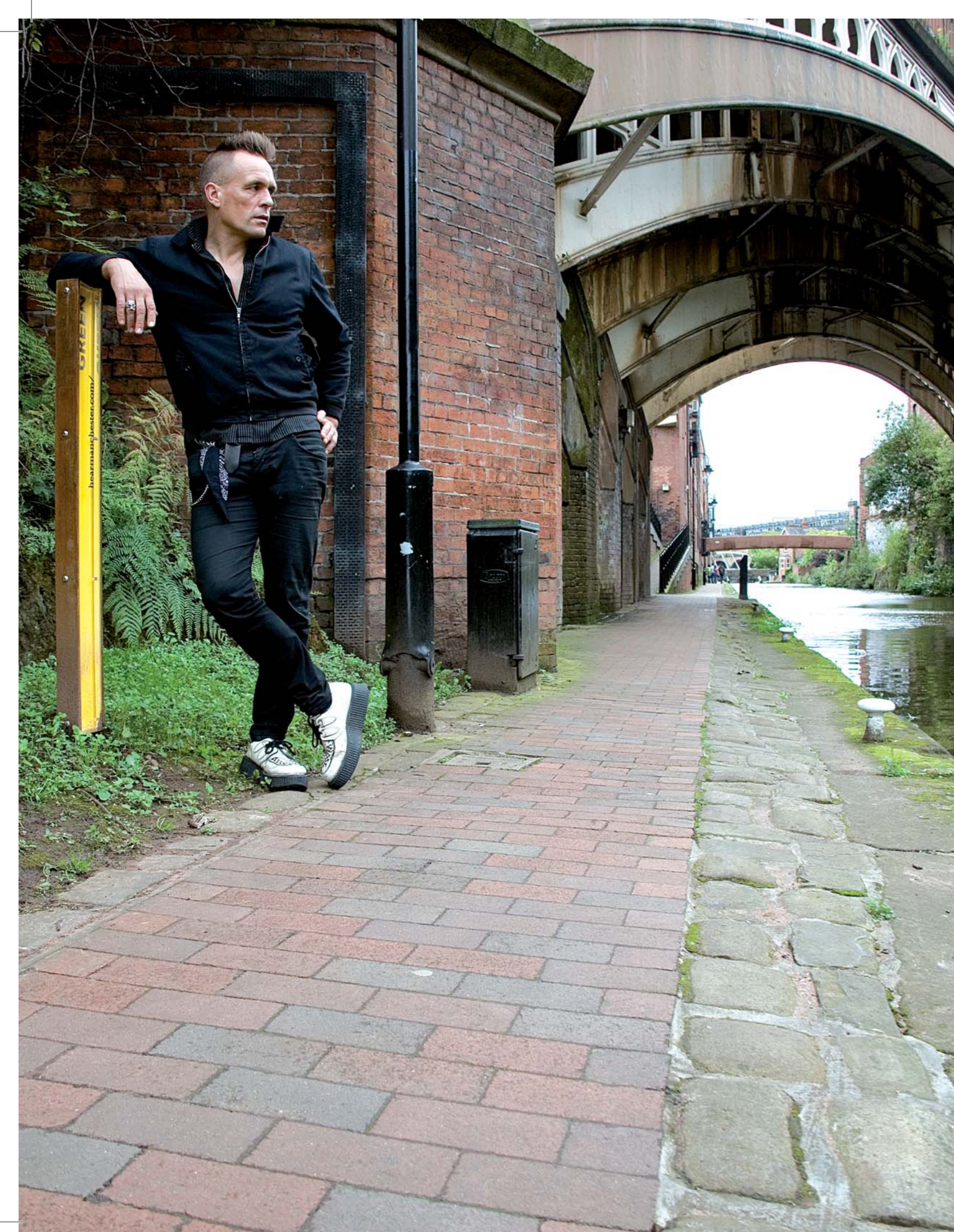
As an environmental activist, both nationally and in Liverpool, Tony was extraordinarily engaged – with Landlife, Merseyside Environmental Trust and many other organisations. To the end, he was an active volunteer in Liverpool Cathedral’s St. James Gardens.

My experience of Tony was that he never passed up an opportunity to lobby, cajole and provoke – always in the interests of sustainable development. He was an enemy of mediocrity and a terrific advocate for science and creativity, together. And he was extremely good fun.

Quite rightly, Tony was listed as one of the top 100 eco-heroes of all time.

Shortly before he died, he was made Liverpool’s first Citizen of Honour. He was a great man.

Professor Anthony David Bradshaw FRS 1926–2008
Walter Menzies, chief executive, Mersey Basin Campaign.



SOUNDS OF THE CITY

A new audio trail brings Manchester's canals back to life.

Words John Robb Photographs Rebecca Lupton

I've run all over the world.

From freezing cold Berlin to LA's boiling beaches, from Cuba's El Malecon and laps of Moscow's Red Square to Tokyo's rockabilly parks and on Goa's stunning beaches, and oddly the canals in Manchester remain my favourite.

You get to run past life in its upfront grittiness – I've seen sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll down here. Couples getting it on, condoms on the floor, the whiff of dope, lurching drunks and shouting deadbeats and I've also seen bird spotters, tourists and school parties.

In the winter when your arms are red raw from the cold to the summer when the canal explodes into a poetry of green foliage (complete with the occasional graceful weeping willow) in the way that only England can, the waterway remains endlessly captivating.

For the special long run I do the City-United loop – the two opposite ends of Manchester in more ways than one.

The run starts at Manchester United's huge temple of football where you can loop the stadium dodging the expensive four-wheel drives that cruise pampered footballers past the tourists with their bags stuffed full of red merch'. You then head down to the canal which runs right by the stadium and on towards the city centre. Past the tram tracks that rise up in the air on concrete stilts, past the last few tiny bits of grimy industry of the scrap yards where you have to hold your breath.

Breathe out and pass the new flats with the geese clucking on the lawns, and then on through the booze battlefield and the staggering Saturday night dolly birds of Castlefield or the lazy

Sunday afternoons of barbeques at Dukes bar. Look left and check Beetham tower – Britain's tallest residential block – and continue along the long strait under the bridge beneath Deansgate and past the new Hacienda building with its potted history of the legendary venue carved into its metallic lower wall. Pick up speed and then pass under Oxford Road and onwards past my favourite section of big office blocks that give you a real sense of a powerful city and then surface along Canal Street with its bacchanalian party plus one.

If you're feeling good take a diversion up Jutland Street, Manchester's steepest road, for gruelling sprints, and then back down past Piccadilly railway station where the newest and biggest tower block in the city is starting to grow.

Pick up speed and you are back underground dodging the rent boys that lurk on one treacherous stretch and on into the new canal basin and on to Chips – Urban Splash's most ambitious project yet – and you get a real sense of a city waking up and defying the recession and still rewriting its own history. Keep on going and you arrive at Man City's amazing new stadium, run round that avoiding the comings and goings of chairmen bringing money in and leaving just as fast, and then you are running back into Manchester city centre – which comes into view, powerful and cosmopolitan, a bold backdrop to aim for.

[CONTINUED OVER]

“The Peterloo Massacre bloodied the streets a stones throw from the Rochdale Canal, and you can imagine Marx and Engels walking along the canal trying to make sense of this whole industrial revolution.”

I've spent years using the canals in Manchester. Not just for running – they're the best shortcut in the city and give you a slice through the history of Manchester, telling you everything about what was once the world's most radical city – the first modern city. Recently I documented this for hearmanchester.com, a series of audio portraits along the canal with recorded stories and interviews that signpost the fascinating social, cultural, industrial and radical history of the city.

Everyone we interviewed said that the canals are the city's 'arteries' – so many times that we laughed about it in the end. But when you think about it that's exactly what they were. Walled in by huge warehouses, factories and mills, these were the main conduit of the murky industrial powerhouse of Manchester.

When you walk or cycle along there today you still get the faint echo of this industrial heritage. There are even a few ramshackle old mills crumbling away like rotten teeth on the canal banks, though many more have been converted to trendy offices and flats. Most were cleared away by the German bombers or the 60s developers but there is enough left for you to get the whiff of claustrophobia of what it must have been like to have worked in them.

Some say that Manchester has never been a beautiful city, but when the weak autumn sun sets in the late afternoon over Oxford Road the canal gives you a great, powerful vista to the red and grey streaked sky with the neon of the city glistening in the misty rain.

It's not just a concrete wasteland – nature is always there. I've seen weird giant spiders and their Hammer House of Horror webs under the bridges, bats flitting about, Canada geese that hiss and attack you when you are running, especially when they have their brood of fluffy yellow-feathered young waddling behind them. Herons are so plentiful standing stock still on the canal side, ready to strike or flying like lazy pterodactyls, that they have ceased to be anything worth mentioning. There are scores of swans so regal and astonishingly white that it looks like someone scrubs them clean every morning. There are families of clucking wildfowl and even, once, the electric burst of green of a kingfisher that flew down the canal past the posh bars on Deansgate Locks.

There are also plenty of rats scuttling along the banks, fat and furry, beautiful creatures, built perfectly to survive in whatever mess we make of their terrain.

The canals used to split off into a maze of waterways that have mostly been covered over, but in Castlefield they still remain as a defiant water park full of barges, a testament to the Victorian virtuosity that created an inland port 35 miles from the sea.

More Victorian virtuosity can be seen if they let you go down to the underground canal basin – almost a mile of subterranean canals deep below Deansgate where

workers used to ferry the goods in and out of the city centre back to Castlefield. It's hard to imagine the horses and the workers in this noisy twilight zone a hundred years ago.

The Victorians also built a huge winch system to bring train carriages up and down to the basin, to load and reload them – and standing by the huge concrete towers you marvel at the sheer daring of it all. The underground canal basin itself is now abandoned but in stunningly good condition. You hear the drip- drip- drip of water and you marvel again at this gloomy, damp cathedral to our industrial heritage.

Back on the surface you can still get a sense of radical Manchester within yards of the water – the suffragettes started a few hundred yards from the Rochdale Canal when they gatecrashed a meeting at the Free Trade Hall – the same venue where the Sex Pistols played about a century later and gave punk and, by proxy, the whole modern music scene to Manchester.

The Peterloo Massacre bloodied the streets a stones throw from the Rochdale Canal, and you can imagine Marx and Engels taking a break from drinking in the pubs of Little Ireland – now Oxford Road train station but then the grimmest and most packed area of Manchester – and walking along the canal trying to work out how to make sense of this whole industrial revolution. Plotting how to improve the lives of the thousands suffering in the tenements. They thought that Manchester was ripe for their revolution. Instead Russia got there first and messed the whole thing up. On Canal Street, which parties 24/7 and where the 'C' is always removed from the road sign, you see Britain's biggest gay village. It's here that you can still see the marks worn into the canal wall by the towropes of the narrowboats.

All around us there is history. We rush past and think history is what happens somewhere else, but Manchester's history is perhaps the most interesting of them all. A city named after the Roman word for breasts because it was built on two small hills. A city that invented the industrial revolution and then tried to do something about the mess. This is a city that gave women the vote and re-invented vegetarianism as a modern concept in the 1870s, when it had more vegetarian restaurants than it has now.

Somehow, the canal has something to do with all of this. Without it as a conduit for



goods and ideas Manchester would never have moved so far, so fast. It was the first major transport link in a city that went on to have the world's first train station and railway.

We invented communism, computers and the whole modern, industrial city and being Northern we pretend that we didn't.

And all the time the canal meanders through it, half forgotten, but still the best slice of the city, telling the whole story in a quick walk.

John Robb is a punk singer, songwriter and musician, as well as a respected music journalist, TV pundit and author, who coined the term "Britpop" and was the first person to interview Nirvana. He is based in Manchester.

www.hearmanchester.com
hearmanchester is a Sense of Place project, part funded by ERDF.



How green is my... colliery?

Edwin Colyer mines some natural inspiration within the Wigan Greenheart regional park.

You might expect a disused colliery to look like a moonscape; a barren, grey place, destroyed by the relentless drive for industrial progress. But Bickershaw Colliery in Leigh – the last major area of derelict colliery land within Wigan borough – is most definitely green.

Climb to the top of the largest of its slag heaps (known locally as rucks), and the Bickershaw site is a vast area of vegetation. Green, but not pretty; you will have to work hard to ignore the scars where people have illegally driven their 4x4s and offroad motorbikes.

Yet this expanse of scrubland includes a variety of habitats. Mark Champion, Lancashire Wildlife Trust's project manager in Wigan, knows the site intimately. "There are some quite valuable areas of grassland with partridge and hare, significant reed beds, and wetland that's home to double figures of jacksnipe," he boasts. "In the flashes there are some great crested newt and water voles."

Abandoned and untouched for so long, Champion says the wildlife is well established. So what is this plan for a new green space?

Work on a massive regeneration project will soon begin to transform the northern part of the site into a country-cum-activity park. A smaller area in the south will become a new neighbourhood of 650 homes, shops and businesses centred around a new canal basin on the Bridgewater Canal.

The project is being funded primarily by English Partnerships through the National Coalfields Programme. The total investment package is worth around £36 million.

The masterplan for the activity park has a visitor centre as its focal point, located on the edge of a new lake, plus an "activities island", the base for a wide variety of outdoor pursuits such as canoeing or rope courses. Behind the visitor centre is an 18 hole golf course, a driving range and a nine hole pitch and putt.

Yet the wildlife is well preserved. Within the golf range are extensive areas of new reed beds and grassland habitats. A bird hide looks out over the fishing lake, Diggle Flash. The rest of the park retains most of the existing habitat, with some additional landscaping to create viewpoints, and a bridleway, footpaths and cycle tracks to encourage visitors to wander about and get some exercise.

Construction of the visitor centre should commence in early 2009 and the park – expected to attract several hundred thousand visitors each year – should open around spring 2010.

To the south of this park-to-be is a much smaller plot of land, dominated by the grey rucks and owned by the Northwest Regional Development Agency. This area is destined to become one of the most eco-conscious communities in the country.

The development has been earmarked to become the Northwest's first Carbon Challenge site. Its 650 waterfront houses will have to meet the highest environmental standards – Code Level 6 – with a zero carbon rating. This rating means that over the course of a year the homes must generate at least as much energy as they use.

"With the Carbon Challenge you are looking at completely new housing products," says Jayne Lomas of English Partnerships. "There's no way you can use existing house designs and materials. You have to achieve the highest levels of insulation and the lowest levels of energy consumption within the house. Designers will have to look at new ways of living and developers will have to demonstrate what kind of legacy they will leave and how their designs will help residents lead less environmentally damaging lifestyles. Contractors will also be asked to meet high environmental standards."

“This site needs to be an amenity for the whole of Wigan, not just the odd loony with a 4x4.”

Environmental issues – whether global climate change or conservation of local habitat – are steering the Bickershaw redevelopment. Despite the diggers and dump trucks, the newts and jacksnipes should be relatively undisturbed.

"This site needs civilising," says Mark Champion, "but it will be developed in a balanced way that brings economic and ecological sustainability, benefiting the surrounding communities and the resident wildlife. Whatever final plans are agreed, they will be better than an unused wilderness. This site needs to be an amenity for the whole of Wigan, not just the odd loony with a 4x4."



PHOTOS: John Rowbotham

PARK

The Northwest's nine regional parks are a test bed for new approaches to the environment and the economy.

LIFE

Words Gareth Chadwick

The Northwest is already home to some of the UK's best loved parks, from country estates like Tatton Park in Cheshire, to miles of glorious fells in the Lake District National Park.

Now, the region is pioneering a new way of using 'parks' as a means of driving regeneration, through the concept of 'regional parks'.

A regional park covers a much larger area than a typical country or urban park. It can be a linear park, like Mersey Waterfront, stretching almost 140 km up the coast. Or it can be a more compact urban park, such as Wigan Greenheart, encompassing many of the area's former coalfields. It can be a part of the countryside surrounding a city, or a network of urban parks, waterways, valleys, nature reserves, heritage attractions and recreational facilities, all linked by notional boundaries.

The definition and purpose of a regional park is fluid and the concept is still evolving. Early regional parks such as the Lee Valley in north London were intended to promote outdoor activities, and this remains the core function of some regional parks today. Scotland's three regional parks, for example, are primarily designated as areas of countryside available for informal recreation. Emscher Park in Germany, however, fulfils a further purpose and is the model that most closely resembles the Northwest's aspirations.

Emscher, Germany

By the late 1990s, 150 years of industrialisation and the restructuring of industries had led to severe environmental damage in the Ruhr region. Derelict steel works and abandoned coal-mining operations scarred the landscape. Emscher Landscape Park was developed as a creative way of regenerating this post-industrial landscape.



The park preserves historical buildings, reusing pithead buildings for housing, workplaces and leisure activities. Industrial relics are presented as museum pieces and promoted as centres of cultural activity. Concerts are staged against the backdrop of a steel plant, while people hike among the hills of reclaimed coal pilings.

Emscher park shows how regional parks can be used to encourage investment in urban and environmental regeneration, as well as to provide outdoor recreation opportunities.

The region's life support system

Regional parks have multiple social, economic and environmental benefits. Encouraging people to take part in outdoor activities can help tackle obesity and stress, improving the health and wellbeing of communities. Developing green spaces helps manage the impact of climate change, including absorbing greenhouse gases.

Improving the environment increases the value of nearby housing and land, while greener cities encourage tourism, benefiting local businesses and improving the images of towns and cities. The process of developing regional parks attracts high value industries and workers, boosting the local economy and improving employment opportunities. Regional parks also provide a venue for the performing and visual arts and other cultural activities.

As Jo Harrop, programme manager at Wigan Greenheart, says, "Regional parks can offer a great deal in one package and are potentially an excellent tool for tackling a wide range of regeneration areas."

Regional parks and the Northwest

There are currently nine regional parks in the Northwest, each incorporating its own variety of landscapes, features and, crucially, objectives.

East Lancashire Regional Park was one of the first modern regional park proposals and focuses on urban regeneration.

Mersey Waterfront is the most developed of the parks, covering over 145 km of coastal and estuarine waterfront, which includes major ports, a world heritage site and internationally important wildlife habitats.

Weaver Valley, stretching 45 km through the centre of Cheshire, from Runcorn to Crewe, is nearing the end of an extensive two year development phase, testing the economic and environmental rationale for further investment in key strategic projects.

Croal Irwell in Manchester is branded as 'an urban playground for the city region,' while Wigan Greenheart is a 20 km² park at the heart of Wigan's former coalfields.

Morecambe Bay and Duddon spans the coastal zone from Fleetwood in the south to Haverigg in the north.

West Cumbria is still in its early stages of development. Its progress is closely linked to wider proposals to brand the whole coastline the 'Energy Coast', reflecting the move from nuclear energy production to the development of new skills and businesses in nuclear decommissioning and the renewable energy sector.

The Northwest Coastal Trail and Ribble Estuary projects have both undertaken feasibility work. The focus of Ribble Estuary is its internationally important wildfowl sites, while the Northwest Coastal Trail aims to provide a continuous high quality footpath along the Northwest coast, from Chester to Carlisle.

Management

The Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA), the Northwest Regional Assembly (NWRA) and Natural England support the nine parks in the Northwest. The NWDA reconfirmed its commitment to the regional park concept in the 2003 Regional Economic Strategy, and development of regional parks is identified as a potentially significant driver of regeneration and investment.

There is no standard model for the management of regional parks. Their development may be driven primarily by a single organisation, or by a partnership. The Weaver Valley project, for example, is managed wholly by Cheshire Country Council, and Wigan Borough Council leads the development of Wigan Greenheart. The Morecambe Bay and Duddon regional park, however, is spearheaded by the Morecambe Bay Partnership, which includes representatives from Lancaster City Council, Cumbria Tourist Board and British Energy. Similarly, Mersey Waterfront is a partnership between all the local authorities on Merseyside, along with other key stakeholders in the area.

The aim is for regional parks to act as a catalyst for action, enabling different partners to focus together to achieve broader, shared objectives.

As Richard Tracey, senior regeneration executive at the NWDA says, "If you want to cover an area like Mersey Waterfront, you have to deal with different bodies all along that stretch of coastline. The only way to do that effectively is to bring people together as a group sharing a single strategic objective. Regional parks are an ideal way to do that."

[CONTINUED OVER]

“Regional parks use nature conservation as a lever to facilitate regeneration and economic development.”

PHOTOGRAPHS

Left: Morecambe Bay by Ian Lawson
Right: Hillbre Island, part of the Mersey Waterfront regional park

To find out a little more about the concept of regional parks, Source magazine spoke to some leading proponents and asked just what it is about regional parks that makes them such a potent force for change, and what some of the key challenges are in realising that potential.

Peter Batey
Lever Professor of Town and Regional Planning, University of Liverpool



“The key ingredients for the success of a regional park are a combination of the potential for economic development and

environmental development. The Mersey Waterfront regional park, for example, has great variety: although it’s a heavily urbanised area, there are lots of open landscape areas which have got some great importance in terms of nature conservation and they are very accessible to the urban population – it’s right on the doorstep. Having those two things juxtaposed is extremely important.

For a regional park to be successful, you’ve also got to be in for the long term. You can’t develop a regional park in three years, despite the fact that a lot of people will want to see results in three years. You’ve got to see it as a 10, 15 or 20-year project, so you do need some degree of certainty that funding is going to be forthcoming. Increasingly, regional parks will have to look to a wider range of sources of finance, including alliances with the private sector.”



Frank Bothmann
Team Manager,
Emscher Landscape Park

“Emscher Park was developed in the early 1990s as part of a regional strategy to support structural change in the Ruhr from an industrial to a modern economy. The focus was on restructuring the landscape to promote a positive identity for the region. Within the park, which covers an area of 350km², slagheaps were transformed into scenic sites with excellent views of the surrounding area to attract tourists. Landscaped gardens were designed within former steelworks. The high quality of the landscapes attracted companies and at least 200 million euros have been invested in the park.

The success of Emscher Park can be attributed largely to the involvement of all the communities and organisations on which it touched. Everyone really got behind the idea and helped to ensure it was a success. Although the approach has been copied elsewhere in Germany, there is nothing on the scale of Emscher. The key future challenge lies in maintaining the high quality of the landscapes. Plans are also in place for the reconstruction of an area of the Emscher River to allow for the development of more houses and leisure facilities.”



Jo Harrop [ABOVE]
Programme Manager,
Wigan Greenheart regional park

“If a regional park achieves enough ‘buy-in’ from local stakeholders, it can help to promote good design and sensible investment, and influence what takes place within the boundaries of the regional park. This strategic engagement is what helps to make regional parks successful. It’s not just what they deliver directly, but the potential they have for a much wider impact on areas in question.

Greenheart offers an opportunity to present Wigan borough in a different light to visitors. Few people – even within the borough itself – are aware of the fantastic countryside and wildlife that lies in what were once industrial wastelands. Individually, the sites act to serve local communities and a few enthusiasts. However, sold as a package, they present an attractive day out – in Greenheart you can visit nature reserves, canals, woodlands and country parks and enjoy sailing, golf, cycling and walking... Together, it is a much more powerful offer.”

Walter Menzies
Chief Executive,
Mersey Basin Campaign

“Regional parks are not about nature conservation for the sake of it, they are about using conservation as a lever to facilitate regeneration and economic development.

In the Northwest, we have a dense population and many of the problems of post-industrial landscapes. And it’s been understood for a long time that one way of helping the economy is by improving the environment. There’s a direct correlation between the two.

Of course, there have been many regeneration initiatives in this region over the last thirty years. What’s different about the regional parks is that they’re quite large areas. The word ‘regional’ implies people coming to the park from outside. Mersey Waterfront, for example, is recognised across the world, and everyone in Merseyside is very keen to build up its tourism economy. If people are coming into an area, enjoying themselves, having a good experience, and spending money, that’s helping regeneration and creating jobs for local people.”

Sarah Heyes
Manager of Regional Parks Xchange, the organisation that coordinates regional parks in the Northwest.

“A lot of the benefits that derive from a regional park come from the very fact that it covers a wider area than just one authority. If you’re a visitor to Morecambe Bay, it doesn’t really matter to you whether you’re in Lancaster City Council district or South Lakeland. You’re looking at Morecambe Bay as a whole. So it is beneficial if the area can be branded or promoted as a whole. Many projects would just not be possible without the co-ordination, focus and partnership that a regional park can bring.

For example, in Morecambe Bay there is the possibility of a footbridge running alongside the viaduct that goes over the Leven Estuary, which needs the co-operation of the local counties, local authorities and many different stakeholders. The project wouldn’t be possible if a local authority was working on its own.”

Richard Tracey
Senior Regeneration Executive,
Northwest Regional Development Agency



“I’d like to try to find a different name for regional parks, because although many parks are wonderful places, they conjure up a particular image in people’s minds. Regional parks are about more than just the park; they’re about bringing wider physical regeneration out of a linked programme that we’ve chosen to call ‘regional parks’. We are in challenging times for getting funding for any initiative, so there is a real issue with making sure people understand that regional parks aren’t just about green infrastructure and the natural environment, but about how we place compelling economic projects within that context.

We have to keep finding ways to justify the economic value of those programmes if we are to continue to invest in them, and that won’t be easy. But with strategic partners in a ‘regional park’, there’s a better case to be made as to why we should keep investing in them, and why others should keep investing in them, than there would be if they were individual projects being led by separate authorities.”

Gareth Chadwick is a Manchester-based freelance journalist with a special interest in environmental and ethical issues.

Regional parks in the Northwest

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Rarely less than controversial, public art can nevertheless create a sense of ‘place’, as the Northwest’s regional parks have found.

Words Louise Tickle



ART IN HIGH PLACES

Singing Ringing Tree [left] and Colourfields, photographed by Ian Lawson.

Walk up to the tree on the top of Crown Point, overlooking Burnley, and with the benefit of a good southwesterly, you’ll hear it humming. Actually, that’s not quite right – it’s honking. Or maybe whistling? No, still not right – as I push hard into a blustery wind, I feel myself enveloped by a mysterious gurgle of melodic sound as a series of low notes emanate from the stack of played metal pipes that make up the *Ringing Singing Tree*. This is one of east Lancashire’s four newest public artworks, known collectively as Panopticons, and from here you can see a very long way north. Just below Crown Point, a narrow snatch of sunlight has struggled through blankets of low, white cloud to illuminate Burnley in a faint golden haze.

Drive towards the *Ringing Singing Tree* from the south, and the sculpture appears as a tiny, yet highly defined iron-grey shape on the horizon. It’s immediately obvious that it couldn’t be a real tree, though its bent outline echoes the way isolated trees typically grow into

bowed forms at the top of windy hills. And yet it’s clearly not a building in any conventional sense. So immediately, it provokes a small, sharp bite of curiosity, and the question, ‘what’s that?’

For Nick Hunt, director of Mid Pennine Arts, which commissioned the four panopticons, now installed across east Lancashire, eliciting that enquiring response was a big part of positioning the artworks in such unusual, faraway, yet prominent places.

The definition of a panopticon is “a structure, space or device providing a comprehensive or panoramic view”. And by siting something unusual on a high point, you not only offer the chance to observe the surrounding environment, but you also draw people to a place that normally they might not have considered visiting: a highly

visible destination has instantly been created.

Nick and I meet in the Crown Point car park and the wind is blowing a gale, so we huddle up in my car in order to speak in relative comfort. A spatter of rain suddenly hits, and two muddy mountain bikers whiz past on the gravel path leading to the *Ringing Singing Tree*. Then a stampede of sheep thunder by, followed by a frisky sheepdog and a shepherd on a quad bike. A few other cars are parked up with people eating their lunchtime sandwiches, but the weather’s too inclement to induce them to venture out.

This, Hunt assures me, is far from typical – usually there are

plenty of school groups, walkers and visitors wending their way along the path to the sculpture. How, then, did it all begin?

“Six or so years ago, a regeneration programme with government money was conceived to promote this little sub-region as a regional park, and we knew this was a big opportunity to access serious money for some creative work,” he explains.

“At the time east Lancashire was getting a particularly bad press – the Burnley race riots had just happened and the housing market renewal programmes were in the offing because of problems with excess terraced housing, so lots of boarded up housing and general dereliction was how people thought of east Lancashire. And it is not widely appreciated that it has such environmental splendours. We wanted to encourage people to see this area in a different, more positive way.”

An international competition was launched to design the panopticons. £50,000 was budgeted for each. Four have since

been created – the other three are *Atom*, overlooking Wycoller village, *Colourfields* in Blackburn, and *Halo*, above Haslingden in Rossendale. This, says Hunt, was “shoestring” money in comparison with other high profile public artworks, which can cost a million or more. But in such an economically deprived area, the

concept of paying even such relative peanuts in order to, in simplistic terms, plonk pricey sculptures in the middle of the countryside, can become very controversial. The reaction of local people was initially mixed, says Hunt. In the Ribble Valley, proposals to commission a panopticon for the area were so fiercely opposed that the project was entirely abandoned. In Accrington, the leader of the council was so hostile that again, plans for a local panopticon bit the dust.

“There has been only a gradual acceptance. People are very wary of change, and of anything as new and radical as this programme, and of art generally,” observes Hunt. “And the way the local press tends to deal with these things reinforces that resistance. They tend to latch onto easy hooks such as ‘waste of public money’.”

“A narrow snatch of sunlight struggled through blankets of low, white cloud to illuminate Burnley in a faint golden haze.”

How far does he think the panopticons, and the extensive public consultation throughout the programme to create them, has turned around the sceptics?

[CONTINUED OVER]

“She’d never felt anything good about where she lived, and suddenly all those people were talking about it.”

“I think to a very large extent. There will always be some diehards who think these things are crazy ideas. But I think the majority of people involved in public life here have been won over by the attention the programme has attracted and the awards it’s won.

“More locally, what is more relevant is that images [of the artworks] are being used in promoting this area and the work of the local authorities. They have been adopted as visual shorthand for the area. For instance, if you’re not familiar with this little bit of country, you come up here to visit the Tree, and what you discover is what’s around you. It’s a gateway into east Lancashire.”

At Landlab, John Kennedy, creator of the fourth and final panopticon, *Halo* – a silvery structure reminiscent of a flying saucer which shines soft, blue light out over Haslingden at night – takes a phlegmatic view of the changeability of local opinion.

“Beforehand, people were concerned that it would be too prominent and too bright. So we re-sited it slightly, and turned down the light levels. Now people say they can’t see it and it’s not bright enough,” he says wryly. “What am I most pleased about? Well, I suppose, that it’s not been smashed up. It shows that people don’t mind it, and maybe even quite like it. They complain it’s not good enough, not that it’s there.”

In fact, Panopticons has won awards and plaudits internationally as well as at home, and Mid Pennine Arts has found itself invited to speak on the same platform as directors of renowned art venues such as Bilbao’s Guggenheim Museum. More crucially for local acceptance, however, says Nick Hunt, Panopticons was conceived in tandem with a community outreach art programme entitled Land. This, says Helen Callaghan, the artist who co-ordinated the programme, involved communities in a wide range of creative processes arising out of the proposals for the panopticons in their area.

Working with schools, community groups and local businesses, a variety of creative projects were undertaken as integral parts of the consultation. Some of those resulted in an actual piece of art being created. In other cases, results came from the discussions around local peoples’ understanding of their area’s history and identity, with an artist on had to lead the project. “The usefulness was in the process, not just in the artwork at the end of it,” Callaghan observes.

All of this, of course, begs the question, why “do” public art at all? At the art-commissioning organisation Liverpool Biennial, director Lewis Biggs chuckles gently.

“A lot comes down to doing something different, and art is all about doing something different because good

“*Panopticons* has won awards and plaudits internationally as well as at home.”



art is unique. And difference leads to identity,” he says.

But how does identity emerge from a giant concrete bull plonked at the end of a promenade, or a few statues gazing out to sea, or indeed a giant spider creeping around Liverpool town centre?

“Well, Liverpool Biennial is a commissioner and our job is to bring the artist and place and people together,” Biggs explains. “We’re specialists not only in art but also in place, and in working with the people who will give that artwork meaning. It’s like landscape gardening. If you think you’re starting with a blank sheet, you’ve got it wrong. You start with what’s there; the job of the artwork is to reveal the history of that place.”

With *Another Place* by Antony Gormley, for instance, the initial task was to get more people to visit Crosby Beach in Sefton, thus prompting the regeneration of local businesses. So Biggs, who had walked that beach many times and knew that it was the last place in England that thousands of emigrants to America would have seen as they sailed westwards, used this as his starting point in identifying an artwork that would chime with the area’s historical identity.

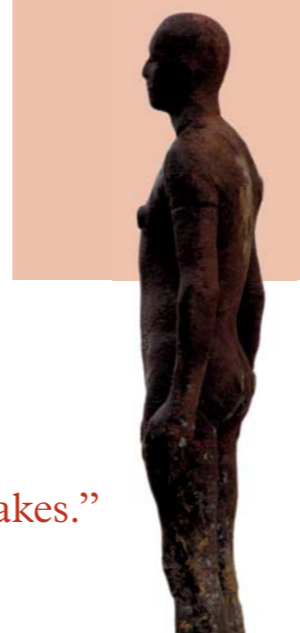
“I knew of *Another Place*, and it’s about people’s aspirations for, well, another place! Which seemed appropriate for this site, so we borrowed it for 18 months.”

“Art is always a risky business, and even good artists can make mistakes.”



Halo [left] and Atom [right], photographed by Nigel Hillier and Ian Lawson respectively.

Sitting Bull [top], and Another Place [below].



So successful was the installation that the Northwest Regional Development Agency finally stumped up the money to pay for it to stay. But Biggs says that he’s always keen that public art is tried out first before becoming a permanent fixture. And even with footfall to Crosby beach trebling, an economic upturn for local businesses and a massively increased profile for the Sefton area, there have still been people dead set against *Another Place* staying put. One of the drawbacks of public art, then, is that it is always going to provoke opposition from some quarter. Another drawback, of course, is bad public art.

“Art is always a risky business, and even good artists can make mistakes,” says Biggs. “I am always in favour of a temporary approach, so if it works out, then great, and if not, you can bulldoze it. So everyone has to be prepared to take a risk. If you’re not prepared to take a risk,

then you’re going to end up with bad art anyway.”

Jo Hayes, co-ordinator for Mersey Waterfront regional park’s Pride in our Promenades project, says that public art can create vibrancy and new appeal for an area. She brought the massive concrete sculpture *Sitting Bull* out of storage and installed it at the unloved, unvisited end of Otterspool prom in autumn 2006.

“This piece was originally conceived for the waterfront a couple of miles away as part of the Garden Festival [in 1984], and so we thought it was appropriate to try to bring it back, as part of a bigger regeneration project at Otterspool,” she explains. “You can walk or cycle from the city centre right up to it. Combined with the children’s play area, *Sitting Bull* has definitely brought life and a sense of fun down to that end of the promenade.”

Quite apart from the economic benefits of having more people visit an area because of a piece of art, Biggs points out, is the energy and excitement that can be generated by encouraging people to commission their own artwork for the place where they live. Liverpool Biennial has recently worked

with local communities on three such projects for a programme called Pavilions: one outside Rotunda College in Liverpool city centre, one by Edge Hill station and one in Garston in south Liverpool. Biggs says that this kind of commissioning is an adventure for everyone involved.

“You get a feeling very early on as to whether they’re going to trust you, but the thing that is magic is when you see people’s confusion and uncertainty turn into pride and confidence. A wonderful example of this is the Rotunda community college project, which is a vertical garden – a sheet-iron structure covered in vegetation. Finding our way in this project was not an easy process and we nearly lost the trust and collaboration of people in the community on more than one occasion.

“But two weeks after it opened, one of the people who’d been most vocal told me she’d been on the top deck of a bus and could see down to where the Pavilion is, and she suddenly said out loud, ‘there’s the Pavilion!’ And then, other people on top of the bus were saying how fab it was. She’d never felt anything good about where she lived, and suddenly all those people were talking about it.”

Louise Tickle is a Cheshire-based journalist who writes for the *Guardian*, *Telegraph* and *Times*.

Up from the ashes

Rushing to finish their new clubhouse in time for its Royal opening, Liverpool Sailing Club found time to speak to Ciara Leeming.

It celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, but a devastating arson attack almost prevented Liverpool Sailing Club from reaching this milestone.

The blaze in 2001 followed years of vandalism targeting both its clubhouse and members' boats, and left management on the brink of giving up.

But discussions with councillors, police and the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) persuaded them to give it one last try. Last month they left the dark times behind when Princess Anne, RYA president, officially opened their new clubhouse.

The finished building – at the heart of Speke and Garston Coastal Reserve – marks the end of a six-year journey that saw members roll up their sleeves to help when funds dried up.

The club – like the neighbouring communities of Speke and Garston, two of Liverpool's most disadvantaged – declined during the 1980s, with membership dropping from 500 to 120.

The polluted land around it, near the original Liverpool airport, was used by off-road vehicles and motorcycles and littered with burned out cars.

Club president Tom Workman, a member since the 1960s, says: "That site was deliberately chosen because it is the widest part of the River Mersey and was the only access point when the Liverpool side was mostly docks.

"But the vandalism affected membership. People couldn't leave their boats at the club because they would get damaged. The 2001 fire was the final straw." Club officials called a meeting with local figures to discuss the future but were persuaded to carry on. Sport England agreed to put £496,000 towards the project.

Then in 2003, Peel Holdings – which bought the old airport site in 1997 – opened Liverpool John Lennon Airport close by. A business park is being built on part of the original airport site, while 70 acres was left to nature and became the coastal reserve. A further £249,000 towards the coastal reserve came from the Mersey Waterfront regional park, £40,000 of which was earmarked for the sailing club.

Run by a partnership that includes the Mersey Basin Campaign, Mersey Waterfront regional park, the National Trust, Liverpool City Council and the Northwest Development Agency (NWD), and largely funded by Artery – a three-year European riverside regeneration programme – the reserve opened in 2006.

While this was being developed, the sailing club put forward two designs for its new headquarters. Both were rejected, prompting the NWD to launch a design contest to find something suitable.

It was agency officials who picked the winner – a modern design that looks like two sails from the air and is carbon-neutral, with a wind turbine to provide electricity and a moat to recycle water. Tendering was carried out and a £1.6 million contract signed.

Club managers applied for a grant from Artery and were awarded £500,000 towards their target.

"We now had £1 million in the bank to do the work, but it still wasn't enough," says Workman. "That just got us the bare building – with no doors, no windows, no floors.

"We had to finish it ourselves. That took ages, and during this period Sport England decided we weren't doing enough to increase use of the river."

BEST

"Members taught themselves how to use computers and set up a website. This was key to keeping the community interested and up to date with the project."

WORST

"Access to the river was more of a problem than we anticipated because the river has silted up. We are still trying to reclaim part of our slipway to allow sailing to take place at low tide, and are having to bid for more funding."

A further £250,000 was secured from Sport England, allowing contractors to be brought in to finish the building work, and leaving officials to fit out the clubhouse. Workman says: "We want to reach out to the whole community and are trying to pick up new members each week.

"We've set up a young people's group called Youth Afloat, to get teenagers learning to sail. We work with local schools and promote ourselves to families.

"Our membership includes people who sail power boats, cruisers, jet skis, canoes and even windsurfers. We have seven cruisers on moorings but we are hoping to increase that to about 30. We want people here all the time, making the most of the water."

Iain Taylor, public-private partnership manager at Peel Holdings, says: "The coastal reserve is designed as a wild open space for local people to enjoy.

"In the past the land had been used for a lot of anti-social activities. For this reason it's very important that this space should be animated in a positive way – and sailing is one way of doing that. The club is an asset to the whole community."

PHOTOGRAPH Matthew Sutcliffe



Words Jo Birtwistle

Regional parks are popping up all over the Northwest. Supported by the Northwest Regional Development Agency and incorporated into its economic strategy, a big part of their purpose is to direct public investment in the environment in ways that will drive regeneration and help the local economy.

The Weaver Valley regional park stretches for 45km down the centre of Cheshire, from Frodsham to Audlem and out to Sandbach and Crewe. Around 300,000 people live within its boundaries.

Ian Dale is programme manager for the Weaver Valley regional park. He recognises that each regional park has very different issues within its borders. "We are very much about wider regeneration projects," he says.

The starting point is to change the image of the area and create a resource for local people and visitors. "The visitor economy does a lot for local people. By changing the image, making it more attractive to invest in and making it a visitor destination, we can improve their quality of life and create opportunities for new businesses to start," says Dale. "We are creating a better environment for businesses to operate in."

One businessperson to have found new opportunities as a result of the improved network of walkways and cycle paths within the regional park is Belinda Davenport. She has been involved in developing the village of Acton Bridge – where her florists, farm shop and cafe are

based – as a gateway to the Weaver Valley.

"Her business will grow off the back of what we are trying to do," says Dale. "We are not a business support service ourselves but we are providing the right environment for these opportunities."

The family run flower shop, based in a barn on land adjoining the Trent and Mersey Canal, has been established for over 60 years. In 2006 Belinda and husband Ian branched out to open a farm shop in the same barn.

"We thought that if we could put the farm shop next to the canal and river it would give people more of a reason to come and get some flowers too," says Belinda.

She adds that improvements to the canalside have had a positive effect on footfall for both businesses. "Because the Weaver Valley is being developed more, people are becoming more aware of the facilities and the area is well used," she says.

Most recently, in December 2007 the business opened a tearoom – just in time for the farm shop's Christmas rush as well as passing cyclists and walkers.

The couple have also agreed to allow a cycle hire company based in nearby Delamere Forest to keep some of its bikes at the Acton Bridge barn, so that people can take one-way hires along the route – driving traffic to both businesses.

And Belinda thinks the concept can be developed further. "If they could link up the Anderton Boat Lift with Delamere Forest, that would be awesome. Both locations are honey pots for tourists," she says. "Its about getting people to come back again and again."

Elsewhere, the Mersey Waterfront regional park has been in operation since 2002. It contains more than 70 miles of coastline and takes in the River Mersey, its estuary, and parts of the River Dee and Southport. It also covers major locations around the estuary

A better place for business

How a family run business in Cheshire is benefiting from the Weaver Valley regional park.

including Liverpool's port and airport, the city centre waterfront and the Wirral waterfront; as well as tourism hot spots like Southport, New Brighton and West Kirby.

According to its director, Peter Morton, Mersey Waterfront is different to other regional parks in the Northwest. "There is a heavy concentration of urban regeneration within the park," he says. "The area has lots of beautiful coastline and also this huge maritime heritage and business sector."

The organisation is working with big private companies, such as Peel Holdings – a major landowner in the area. "There is a lot of investment in commercial property and development – there is a huge concentration of that on or close to the waterfront," says Morton.

He hopes that by improving the waterfront with new developments and making it a more desirable place to visit, smaller local businesses such as cafes and restaurants will benefit from increased footfall. "We have a real ambition to bring more business to the waterfront locality," says Morton.



THE GREEN POUND

“The economy of the Solway Firth rests on its distinctive natural assets in more ways than one”

New research is teasing out the deep links between the economy and the environment – creating major opportunities for environmental projects. Not least in the Northwest’s regional parks.

Each summer, as the wild Atlantic salmon makes its journey from the feeding grounds off Greenland to its native rivers in Britain to spawn, a dying breed of men stand ready to catch the king of fish. Some of the last remaining of them stake out their poke nets and haaf nets on the shifting sands of the Solway Firth, as they have done for a thousand years. Theirs is a livelihood that is profoundly tied to this beautiful and unforgiving landscape.

But even as the fishermen struggle to earn a living, it has become clear that the economy of the Solway Firth rests on its distinctive natural assets in more ways than one.

“It was the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001 that started things off,” says Brian Irving, manager of the Solway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). “The countryside was closed all summer and for the first time it was clear why people were visiting the Northwest – it was for the natural environment. When the countryside was closed, the ‘visitor spend’ dried up.”

The firth is as far north as you can go in the Northwest. Cross the River Nith and you’re in Scotland. On the English side much of the firth falls within the Solway Coast AONB. It’s an area famed for its stunning sunsets, sand dunes, bird life and salt marshes. Not to

mention its peat bogs – it has the largest density of raised peat bogs in the UK, nearly 1,000 hectares of which are classified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest for their important ecology.

The Peatlands for People project was born in 2000 as a way to protect these peatlands – particularly from being drained for farming or extracted for the garden industry. Bringing together the various organisations working in the area, such as the RSPB, Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency, Natural England and Solway Coast AONB, it has been highly successful. Now a successor scheme, the Solway Firth Wetlands project, is seeking funding.

“To find funding for natural assets – of which the Northwest has many – is very difficult,” says Brian. “Because it’s difficult to show how a natural asset is bringing money into the economy. “The thing with natural assets is that there’s no primary focus for measuring the financial impact. It’s not like putting bums on seats at a theatre, where you can count the number of tickets sold.”

“People visit an area for the natural assets and they spend money, but it’s all to third party businesses. The natural assets are free, but the spin-offs to the local economy are absolutely massive.”

Solway Coast AONB needs funding of around £2.5 million to continue its wetlands projects. It’s in negotiations with the Heritage Lottery Fund for around 75 per cent of the money, for which it will not need to show any economic outputs. But for the

Words Matthew Sutcliffe Photographs Colin McPherson

remaining 25 per cent the most likely target is the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA), whose £1.5 billion budget over three years makes it a crucial regional funding body for many environmental projects. With a clear focus on the region’s economy, however, the NWDA expects to see evidence of economic impacts before it commits to investment.

For help, the Peatlands for People project turned to Natural Economy Northwest, a three-year project co-funded by the NWDA, Natural England and the SITA Landfill Trust. Over the last two years it has commissioned a series of groundbreaking studies that have helped identify the links between the environment and the economy.

Will Williams is the programme director of Natural Economy Northwest. He explains: “We found that the [Peatlands for People] project invests about £1 million a year – money that goes straight into the economy of northern Cumbria.

“We worked with them and said, ‘Hold on, what’s the social and economic benefit of this project?’ With help from the Rural Innovation consultancy, we repositioned what started out

as an environmental project in social and economic terms. This project delivers sustainable economic growth.

“This is a new methodology – people who fund development projects are interested in the environment but need to know what they will get for their money.”

Brian Irving is in no doubt about the value of the new approach.

“It allows me to see an opportunity, create a project and go to pots of money that are based on developing the economy – because that’s where most of the money is. There is far more money in budgets for economic development than in budgets purely for environmental restoration and improvement. The difference is off the graph, a completely differently magnitude.

“If we can’t show the economic benefits we don’t get the cash. Now with this new approach the NWDA can see that our projects are worth supporting because they do bring in visitor spend and create jobs.”

[CONTINUED OVER]

“Altogether over 100,000 jobs are supported by the environment in the Northwest.”



If the people like Brian Irving, who run environmental projects, increasingly understand the need to quantify the economic impact of their work, then there's also a flip side, which is that the people responsible for investing public money increasingly understand that the environment does indeed drive the economy.

As Mark Atherton, head of sustainable development and climate change at the NWDA, explains: "We understand that the natural environment has intrinsic economic value in terms of making good places to live, encouraging inward investment or alleviating the impact of climate change and flooding. The task is to put a figure on it."

Added impetus comes from the fact that the government is encouraging many public sector organisations to move towards a more evaluative approach. "The regional development agencies are rightly being asked to evaluate the economic impact of their work," says Atherton. "We need a better understanding of the value of investing in the environment if we're going to continue to do so."

The Gross Value Added (GVA) from the environment to the economy of the Northwest is about three per cent, or just under £3 billion per year, according to research from 2006. It's a key economic measure, but as Will Williams at Natural Economy Northwest warns, "that figure doesn't truly reflect the value of the environment to the economy. If you could include things like the way the environment creates the conditions for prosperity, increases economic security and provides 'ecosystem services', the picture for GVA would be much clearer."

The NWDA's newest report, *The Economic Value of*

Property values: influence of parks

How nearby green spaces can enhance property values. The figures show the uplift for different types of property.

	DETACHED	FLAT	NON-DETACHED
CITY PARK	19.97%	7.54%	2.93%
LOCAL PARK	9.62%	7.92%	9.44%
OPEN SPACE	2.71%	4.70%	0.44%

Source: Neil Dunse 007, Urban Parks, Open Space and Residential Property Values, RICS

The annual value of forests in the UK in terms of recreation and landscape value equates to some £400m. In the Northwest the annual value has been estimated at £35m.

Green Infrastructure, was formerly unveiled by Hazel Blears, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, at an event in Manchester on October 27th.

It lays out 11 keys ways in which the environment underpins the regional economy, including GVA, tourism, land and property values, labour productivity, health and wellbeing, and protection against floods and the impact of climate change. It also provides hard evidence from case studies – like the fact that the Northwest's woodlands are worth around £35 million per year to the regional economy in tourism and landscape value, for example. In urban areas, houses close to parks are worth eight per cent more than similar houses further away. Agriculture creates around 40,000 jobs in the region. Altogether over 100,000 jobs are supported by the environment in the Northwest, according to research quoted in the report.

Williams explains: "This report puts beyond doubt that there are economic benefits [of the environment], articulates them, and allows us to move on to the next step – how do we ensure that we have quality environments?"

How do we make sure that we help those people leading environmental projects to integrate ideas from this report into their planning?"

In fact, Williams and his team are tackling the question from both sides. As well as working with projects on the ground, such as Peatlands for People, they are ensuring that their research is embedded into the NWDA's Single Regional Economic Strategy. "Getting recognition from the NWDA of the importance and benefits of integrating the natural economy into sustainable economic growth is a real milestone for us," says Williams.

"The bottom line for our work is to optimise the economic benefits from the natural environment. That's the challenge for us."



PHOTOGRAPHS:

TOP LEFT: A forest in the Peak District National Park
 RIGHT: Witton Weavers Way in Lancashire (Jill Jennings)
 BOTTOM LEFT: Lake viewpoint and ospreys at Bassenthwaite (Lake District Osprey Project)
 BOTTOM RIGHT: Moston Vale before and after.



Visitor economy: Bassenthwaite ospreys

Ospreys are one of Britain's rarest and most spectacular birds. In 2001, after hard work by a handful of enthusiasts, a pair of ospreys settled in a purpose built nest on the edge of Bassenthwaite Lake near Keswick. They reared a single chick – the first ospreys to breed in the Lake District for 150 years.

The ospreys have returned every year, fledging a total of 13 chicks between 2001 and 2007. But they have also attracted half a million visitors, leading to two dedicated viewing areas and even their own special Osprey Bus.

Around 100,000 people visit the ospreys each season. A study in 2003 found that these visitors spent £1.68m, of which £420,000 was directly attributable to the ospreys. This spending supported the equivalent of 34 local jobs over the four months of the osprey breeding season.

The ospreys' return was the culmination of several years' work by the Forestry Commission, RSPB and the Lake District National Park Authority.

Land values: Bold Moss

At the former Bold Colliery on the outskirts of St Helens, derelict industrial land has been transformed into the Bold Moss community woodland. A report by the District Valuer in 2004 concluded that the woodland had "directly and uniquely enhanced existing property values in the surrounding area by £15 million. In addition, as a result of the regeneration initiative, new development to the value of £75 million has been realised." This includes almost 600 new homes.

The report's success lies not only in uncovering £90m worth of added value – its master-stroke was in commissioning its research from the District Valuer, an independent assessor whose figures are extremely robust and reliable.

When first Bold Colliery and then the nearby power station closed in 1985, over 800 jobs were lost and 130 hectares of land left derelict. The creation of Bold Moss community woodland, a ten-year project led by Groundwork, provides vivid evidence of the economic value of environmental regeneration.

Inward investment: Portland Basin Green Business Park

Portland Basin Green Business Park in Ashton, Tameside, has succeeded in levering in £1,820,000 of private sector funding on the back of £424,000 public sector investment, according to a report released by Groundwork and the Centre for Local Economic Strategies.

Regeneration: Newlands

Newlands is one of the largest green regeneration schemes in the UK, turning large areas of brownfield land in the Northwest into community woodlands. With total investment of £59m from the NWDA, it aims to regenerate over 900 hectares of brownfield land.

At Moston Vale in north Manchester, a former landfill site has been transformed into

Working with a group of closely located businesses, the project had a number of different economic impacts. It helped the businesses to improve resource efficiency and thereby raise productivity – it resulted in 11 waste reduction schemes, 2 recycling schemes and 34 water saving initiatives. It also improved security and enhanced 28,000m² of land, helping to attract new businesses and ultimately new jobs.

a 21-hectare area of 'urban countryside', with solar powered lighting, woodland areas and sports facilities. Moston Vale is now a quality setting for investment, with economic inclusion projects also critical to its future management.

The Newlands programme was also the impetus behind the development of the Public Benefit Recording System, an innovative way of recording the positive impacts of public projects.





Bay of light

Source talks to Susannah Bleakley of the Morecambe Bay Partnership, the driving force behind the proposed Morecambe Bay and Duddon Estuary regional park.

Q What's your connection with Morecambe Bay?

In the early 1990s, as a student at Edinburgh University, I was looking at environmental conflict for my Masters' dissertation. Morecambe Bay was a natural choice, as my parents had just moved to the area.

I was really drawn to the local fishing communities, full of larger-than-life characters, and so proud of their traditional way of life. Professionally, I've led the Morecambe Bay Partnership's work since 1997. I've got great enthusiasm for the place as a whole, and I want to see the communities around the bay thriving.

Q What's so special about this area?

Morecambe Bay is a big place, large enough for all of Manchester within the M60 to fit inside at least twice. The size and scale gives it a grandeur and sense of openness that is relaxing to the soul.

The view across the bay from either side has a foreground of changing intertidal channels, with a backdrop of hills – whether the Lake District or the Pennines. Islands like Piel and Chapel add further interest to this view.

Most of the Northwest coast to the south is low-lying, but we have headlands and viewpoints from which you can really appreciate these vast panoramas.

Earlier this year, visitors from the Regional Parks Xchange described the bay as 'elemental' – light and water, sea and sky. To experience Morecambe Bay with all its multi-layered sea- and soundscapes prompts a strong emotional reaction, and engenders a sense of freedom. Yet this wilderness is only a short distance from our urban centres.

Q What's your vision for the area?

I'd like the whole bay to be better connected, with really high quality transport infrastructure and new ferry links from Heysham to Fleetwood and across to Barrow.

The existing railway links the communities on the north and east of the bay, but we need to significantly improve some facilities and connections in order to make the whole bay area work, and provide it with an integrated green transport network.

A coastal path exists, but is neither promoted nor well maintained. Signage could definitely be improved. The proposed Morecambe Bay cycle route would also be a great asset.

Something hardwired into the human condition draws us to the coast – Morecambe Bay has lots to offer, but it certainly needs to lift its game. The facilities are patchy and its assets are undersold.

We're pushing for local authorities and other agencies in the bay to work together and formalise a regional park grouping.

Q What are the major obstacles you face?

The 'park' part of the term 'regional park' is unhelpful and misleading, especially in Cumbria where it tends to be associated with planning restrictions. We need to find a way to express the concept of a regional area of regeneration activity which will bring benefits to the economy and to communities, while still celebrating the natural space and wildness of Morecambe Bay.

The bay is split in half by the Lancashire/Cumbria county boundary, and in some places this is a problem. A regional park would be a really valuable aid to better collaboration, but the practicalities are doubly complicated by the administrative set up. Functionally, though, the place works as a cohesive unit, with continuous social, communication and economic links.

However, the biggest obstacle is probably cash and selling the concept. I still need to show the politicians that the idea is irresistible and has great added value.

Q What's the bay's best-kept secret?

The whole place is so little known – it has a low profile and a rather melancholic image. It's time to change that, though, as there are

some great places: the islands of Barrow, for example – Piel Island, which has its own castle, and a king with a huge spirit of enthusiasm. Walney Island, in the shadow of Barrow's shipbuilding cranes, has a maritime character – travel south and the field boundaries are built from beach boulders. There's drama to the western shore, while families of shelduck and eider duck scuttle in the sheltered eastern marshes. Eiders are great, I love their charming, cheeky call.

Hoad Hill, Hampsfell and Arnside Knott all give you knockout panoramas for only a little climbing effort. Humphrey Head is full of mystery and folklore, magic and myth. It claims the last English wolf, and today is the home of otters. It's right in the heart of the bay, and if you take just a short walk along the sands, you get a sense of the beautiful enormity of eternity.

I always get excited by a trip to Sunderland Point – so very much its own place – with its character coming from the isolation as the entry road is covered by the highest tides, when the whole place is cut off for a few hours at a time.

Then there are the great family beaches on the Duddon Estuary at Haverigg, Hodbarrow and Roanhead. What are you waiting for?

Comment: Natural England wants people to enjoy better access to the coast. The Northwest Coastal Trail regional park will help.

STEPPING OUT

The Northwest coast is an important part of our regional identity; valued for its scenery, wildlife, and as a place for relaxation and enjoyment. But how accessible is the coast in the Northwest, and the rest of England? People often assume that they already have a right of access to coastal land, but this is far from true.

The draft Marine Bill proposes powers that would require Natural England to secure a long distance walking route around the whole of the English coast, as well as an accessible margin of land close to the route for people to spread out and explore, rest or picnic.

In order to achieve this, we've published a scheme that explains in more detail how coastal access will work in practice. For example, we'll focus on filling in the gaps in existing access, providing a better quality experience (including 'spreading room' en route) and improving the fit with other land uses.

Obviously, the new rights should take account of the unique coastal

situation we're faced with, and be capable of 'rolling back' automatically with any future erosion. Building on the excellent work of environmental stewardship schemes, we'd also like to see intensive farming moved back from the coast, and especially from cliff edges.

Over 80 per cent of the Northwest coast is included in European Sites designations for wildlife importance. Some of these sites have real sensitivities to the presence of people, or to particular activities. We want to protect and enhance the coastal environment, as well as opening up access, so we're looking to develop assessment methods that will help to safeguard these vital areas.

Access to and along the coast can be a highly complex, controversial issue, with both coastal users and property owners having equally compelling legal rights to use and enjoy our coastline.

The provisions for coastal access within the draft Marine Bill have been reviewed by both Commons and Lords committees, both of which supported the overall objectives, but were sceptical of the estimated costs. They've recommended stronger safeguards for affected landowners, for example providing a third party appeals process.

Natural England believes that there should be a working presumption against paying compensation for any new right of access. The measures set out in the draft Marine Bill will simply provide new rights of access over land, and won't be depriving landowners of their property.



Of course, we'll consult with landowners to determine the most appropriate siting of the coastal route, and any other appropriate conditions of access. By being sensitive to local issues, we hope to minimise the impact on property or businesses.

We expect that the Bill will include provision for affected landowners and occupiers to make representations to the secretary of state if they disagree with our final proposals for their section of the coast.

At the moment we're part way through a comprehensive audit of the existing access situation. Once that's complete, we'll have a clear idea of the scale of new access that's needed, so we'll be able to refine our estimates of how much the changes will cost to implement.

We're especially lucky in the Northwest that we will be able to benefit from the parallel work of the North West Coastal Trail team, currently a regional park project in its own right, which can help to bring together a wide range of partners to maximise the economic, social and environmental benefits to the region.

The next move for Natural England is to publish a full first draft of the scheme, which we'll do when the Marine Bill is introduced to parliament. Once the bill receives Royal Assent, we'll finalise the scheme in consultation with partners and key interest groups before sending it to the secretary of state for approval.

I believe that our current proposals offer a creative and flexible package that will open up the Northwest's fabulous and varied coast for the public to enjoy whilst protecting the rights of landowners.

Liz Newton is regional director for Natural England in the Northwest.

“We want to protect and enhance the coastal environment, as well as opening up access.”



REGIONAL PARKS XCHANGE

The Northwest's nine regional parks are working to improve the environment and strengthen the economy in locations throughout the region. They can be found in every county from Cheshire to Cumbria.

The Regional Parks Xchange programme brings together the people working in regional parks across England's Northwest.



Find out more at www.rpx.org.uk