

PETER BATEY
LEVER PROFESSOR OF TOWN AND REGIONAL PLANNING
LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY

A MAN WITH A PLAN



TURNING POINTS

- 1969**
After graduating in geography from Sheffield University, arrived at the Department of Civic Design at Liverpool University to study for a master's degree in planning.
- 1975**
Returned to Liverpool University as a lecturer.
- 1989**
Appointed as Lever Professor of Town and Regional Planning at Liverpool University, the oldest chair in urban planning in the world.
- 1992**
Took on a commission to direct the Mersey Estuary Management Plan, the first strategy to be prepared for a heavily industrialised river estuary in Western Europe.
- 1997**
Began a six year stint as Dean of the Faculty of Social and Environmental Studies at Liverpool University.
- 2003**
Joined the board of the Mersey Waterfront Park.

"For a professor of planning, Liverpool in 2003 is an exciting place to be." So says Peter Batey, Lever Professor of Town and Regional Planning at Liverpool University and, until recently, Dean of the Faculty of Social and Environmental Studies.

It's summer and the students have all gone home. Sitting in his quiet office at the university not much more than a month after Liverpool was named Capital of Culture 2008, Professor Batey reels off the list of major events that will propel Liverpool and Merseyside into the headlines over the coming years: a nomination for parts of the city centre and Pier Head to be designated a World Heritage site, the Open Golf Championship in 2006 and the 800th anniversary of the city charter in 2007, among others.

Professor Batey is himself involved in one of the most ambitious regeneration projects on Merseyside, and indeed in the whole Northwest. He is on the board of the Mersey Waterfront Park, the organisation based in Liverpool's famous Cunard building that aims to make the most of the assets on the Mersey's waterfront.

Explains Professor Batey, "It's not a park in the sense of some grass across the road. It's actually a huge network of linked features that stretches 70 km from Southport to Runcorn on the Mersey estuary and takes in most of the Wirral coast."

Professor Batey is a distinguished planner and regional scientist whose academic career began when he took up a lectureship at Liverpool in 1975. This followed a brief career in local government that saw him working in Lancashire and Greater Manchester during the administrative shake up of the early 1970s. In the 1990s he led the research project that produced the Mersey Estuary Management Plan. A decade later the plan would help inspire the waterfront park.

"The need for a plan for the estuary was quite important at that time because we had all these big development proposals coming through, like building a barrage across the river."

What the researchers encountered on the estuary was a complex web of issues covering shipping, economic regeneration, physical regeneration, recreation, tourism and nature conservation. Says Professor Batey, "Our job was to

use our skills as planners to see the picture as a whole and how the individual elements fitted together."

Batey acknowledges that he was lucky to work in a department in which people were prepared to work on the project not just for what they could get out of it but also for what they could put into it. It's an attitude he's tried to encourage in other departments in the faculty during his six years as Dean.

In 1996, after four years of research, the plan became the Mersey Estuary Strategy and was launched by the then Minister for Merseyside, Robin Squires. When, several years later, the Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) was searching for headline projects for the region, the idea to create a regional park based on the Mersey estuary bubbled to the surface. Postgraduate students in Professor Batey's department carried out an implementation study and ultimately the Mersey

"We weren't seen as rabid environmentalists or as being in the pocket of people only concerned with development."

Waterfront Regional Park was born, quickly becoming a key element of plans to regenerate the region with a budget of over £8 million from the NWDA in the first three years.

Nowadays Professor Batey is an influential figure on Merseyside and in the Northwest. He chairs the annual Mersey Estuary Forum, which grew out of meetings to develop the management plan. It's a role he enjoys. "You can be provocative if you want to be, as long as you maintain a constructive dialogue. Occasionally you need to jolt people out of some pretty silly attitudes." He also chairs the Mersey Strategy Steering Group, which oversees the implementation of the Mersey Strategy. He sits on the Council of the Mersey Basin Campaign, the organisation that provided the overarching structure behind the original plan and subsequent strategy. And since 1995 he has chaired Alt 2000+, the first of the Campaign's 19 local River Valley Initiatives to be established.

Despite his links to the Mersey and its tributaries, Professor Batey insists, "If I'm an expert on anything it's got nothing to do with rivers." That, he says, is actually an advantage. "If I was an expert on one aspect, the chances are I'd be obsessed with it, whereas what actually appeals to me is the connections between things, and making partnerships work."

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