

# The Mersey Basin Campaign

## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the creation of the Mersey Basin Campaign

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the North West of England became the world's first industrialised region. The rapid industrial growth created a high level of demand for labour and thus brought about very rapid expansion of urban areas. Domestic sewerage systems were based on untreated disposal directly into rivers and sea. Manufacturing industry became established along the region's rivers and new canal system, which became the major conduits for removing and transporting industrial waste.

By 1869 the Mersey and the Irwell, which in 1721 supported fish as a commercial industry, had become so grossly polluted that a Royal Commission on Rivers Pollution was appointed to study and report on the problem. In so far as the problems were recognised, little priority was attached to addressing them by the municipal authorities. Certainly as late as the 1980s, the Mersey was the most polluted estuary and river system in the UK. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressive changes to legislation and institutions, including the formation of water authorities in 1974, brought about significant improvement but, even so, towards the end of the century, the region's waterways were among the most polluted in the world, and industrial decline was manifest in dereliction, poor housing and growing social problems.

These problems came to a head in 1981 when disturbances in Toxteth, an inner-city area of Liverpool, turned into full-blown riots. In the wake of the riots, government policy began to focus on the problems of inner cities, and of post-industrial dereliction. A number of targeted regeneration programmes and projects followed, including the Mersey Basin Campaign.

The Campaign was established in 1985, with government backing and a 25-year initial life span. Its role was to address the problems of water quality and associated landward dereliction of the River Mersey and its tributaries. (It has since expanded to include the River Ribble in Lancashire). The development of the Campaign broke new ground in British administrative practice in a uniquely collaborative programme founded on a personal initiative of a government minister, Michael Heseltine, then Secretary of State for the Environment. In a deliberately provocative call for action, Heseltine wrote this about the Mersey in 1983:

*"Today the river is an affront to the standards a civilised society should demand of its environment. Untreated sewage, pollutants, noxious discharges all contribute to water conditions and environmental standards that are perhaps the single most deplorable feature of this critical part of England."*

## The aims of the Mersey Basin Campaign

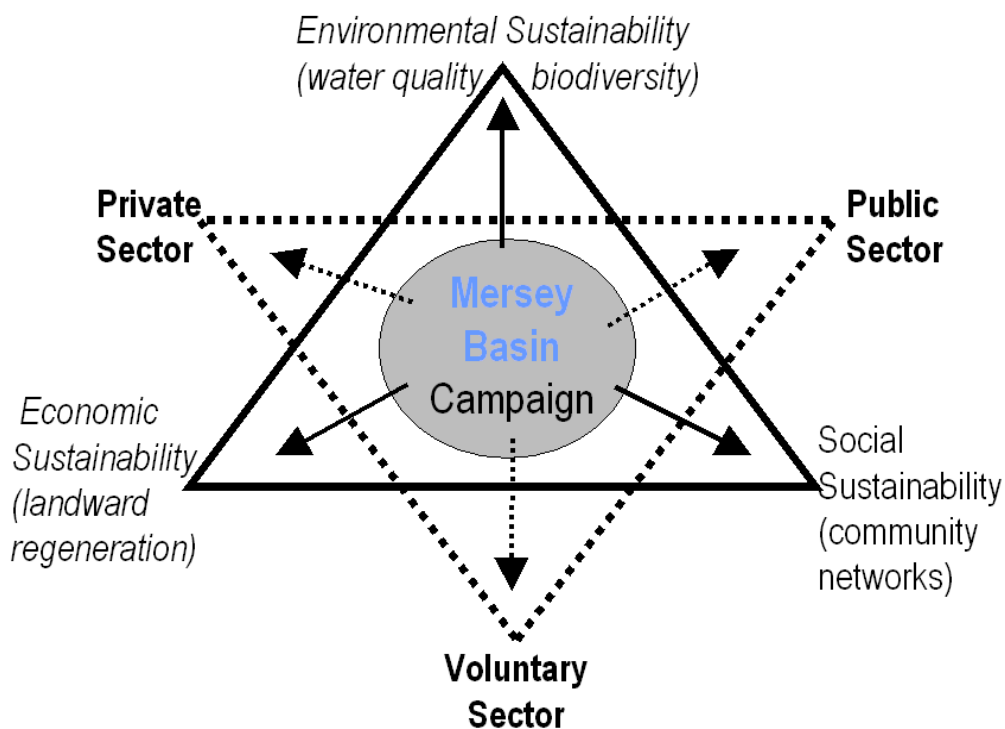
In the same letter, Heseltine argued the case for a comprehensive programme of environmental improvements:

'To rebuild the urban areas of the North West we need to clean and clear the ravages of the past, to recreate the opportunities that attracted earlier generations to come and live there and invest there...A Mersey Basin restored to a quality of environmental standards fit for the end of this century will be of incalculable significance in the creation of new employment.'

He recognised, quite clearly, the interdependence of economic prosperity and quality of environment, with the Campaign conceived as a 'sustainable development' approach long before these words were in common currency. This translated into three key aims for the Campaign, identified at the start of the initiative:

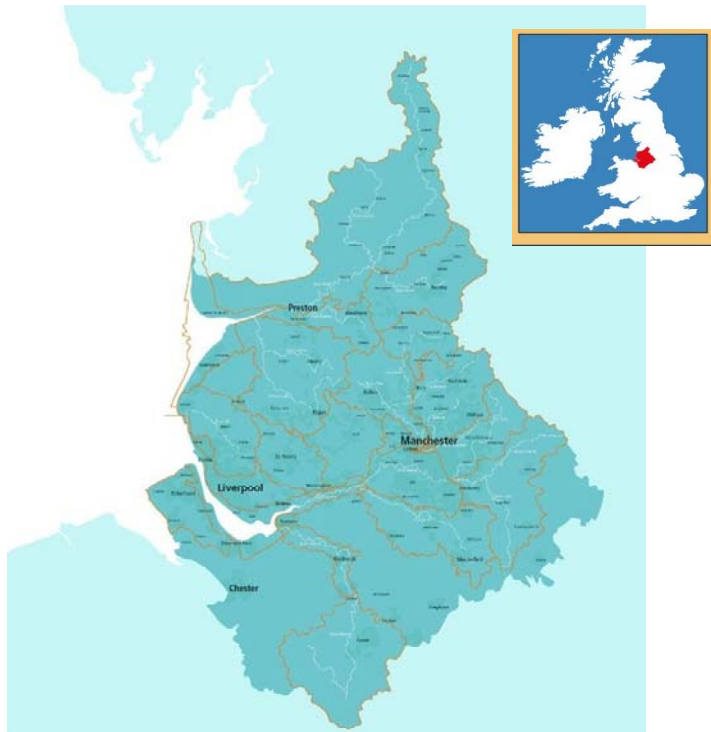
- to improve river quality across the Mersey Basin to at least a 'fair' standard by 2010 so that all rivers and streams are clean enough to support fish;
- to stimulate attractive waterside developments for business, recreation, housing, tourism and heritage; and,
- to encourage people living and working in the Mersey Basin to value and cherish their watercourses and waterfront environments.

These three simple, but clear, aims have remained the same throughout the life of the Campaign. The relationship between these aims, the Campaign and its partners is expressed in the following diagram:



### **The location of the Mersey Basin Campaign**

The Mersey Basin Campaign covers two river basins in the North West of England: the catchment of the River Mersey and the contiguous river catchment to the north, the River Ribble and its tributaries.



### **THE EMERGENCE OF THE PARTNERSHIP**

The scale and complexity of the clean-up programme required in order to deal effectively with the gross water pollution and waterside dereliction was too great for any one authority or agency. (At the time, there was no national environmental programme for water quality improvements; that would not come until water privatisation in 1989). A civil servant heavily involved in setting up the Campaign, Peter Walton, commented in 1983:

“The task of cleaning up the Mersey – the watercourses and waterside areas of the whole catchment – is a comprehensive and formidable one. The task calls for a team effort, in which the inputs of all sectors encourage each other and generate a momentum of improvement greater than could be achieved otherwise.”

This recognition that a combination of public, private and voluntary sector action was necessary to bring about the total process of renewal for the water and bordering land led to a new partnership being formed in 1985. At the time, most partnerships operated just between the public (government) and private (business) sectors. The Mersey Basin Campaign partnership was conceived differently from the start. It was organised around an independent Chair leading a unit from the government’s Department of the Environment.

Key partners were brought in, including the (then publicly-owned) water authority, local government authority representatives and professional officers with an advisory role from a number of non-governmental organisations.

## FIVE VERBS USED TO DESCRIBE HOW THE CAMPAIGN OPERATES

Five verbs capture the essence of the Campaign and the work it does together with its partners:

### ***Influence***

The Campaign seeks to *influence* opinion and priorities among stakeholders, politicians, government officials, the business community and the local population by diplomatic means. This influence is felt at all geographical levels: local, sub-regional, regional, national and international.

### ***Enable***

The Campaign strives to forge connections between policy and action, to *enable* projects to be delivered by the Campaign itself and the full range of partners.

### ***Mediate***

By acting as a *mediator*, the Campaign is able to identify common ground between partners that enables them to work together more productively and effectively.

### ***Enhance***

The Campaign seeks to *enhance* the work of partners by raising their aspirations and identifying circumstances in which the Campaign's involvement is likely to lead to timely, better coordinated and higher quality outcomes.

### ***Communicate***

The Campaign *communicates* with a wide range of different audiences in several ways: in putting its own messages across; in providing a forum for partners to discuss and debate matters of mutual interest; and in listening and responding to views expressed by partners about the Campaign and its activities.

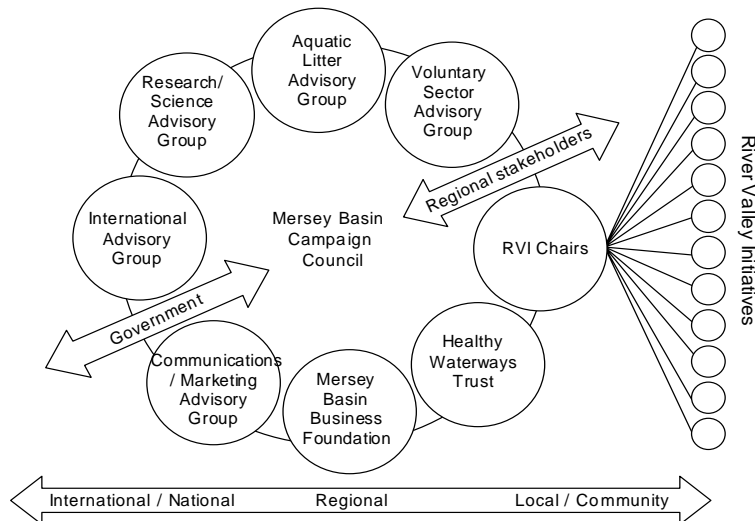
## GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND DECISION-MAKING

### **The organisational structure of the Mersey Basin Campaign**

The organisation of Mersey Basin Campaign has changed over its life span to reflect regional changes and developments and to build upon experience. Two major changes in structure have taken place over its 22-year history to reflect the growing and changing needs of the Campaign and the region.

1. In 1996, Mersey Basin Campaign gained some independence from government as it became an 'arm's length' management organisation'. This 'privatising' was considered to be necessary to allow the Campaign to be more effective for engagement of the private and voluntary sectors. Although now at arm's length, the Mersey Basin Campaign still retains its part sponsorship from the UK central government, and has enjoyed the ongoing support of successive governments since its inception in 1985.
2. A review of the partnership in 2001 brought about further changes to the governance of the Campaign, allowing even wider participation in the Campaign and its work through changes to the organisational structure, and the development of a constitution for the Campaign Council.

These two fundamental changes have led the Campaign to develop from a government-run initiative, led by an independent Chair, to its current partnership status which is discussed below.



**Organisational structure of the Mersey Basin Campaign**

### The partnership approach

The Campaign partnership in 2007 is based upon active involvement through a number of organisational structures (see diagram).

This partnership governance can be summarised as:

- the Council, as the formally constituted, non-executive governing body of the Campaign, determines strategic guidance and approves the annual corporate plan;
- the Mersey Basin Business Foundation (MBBF) is a mechanism for business and financial management, contracts and the employment of the Mersey Basin Campaign staff. It is the legal personality of the Campaign;
- the Healthy Waterways Trust is the Campaign's charitable arm and is a registered environmental body; and,
- Advisory Groups providing focus for more specific policy development and guidance for the work of the Campaign.

The Campaign structure also allows spatial flexibility in the partnerships. Regional stakeholders play key roles within the Campaign Council and MBBF. Local stakeholders partner the Campaign through its Action Partnerships. Action Partnerships reflect local challenges and needs and are composed of key local partners, with the Campaign employing a number of Action Partnership co-ordinators to support the individual steering groups and to take decisions forward through fund raising, managing projects, events and awareness raising activities.

### The decision makers and the Campaign managers

#### ***The Council***

The Council was set up as the governing body for the Mersey Basin Campaign within which key regional stakeholders provide strategic direction and policy guidance to the Campaign in delivering its objectives. It is an unincorporated stakeholder partnership of 38 representatives with two types of members: partners, with voting rights; and, advisers/observers without voting rights.

Members of the Council are appointed as representatives for their organisations, sectors or area of interest. Core partners on the Council include representatives of the water company (United Utilities); the environmental regulator (Environment Agency); local government; the Regional (economic) Development Agency; and a number of other public bodies (for example,

Natural England). The voluntary sector is also represented on the Council, with the Voluntary Sector Forum, and advisory group to the Campaign Council, providing representation.

### ***The Mersey Basin Business Foundation***

The Mersey Basin Business Foundation, a non-profit making limited company, carries out the task of overall operational management for the Campaign. Directors are partners from industry, based on an initial partnership between the Campaign, ICI (in 1987), Shell (1988) and Unilever (1989). MBBF was launched as a separate and increasingly important arm of the Campaign in 1992 and now has 12 members. It actively seeks to expand the number of businesses linked to the Campaign and specific Campaign projects. Member organisations are encouraged to incorporate Campaign objectives into their daily activities and business practices. The MBBF is the recipient of the core government grant to the Campaign.

These two structures (the Campaign Council and MBBF) enable partners to work with the Campaign at different levels and degrees of commitment. The MBC has found that one of the keys to successful partnerships is ensuring there are many opportunities to build relationships with partners and connections at all organisational levels, from the top of an organisation down. For long-term commitment, the Campaign has found it essential to establish a relationship at the top of the organisation, thereby ensuring commitment throughout that organisation.

## **BUILDING TRUST AND DEVELOPING A LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIP**

One potential stumbling block to good partnership working is lack of consistency between partners' objectives. Partnerships such as the Mersey Basin Campaign bring together disparate groups and sectors to work together towards a shared mission. The Campaign has its own unique objectives and mission. Partner organisations, especially core partners, generally have objectives that complement at least one of the three key Campaign objectives.

One of the strengths of the partnership has been the relationship between United Utilities Water plc and the Campaign. Prior to water privatisation, the North West Water Authority (NWWA) had been investing to deal, *inter alia*, with the crude waste discharges to the Mersey. Collaborating with the Campaign, industry matched NWWA's investment, cleaning up its own discharges.

On privatisation of water services in 1989, the then North West Water Ltd (which later became part of United Utilities plc) was charged with delivering a £2.2 billion, five-year investment programme to improve the region's water infrastructure and make inroads into the worst of the region's water pollution. The company's objectives mirrored those of the Campaign, and for the first time, the necessary investment existed to make these objectives a reality. The company and Campaign have enjoyed a constructive, collaborative relationship ever since, across all levels of the organisations. For United Utilities, the Campaign provides a broader context for environmental improvements, helping make connections to waterside regeneration and providing third-party publicity of the United Utilities' water quality achievements. For the Campaign, United Utilities is a core funder, the main contributor to improving water quality, and a source of support and technical advice.

But how do partners collaborate if their objectives are not the same? By establishing and identifying the benefits in working together the complementary nature of the respective organisations objectives becomes more focused and allows the partners to recognise the added-value in working together. In the case of the Mersey Basin Campaign, collaboration on a project basis over the years has allowed trust to develop between the partners through working together, producing positive results and both partners obtaining benefits from working together rather than individually.

For example, businesses are keen to work with organisations that can supply niches they do not supply themselves, for example delivering community engagement. These opportunities enable the partnership and private sector to develop shared vocabularies, finding overlaps and understanding. Such an approach enables the delivery of complex regeneration projects, which a single partner alone cannot realise.

Only once the benefits have been established can trust develop between the partners. The government origins and continued support for the Mersey Basin Campaign has provided the basis from which a good reputation has been developed. This reputation has developed over time from building upon achievements in water quality improvements within the catchments and by having a good track record in project delivery. This has been achieved through working with the partners gaining continued improvements in water quality in the two catchments and large-scale regeneration programmes, especially targeted at derelict waterside environments.

## **DELIVERING ACTION**

### **How are decisions taken forward and actions put into practice?**

The Campaign is essentially a project-based organisation, with projects delivered at the catchment or sub-catchment scale. The decision makers at the catchment scale are the Council members. However, at the sub-catchment scale that decision making transfers to an individual steering group of the Campaign's Action Partnerships, where partners play a key role through the steering groups for each Partnership, or through specific projects and action within the partnership's work. For example, a partner may provide the Chair for an Action Partnership steering group, leading the local initiative. Alternatively, a partner may participate within a specific project being undertaken by an Action Partnership co-ordinator, such as a clean-up event or habitat rehabilitation programme. The Campaign has found this action-led partnership approach has been successful in maintaining interest in the Campaign and its work by partners. This organisational structure provides a framework in which all partners can gain from their own inputs.

### **HOW HAS THE CAMPAIGN PERFORMED?**

In this section the Campaign's performance is examined using a combination of formal evaluation studies and other relevant material. The assessment is arranged according to the three main aims of the Campaign.

*Aim 1: to improve river quality across the Mersey Basin to at least a 'fair' standard by 2010 so that all rivers and streams are clean enough to support fish*

"... the Campaign should be credited with playing a significant role under this aim. This has primarily been through its ability to bring projects together, develop partnerships, become involved in projects, promote the benefits of water quality improvements, and organise clean-ups at the local level." **(EKOS Consulting (2006) 'Evaluation of the Mersey Basin Campaign: report to the Government Office North West')**

"Porpoise, dolphins and seals are now regularly spotted in the Estuary and salmon were recently discovered to be breeding in the river's headwaters for the first time in living memory." **(Mersey Basin Campaign (2007) 'Making the most of the Mersey: a leisure guide to your Estuary', second edition).**

"In recent years there has been a striking increase in numbers of larger and healthier cod and whiting caught in the Mersey. Flat fish such as plaice, dab, thornback rays and flounder were once rare but these days are commonly found, while bass are now returning to the river." **(Mersey Basin Campaign (2007) 'Making the most of the Mersey: a leisure guide to your Estuary', second edition).**

"Nick Nuttall, United Nations Environment Programme Head of Media Services, has said that the return of wildlife to the Mersey estuary is an inspiration for 'marine dead zones' around the world. He commented that 'the leadership that the North West has shown to address the problems of pollution is exemplary'" **(P.D. Jones (2007) 'The Mersey Estuary: a case of mistaken identity....almost' ECSA Bulletin 51, 12-13)**

*Aim 2: to stimulate attractive waterside developments for business, recreation, housing, tourism and heritage*

“... the past twenty years have seen significant waterside regeneration throughout the North West but particularly in urban settings where the waterside is now seen as being a positive focus for regeneration. The Campaign has played a role in encouraging sustainable waterside regeneration mainly through its involvement in sourcing funding for specific projects such as the EU Artery projects, and particularly in the initiation and development of the Mersey Waterfront Regional Park. The development of effective working relationships with key landowners, developers and major employers such as Peel Holdings has been a key ingredient in this success. The Campaign has been an effective mechanism to bring organisations together and in developing partnership-based solutions to waterside regeneration issues.” **(EKOS Consulting (2006) ‘Evaluation of the Mersey Basin Campaign: report to the Government Office North West’)**

“On the Liverpool side, beyond the waterfront buildings that symbolised the city to generations of seafarers, lie the newly revitalised, World Heritage docklands. Grouped around the key visitor attraction of the Albert Dock you’ll find shops, restaurants and bars, not to mention a national art gallery and two national museums.....Further along the waterfront you will find a chain of renovated docks that have become a focus for watersports, as well as a community of impressive new waterfront homes clustered round the masts that throng the busy marina. From here you can walk or cycle along the promenade almost to Garston, five miles away.” **(Mersey Basin Campaign (2007) ‘Making the most of the Mersey: a leisure guide to your Estuary’, second edition).**

“The urban waterfront in the Mersey Basin has been the key focus for urban regeneration activity in the North West. To a large degree this has been dependent upon continued and sustained water quality improvements, which contribute to the intrinsic attractiveness of these locations. Allied with the targeting of public investment into areas of concentrated dereliction, and the flow of private sector investment, the image of these areas has been transformed.” **(J. Handley et al (1998) ‘The relationship between water quality and economic regeneration in the Mersey Basin’, research report)**

*Aim 3: to encourage people living and working in the Mersey Basin to value and cherish their watercourses and waterfront environments.*

“A wide range of benefits and impacts on awareness and involvement resulting from the work of the Campaign were identified through the study. Their effectiveness has been demonstrated in a number of ways, including:

- Getting people from a variety of levels involved in waterside regeneration
- Ensuring greater involvement at the local level particularly through the Action Partnerships and the Mersey Basin Week
- Providing targeted and engaging public information on water related issues through such mechanisms as the Source Magazine, conferences and sub-regional forums.

The overall diligence and professional approach of the Campaign team has underpinned the achievements.” **(EKOS Consulting (2006) ‘Evaluation of the Mersey Basin Campaign: report to the Government Office North West’)**

“The diverse array of activity which has been developing around the third aim of the Campaign reveals great demand both for the Campaign’s existence and further development. The strong degree of coordination of public, private and voluntary activities and interests through the Campaign is striking, and the water environment is clearly proving to be a common focus for a range of environmental activity.” **(J. Handley, R. Wood and S.J. Kidd (1997) ‘Building a healthier economy through a cleaner environment: mid-term report’)**

“We throughout Europe refer to the Mersey Basin Campaign as an example of what can be achieved... I think the track record speaks for itself and is very impressive both in terms of improving water quality and of bringing a better quality of life to the whole region” **Catherine**



Day, former Director General, Environment Directorate, European Commission, speaking in 2004.

#### WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS?

A number of factors have contributed to the success of the Campaign. These include:

- **The partnership approach** – the Campaign is a partnership that includes government, agencies (such as the Environment Agency), local authorities, businesses – corporate bodies such as United Utilities and, of course, local communities;
- A **clear vision** from inception with an undiluted focus on water, watersides and communities;
- A **realistic timescale** for change to occur: the Campaign was set up as a 25-year initiative;
- **Continued government support** – successive governments and individual ministers have strongly and actively backed the Mersey Basin Campaign;
- **Strategic influencing followed through with delivery** - the Campaign operates at the global, EU, national and regional level but also through 19 locally driven, locally-focused action partnerships (previously called river valley initiatives) working at the grassroots level;
- **An evidence-based organisation**, with strong scientific and technological innovation such as the oxygenation of the Manchester Ship Canal at The Quays at Salford;
- **Resources** – the current five year Asset Management Programme of the water company, United Utilities, exceeds £2.5 billion for 2005 – 2010 investment;
- **Leadership** – the succession of government appointed, independent chairs of the Campaign leading the partnership with determination and drive.

## **APPENDIX 1:**

### **Financial performance of the Campaign**

“The Campaign's ability to utilise its core funding to draw in substantial contributions from other public, private and voluntary sector sources is one of its key strengths.”

**(EKOS Consulting (2006) 'Evaluation of the Mersey Basin Campaign: report to the Government Office North West')**

The Campaign receives annual funding of £0.5m from Central Government, the majority of which is used to pay for staffing costs and overheads. This funding enables the Campaign to draw in income from a wide range of other public and private funding sources for projects and activity. In addition the Campaign receives significant in kind contributions from a range of sources (with a financial value of £3.2m in 2004-05). When these in kind contributions are included, the leverage ratio is 1:9, greater than that achieved by many comparable organisations.

**APPENDIX 2:**

**Chairs of the Mersey Basin Campaign**

**1985-1992** Sir John Tavaré

**1992-1999** Brian Alexander CBE

**1999-2004** Joe Dwek CBE

**2004-2010** Professor Peter Batey