

# source<sup>NW</sup>

WATERS | REGENERATION | ENVIRONMENT | SUSTAINABILITY



## CELEBRITY MAKEOVERS

Lancashire gets the star treatment.

### KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

Lessons in long term maintenance.

### PUBLIC BODIES

Antony Gormley talks about art and regeneration.

### FLOCKING TO THE MERSEY

Our guide to one of Britain's most important winter wildlife havens.

**INTERVIEW** PC Kath Juckes and the Birch Green Dirt Busters

**COMMENT** It's time to move the Mersey





Promoting sustainable water use is one Unilever’s three global sustainability initiatives, alongside sustainable agriculture and sustainable fishing.

Malcolm Bower, winner of a Unilever Dragonfly Award 2005, with members of the Macclesfield Canal Society.

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

Volunteers like Malcolm Bower of the Macclesfield Canal Society, who for over a decade has tended and improved the canal for the benefit of boaters and the local community alike.

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



Anyone who is prepared to pull other people’s litter from the chilly waters of their local river

in autumn so that we can all enjoy a countryside that is clean and pleasant is clearly worthy of our thanks. The surprise is that every October for the last fourteen years, that’s exactly what hundreds of people have indeed done.

They’ve been taking part in the MWH Mersey Basin Week, the biggest week of water related improvements and activities in the Northwest.

The Mersey Basin Campaign, which publishes this magazine, has more reason than most to be grateful to the volunteers of the Northwest. Without their help the Campaign simply could not operate the way it does. Their desire to improve their local environment provides the enthusiasm and hands on help our network of local co-ordinators needs.

Every year we try to do our bit in some small way to honour our volunteers by handing out the Unilever Dragonfly awards, along with a cheque to finance further environmental improvements.

The work of the region’s army of volunteers often goes unsung, but if they weren’t there, we’d notice. To say that they deserve our thanks and appreciation is not a new observation, but it is one that’s worth repeating. *For more on these stories, see pages 8, 9 and 18.*

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Source<sup>NW</sup> is sponsored by



Source<sup>NW</sup> is the magazine of the Mersey Basin Campaign. The campaign works towards better water quality and sustainable waterside regeneration for the rivers and waterways of England’s Northwest.

Cover Tony Wilson and Yvette Livesey (see page 14-17). Photograph by Len Grant.

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**Stars including actor Christopher Eccleston**, athlete Diane Modahl and Premiership footballers from Manchester City, Manchester United and Wigan Athletic have joined a major environmental campaign aiming to make Greater Manchester a leader in tackling climate change.

Campaigners are urging the three million people who live or work in Greater Manchester to take the ‘Manchester is my Planet’ pledge before a G8 climate change event in early November. Each individual will be pledging to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Greater Manchester by 20 per cent before 2010, to help the UK meet its international commitment on climate change.

According to a survey of greenhouse gas emissions for the region, Greater Manchester is responsible for 36 per cent of the carbon dioxide released in the Northwest, with the largest single source of emissions – 23 per cent – coming from domestic households.

“The three million people who live or work in Greater Manchester together have the power to make an important contribution to action on climate change in the UK,” said environment minister Elliot Morley.

“In local neighbourhoods and in our homes, what seem like small changes in behaviour will actually make a huge difference. Government legislation and international treaties have their place, certainly, but Greater Manchester is showing that it’s the people that have the power to make a real and dramatic change.”

People signing up to the pledge are asked to make changes to their lifestyle such as not

# Manchester is my Planet

Celebrities take climate change pledge as three million people are urged to make Manchester the ‘coolest’ city in the world.

leaving electrical appliances on standby, turning down the thermostat by one degree, and thinking twice about making a car journey when they could walk, cycle or use public transport.

Backed by the support of local celebrities the campaign signed up over 4,000 people within the first four days via the internet, text message or by filling in pledge cards.

Dr Who actor Christopher Eccleston said: “Coming from Salford I am very proud to be involved in the Manchester is my Planet campaign. The fact that people in and around Manchester can now take real action against climate change is an excellent way to show the rest of the country that here in the North we are leading on the important issues facing us today.”

The campaign is being led by the not-for-profit agency, Manchester: Knowledge Capital, with partners including regional think-tank Sustainability Northwest and the ten local authorities. It is being sponsored by the Northwest Regional Development Agency, Manchester: Knowledge Capital, Manchester

University, Defra and Manchester City Council. Other major supporters include Manchester Enterprises, United Utilities, Manchester Museum and ITV Granada, as well as Bolton, Salford and Manchester Metropolitan Universities.

Manchester is my Planet is aiming to gather 10,000 pledges before the November G8 summit, and with over half that number now signed up organisers say the target is likely to be surpassed.

**MORE INFORMATION**

Sign up to the pledge by visiting [www.manchesterismyplanet.com](http://www.manchesterismyplanet.com), by texting the word ‘pledge’ and your postcode to **80010** or by filling in a pledge card, available from libraries, galleries, museums and local authority offices.

**ABOVE MANCHESTER CITY AND ENGLAND GOALKEEPER DAVID JAMES MAKES THE MANCHESTER IS MY PLANET PLEDGE**

# Two hundred year wait is over

The discovery of young salmon in the River Goyt marks a historic moment for the Northwest’s improving environment.

**Salmon are breeding in the River Mersey catchment** for the first time in living memory, according to ecologists from the Environment Agency (EA).

Environment Agency officers found three young salmon during fish surveys on the River Goyt, a tributary of the Mersey in Stockport – proof that salmon are breeding successfully.

The discovery raises the tantalising prospect of a return to major salmon runs on the Mersey – at least in the long term.

Environment Agency spokesman Oliver Southgate said: “The River Mersey has a fishing history dating back as early as the twelfth century. In the 1700s salmon and sea trout were so common in the Mersey that the fish supplied markets as far away as London.”

Bill Darbyshire, an environmental manager at the EA, said: “I don’t



“We appear to be getting to the point where the adult salmon can make it all the way to the breeding grounds at the headwaters of the river.”

One of the main barriers to migration had been thought to be the low water quality in the Manchester Ship Canal, a stretch of which the fish must pass through. Although much better than in the past, water quality in the canal remains poor compared with much of the rest of the Mersey system.

Whilst it is now clear that some salmon are making it past the Ship Canal, they still face a difficult journey ahead – many of the Mersey’s tributaries are blocked by weirs that are impassable to migratory fish such as salmon and sea trout. The route up the Mersey to where the young salmon were found is very unusual because it is not blocked by weirs.

According to Bill Darbyshire, one of the next big challenges is it to build fish passes on these weirs. Without them, there will be no return to major salmon

“I don’t think the public realise how big a deal this is. It’s massive.”

Jeff Lang, United Utilities’ chief operating officer for wastewater, said: “This is wonderful news and a real endorsement of our £1 billion wastewater investment programme throughout the Mersey basin over the last fifteen years.”

As Bill Darbyshire explained: “Salmon tend to like lovely clean rivers so it tells us that the water quality really is improving.”

runs. The problem is that fish passes can cost around £100,000 and there is no direct government funding available to pay for them.

But as Bill Darbyshire says: “It’s now possible to imagine salmon on the Mersey and its tributaries. Imagine – salmon in Manchester. You couldn’t have thought that even ten years ago.”

*For comment on this story see page 27, “Moving the Mersey.”*

**S Ban on fish movement relaxed.** A ban on the movement of all coarse fish in Merseyside, Cheshire and Greater Manchester has been relaxed, although experts still cannot explain the death of 350 carp on the River Weaver and the Trent & Mersey and Bridgewater Canals. The Environment Agency introduced the ban last summer to reduce the risk of disease spreading. It was lifted when no further deaths were reported by early autumn. Infectious disease is thought to be the most likely cause of the deaths.

**S Promenade wins Green Flag award.** A Victorian promenade on the River Mersey has become the first in the country to win a Green Flag award, the coveted national standard for parks and green spaces across England and Wales. Victoria promenade is one of the coastal sites tended by the Halton Maintenance Team, a pilot scheme funded by the Mersey Waterfront programme. Councillor Phil Harris said, “We hope to carry on winning at least one more award each year until the majority of our parks and nature reserves are recognised.”

## SOUND BITES

**S New exhibition shows how to build a boat.** A new gallery and interactive exhibition has opened at The Boat Museum in Ellesmere Port showcasing how the wooden and metal narrowboats that worked in the heyday of the canal era were made. The museum has the largest collection of historic inland waterway craft in Britain, including narrowboats, canal barges, river barges, canal and river tugs, icebreakers and a coaster. A specially created computer-generated exhibit shows a flat plan being transformed into a living vessel, demonstrating in seconds what would have taken months for the boat builders of the 18th and 19th centuries to see. The new exhibit is part of a £1.6 million programme to revitalise the museum. [www.boatmuseum.org.uk](http://www.boatmuseum.org.uk)

**S Southport pier gets green tram.** Holiday makers in Southport can now reach the end of the resort’s 3,600 ft grade II listed pier, the second longest in the country, aboard a new hi tech tram. The environmentally friendly electric tram, which is the only one of its kind in the world, uses the latest battery technology and also has a hydraulic ramp to allow disabled access. Estimates suggest the new tram could attract an extra 70,000 visitors to the resort annually. It has been funded with a quarter of a million pounds from Mersey Waterfront, alongside £45,000 from Sefton Council and a further £30,000 from The Pier Trust.

**S Canal scheme to breathe life into old town.** Runcorn is to be given a trendy canal quarter in a £65 million scheme by award winning regeneration company Urban Splash. It will bring canalside cafe bars, restaurants and

homes to a new development in what will be the biggest ever project in Runcorn Old Town. Urban Splash won a competition to work with Halton Borough Council to breathe 21st century life into the town.

**S New CE joins The Mersey Partnership.** Dr Robert Crawford has taken over as chief executive of The Mersey Partnership, the organisation that promotes economic growth, investment and tourism in Merseyside. Dr Crawford has most recently been working as an advisor to international development initiatives in Kosovo and is a former chief executive of Scottish Enterprise. He lists his hobbies as hill running and reading modern history, economics and political biography.

His first speaking engagement will be at the Mersey Basin Campaign’s annual conference on 22nd November.

**S Europe warns UK to pick up pace on key Directive.** The European Commission has delivered a stern reminder to the Environment Agency and the UK water industry not to give in to complacency on delivering the far reaching Water Framework Directive. A swift rebuke followed comments by the chief executive of the Environment Agency Barbara Young, which implied that the UK would find it hard to meet the Directive’s key water quality deadline of 2015. Patrick Murphy, head of the water protection unit at the European Commission, scolded: “Do not start planning

to deliver in [the extended deadline of] 2027 because you will be in the European Court a lot earlier than that.” Full story, Ends Report 367.

**S Be wise with your water.** A major new water conservation initiative has been launched by the UK water industry to highlight the pressing need for water efficiency. The initiative, Waterwise, is funded jointly by all the water companies in the country and run as an independent organisation by the industry body, Water UK. “On average the UK has less water available per person than any other European country and water shortage is among the most serious medium term threats to quality of life facing the country,” says Walter Menzies of the Mersey Basin Campaign, a board member of Waterwise. More information: Waterwise 0207 344 1805





## Irwell River Walk proposed for Salford

It might defy the usual stereotype of the place, but 60 per cent of Salford consists of green open spaces and the city has 30 miles of rivers and canals. A proposed new walkway along the River Irwell aims to link the water and green spaces, making more of both assets and offering visitors and residents the chance to enjoy them on foot or by bike. The proposal is part of a draft vision published by the Central Salford Urban Regeneration Company that aims to show how Salford can become “the most beautiful part of Greater Manchester.”

## A bridge too far

The news that a decision on the proposed new Mersey Gateway bridge has again been delayed by roads minister Stephen Ladyman has drawn angry responses from its supporters.

Councillor Tony McDermott, leader of Halton Council, expressed his bitter disappointment in no uncertain terms. “We have provided everything the civil servants have asked of us,” he said.

“It is frustrating for Halton and Merseyside residents that a decision will not now be taken until early 2006.”

The new bridge would provide a crucial new link between Halton and Liverpool. Supporters argue that it is critical to the continued growth of Liverpool and the surrounding area and is an issue of national significance.

Mr Ladyman acknowledged that great strides have been made in answering his department’s questions about the bridge. Nevertheless, he has again asked for more detailed information, and will only make his final decision in January 2006 at the earliest.

Commenting acerbically on the minister’s response, Roy Morris, chair of the Mersey Partnership, said: “The government has dealt Merseyside another major blow.

“The continued delays and seeming inability to reach a decision are deeply worrying for every road

## Learning from the best in class

RENEW Northwest, the Northwest’s Regeneration Centre of Excellence, is aiming to raise the quality of regeneration practice in the region through a series of masterclasses.

Building on existing good practice and featuring speakers who are experts in their chosen fields, the masterclasses are half-day events, sometimes with an optional site visit or tour in the afternoon. The idea is to bring together professionals from a wide spectrum of disciplines within the world of regeneration so that stronger links can be made, knowledge shared and new possibilities for partnership working discussed.

Masterclasses held so far include sessions on the contribution of the creative industries to regeneration, the lessons from DPM Award winner Grange Park Community Project in Blackpool, and the use of virtual reality technology in regeneration.

This last masterclass was a revelation for many of the delegates involved. At a session at the University of Salford’s Centre for Virtual Environments, manager Karen Padmore demonstrated different ways of capturing data and the process by which this could be transformed into 3-D experiential models. Delegates had the chance to step into a

user across the Northwest and beyond.”

At a cost of £335 million, the new crossing would attract an estimated 80 per cent of traffic from the existing Silver Jubilee bridge, which would then be reduced to two lanes, with priority given to pedestrians and cyclists.

And as the only other bridge for twenty miles will soon be severely restricted due to necessary repair work, the start date for building the Mersey Gateway is becoming urgent.

The team behind the new bridge say that despite this latest setback they are determined to press ahead and work is already well under way to complete the further detailed studies requested by Mr Ladyman.

three-metre square ‘Cave’ which contained an interactive human-scale virtual reality model, and with stereoscopic glasses and a head-tracker, were able to ‘move’ through the model testing out how the planned ‘environment’ would feel and look.

The masterclass covered issues including technology and terminology, cost planning for virtual reality modelling, situations when such an investment might be appropriate and how to get best value for money. Time was also spent looking at what resources are available free on the internet, including Google maps through Google Earth ([www.earth.google.com](http://www.earth.google.com)).

Future masterclasses include Heritage-based Regeneration: Longlands Mill, in December; Enterprise and Regeneration in January; and Valuing Nature in Regeneration in February. Sessions are free, and further information is available at [www.renew.co.uk](http://www.renew.co.uk).



## Cleaning up on their act

### Environment Agency praises water company as pollution falls.

Water companies have reduced their pollution incidents to the lowest level since 2001, the Environment Agency (EA) has announced in its annual Spotlight on Business report for 2004.

Overall, there was a 29 per cent drop in the number of serious pollution incidents last year, and two water companies, Wessex Water and South West Water, managed to stay squeaky clean for the entire twelve month period.

The Northwest’s regional water company United Utilities had just a single Category 1 Serious Pollution Incident all year, the same as in 2003, and also managed to reduce its Category 2 incidents by four.

The improvement is largely due to millions of pounds worth of investment by United Utilities, but the EA has also praised the water company for helping to develop closer ties between the two organisations.

This has happened in several ways, including secondments at managerial level and the joint development of a training package for new starters. It is credited for a deeper understanding of the pressures and constraints under which each organisation operates.

One new employee at the EA, Michael Ainsworth, who spent time working at a United Utilities’ wastewater treatment plant in Lancashire, said: “This course has given me a couple of years worth of experience in a week. I’ve learned things I would never come across in my day to day role.”

As United Utilities’ compliance relations manager Joanne Startin explained: “When someone comes onto site as an EA officer they don’t always appreciate the pressures our operational staff are under.”

Ten more staff from the EA are due to experience life at United Utilities later this year. Secondments have also happened in the opposite direction, giving workers at the water company an insight into the Environment Agency.

If the scheme continues to be successful the goal is to take it to water industry body Water UK with a view to rolling it out across the country.

Despite the improved relations between the EA and United Utilities, it wasn’t all good news in the Spotlight report.

Across the country, nine of the ten big water companies found themselves in the dock, with accumulated fines ranging from £5,000 (Severn Trent Water) to £132,500 (Thames Water).

United Utilities was prosecuted nine times in all and fined £42,200 for non-compliance with legislation on water pollution.

## Bridgewater project gets under way

Transport Minister Derek Twigg has officially opened the first section of The Bridgewater Way, the project to revitalise waterside areas along all 65 km of the historic Bridgewater Canal.

The first phase of the Bridgewater Way starts at Waterloo Bridge in Runcorn Old Town and runs to Bates Bridge. New uses for the canal towpath are being encouraged, such as cycling, while a new surface allows easier access for wheelchairs and prams. Visitor information points, improved lighting and public art is also being installed, making the area safer and more attractive.

The project is being pioneered by the owner of the Bridgewater Canal, Peel Holdings, on behalf of the Bridgewater Canal Trust.

It also part of the nationwide Transport Links to Schools Programme, run by Sustrans and the Department for Transport to connect schools, colleges and communities to the 10,000 miles of the National Cycle Network.

Supporters include the Northwest Regional Development Agency, Halton Borough Council and the Mersey Basin Campaign.



**September 24 - January 8** [The Coast Exposed](#)  
Exhibition of spectacular coastal landscapes featuring photographs of Formby in Merseyside and the coast of Lancashire. Pictures by photographers from the famed Magnum agency are also on show and include shots of the recent flooding in Boscastle, puffins in the Farne Islands and a traditional seaside day out in Wales.  
**Venue:** The Lowry, Salford Quays **Contact:** 0870 787 5794

**October 25-26** [Northern Way Conference 2005](#)  
Exploring sustainable investment opportunities in the North for the business and property sector through the government’s Northern Way initiative. Bringing together leaders from businesses already in the North and those looking to move, government representatives, regeneration agencies and local authorities. **Venue:** De Veres Whites Hotel, Bolton **Contact:** Will Kendrick 0208 267 4454

**November 13-16** [10th European Biosolids and Biowastes Conference – A decade of change](#)  
The Annual European Biosolids and Biowastes conference is the leading conference in Europe covering these important subjects. It draws professionals from around the world who come together to update each other on science, engineering and operational practices. **Venue:** Cedar Court Hotel, Wakefield **Contact:** Krista Braithwaite 0113 242 2400

**November 22** [Mersey Basin Campaign Annual Conference](#)  
The Campaign’s annual conference this year asks how we transform the idea of sustainable businesses and communities from rhetoric to reality? Speakers include Jonathon Porritt CBE, chair of the UK Sustainable Development Commission, along with leading figures from the Northwest and a contribution from a government minister. **Venue:** Liverpool Marriott City Centre Hotel **Contact:** Fouzia Bhatti 0161 242 8200 Email: [f.bhatti@meseybasin.org.uk](mailto:f.bhatti@meseybasin.org.uk)

**November 23** [Water Framework Directive and its impact on the water freight industry](#)  
A half-day seminar to examine what the EU Water Framework Directive means for the water freight industry. The Water Framework Directive is the most substantial and wide ranging piece of water legislation to originate from Brussels. What will be its impact on ports, carriers and the environment? This seminar is essential for those who want to further their understanding of a major piece of European legislation. **Venue:** Manchester Conference Centre **Contact:** Carlotta Nelson 0207 928 9090

**December 2** [Planning and Water: an ENMaR seminar](#)  
An opportunity for planners to look at the benefits of the EU Water Framework Directive, focusing on improved tourism. This is the latest in a series of seminars for Northwest planners under the ENMaR banner, an international project drawing in partners in five European countries. **Venue:** Manchester **Contact:** Caroline Riley 0161 242 8206 [c.riley@merseybasin.org.uk](mailto:c.riley@merseybasin.org.uk)

**January 25, 2006** [Voice 06 – Social Enterprise Conference](#)  
The conference will examine and tackle the issues facing social enterprises, highlight how social enterprises are at the cutting edge of market making and changing, and showcase the diversity of the sector. **Venue:** Manchester International Conference Centre **Contact:** [www.socialenterprise.org.uk](http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk)



# Voluntary contributions

Too often taken for granted, the efforts of environmental volunteers around the Northwest are highlighted in this year’s Unilever Dragonfly Awards.

When Charles Hamilton began volunteering at Etherow Country Park in the 1960s, environmental issues were decidedly not high on the national agenda. But it is only through his tireless efforts, and those of exceptionally dedicated people like him, that environmental concerns are now a pressing priority across the globe.

Mr Hamilton is the overall winner of this year’s Unilever Dragonfly Awards. The impact of his 35 years as a committed volunteer is clear to Kelly Horrocks, a countryside ranger at Etherow Country Park and Local Nature Reserve.

“He’s done virtually everything – from practical outdoor work to being an educational adviser, tour guide and a trustee,” she says.

“He was also instrumental in creating our local nature reserve, the first one in the country to receive this designation. When he retired from work he took on the role of volunteer manager at the reserve, and started a regular Saturday morning work group. Some of the people taking part in this had learning disabilities and Charles supported them to get their Duke of Edinburgh awards.

“Even after he retired from that role in 2002, he’s been active at Etherow, managing a volunteer group on Wednesdays and going into local schools and community centres to give talks about the river valley.”



The awards are organised by the Mersey Basin Campaign to recognise the Northwest’s top environmental volunteers. Winners receive a trophy and a cash prize to help fund their project. With almost 60 nominations received, competition in 2005 was tougher than ever.

From a single winner to a whole school bursting with eco-champions: St. Philip’s CE Primary School in

Atherton won first place in the Young People’s category for its environmental education inside the classroom and beyond.

In April 2003 the school decided to establish an Eco committee and work towards the Eco Schools’ Green Flag Status, which it earned in June 2004.

Pupils have been encouraged to ‘adopt a local street’ and help to keep it clean and tidy through regular litter-picks. Meanwhile the school Eco mascot, Eartha, is handed from class to class to prompt children to come up with green ideas relating to their schoolwork.

Linda Owen, deputy head and Eco co-ordinator at St Philip’s, says that the school’s involvement with Eco Schools has made pupils more aware of environmental issues and helped to develop teamwork.

“We’ve experienced lots of fun and enjoyment, plus a genuine sense of achievement and satisfaction. We take pride in our surroundings and realise that we all have an important part to play in caring for the environment. Your award acknowledges our achievements – and we’re thrilled!”

Caring about the local environment can lead to a lifetime’s passion for certain of its charms. For Malcolm Bower, winner of the Individual award, canals are the thing.

As secretary of the Macclesfield Canal Society for the past 12 years, Mr Bower has taken part in many towpath litter-picks and water clean-up schemes, but is endearingly modest about his achievements in helping people understand and enjoy these historic waterways.

“I find it fascinating that though they’re so old, canals are still with us in our daily lives. Until 50 to 60 years ago they were in regular commercial use, and now people enjoy them for leisure,” he explains.

“Families like to get involved. We help British Waterways to clear vegetation along the towpath. We’ll go along in a party of up to 12 or



so with loppers – I always think it’s a nice Sunday morning’s activity.”

The final Dragonfly winner, in the Group Award category, is the Friends of Gorse Hall, a voluntary group that leases and manages a 20 hectare site of park and woodland in Stalybridge. Working in partnership with the local community and schools, the Friends of Gorse Hall have laid 2 km of new footpaths, completed a pond project, restored meadows, planted native tree species and undertaken rhododendron and scrub management.

PHOTOGRAPHS CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: CHARLES HAMILTON WITH BEV MITCHELL OF THE MERSEY BASIN CAMPAIGN; PUPILS OF ST PHILIPS SCHOOL; A FRIEND OF GORSE HALL; MALCOLM BOWER OF MACCLESFIELD CANAL SOCIETY

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS PAGES 8 & 9  
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PHOTOGRAPHS CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: SAILING REGATTA; TREE THINNING AT RISLEY MOSS; WATERSKIING ON THE RIVER WEAVER; FISHING COMPETITION

# Saving the environment with a smile

This year’s MWH Mersey Basin Week encouraged people to rediscover and enjoy their local environment, as our round up of the highlights shows.

MWH Mersey Basin Week (MBW) opened and closed with a bang this year – or should that be a splash – as water sports enthusiasts showed the high adrenaline way to enjoy our cleaner environment.

There was water skiing and wake boarding on the River Weaver in Cheshire to open the week of over 300 water and environment themed events and activities. Meanwhile the week’s closing celebrations saw horsepower swapped for wind power at a sailing regatta at Pilkington Sailing Club near St Helens.

Activities also took an unusually musical turn this year as a very special environmental champion took his eco-message into schools in Eccles.

CYCLER the Rapping Robot put on an all singing, all dancing performance to explain about the three R’s – not reading, writing and ‘rithmetic, but reducing, reusing and recycling waste. Tackling our growing piles of rubbish will be crucial in the years to come if we are not to dig ever bigger holes in the ground for landfill.

Rapping his way through Barton Moss Community Primary School, CYCLER then travelled on to Westwood Park Primary School as part of a slew of environmental

activities that took place across the Northwest during the week.

Sandra Whittaker, teacher at Westwood Park Primary School, said: “We hope to increase environmental activities within the school and CYCLER the Rapping Robot is a great way of engaging the children and teaching them about the importance of environmental problems such as waste.”

At the Mersey Basin Campaign, Gemma Tomlinson agreed. “Innovative and entertaining ideas like CYCLER are important because if we try to preach the environmental message to children it just turns them off.”

Fun was also the focus of a day out on the Bridgewater Canal for the children of Alderman Kay Special School. A converted narrowboat took 23 children along the Canal from Castlefield and over the Barton Aqueduct to Worsley, showing them the industrial heritage of the waterway stretching outwards from the city centre to the suburbs.

With many of the children never having been on a boat before, the Bridgewater Heritage Boat Company, who hosted the trip as part of MBW, had to explain some unusual



sightings, as pupils pointed out ‘sharks’ in the water and excitedly explored the boat above and below decks.

It wasn’t only children getting out into the countryside. Warrington MP Helen Jones joined 35 employee volunteers from Mersey Basin Campaign partners United Utilities, Brunner Mond, Unilever, British Waterways and Mersey Basin Week sponsor MVH at Risley Moss as they cleared the site of shrubs and trees.

With its peaty soil creating a rare mossland habitat, Chris Purvis, area ranger of the nature reserve explained why the vegetation, perhaps surprisingly, had to go.

“Mossland is a traditional habitat in the Warrington area and Risley Moss is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The moss is in the early stages of re-wetting and at this key stage of re-establishing itself it’s important to protect it. If we left the trees in place they would dry the area out and it would turn into woodland.”

With only two rangers on the site on a day-to-day basis, he explained that it is physically impossible to manage the shrubs effectively. “These volunteers,” he declared enthusiastically, “are a smashing help!”

The shrub and tree clearing effort was one of the biggest MBW activities, and even the big-wigs rolled their sleeves up and got stuck in. Mark Turner, the Mersey Basin Campaign’s deputy chief executive got busy – not to mention muddy – at the Risley Moss event, and said: “MWH Mersey Basin Week is all about getting people to appreciate their local environment.

“The good news is that our environment in the Northwest is steadily improving – our rivers and streams, for example, are cleaner than they have been since the end of the Industrial Revolution.”

MORE INFORMATION  
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Can Liverpool’s once glorious  
Garden Festival site emerge from  
beneath the weeds with the help  
of new plans for long term maintenance?

Words Ben Willis  
Photographs courtesy of  
Mersey Waterfront, Halton BC,  
Land Restoration Trust,  
Haycock Associates

# KEEPING UP APPEARANCES



In the summer of 1984 over three million people flocked to Liverpool to witness the city in full bloom. This wasn’t the kind of attention it was used to. Only three years earlier it had achieved international notoriety as one of a number of UK cities hit by racial rioting. But, largely in response to the 1981 riots, the then environment secretary Michael Heseltine had chosen Liverpool to host the UK’s first garden festival, and the crowds came in their droves.

Now, just over 20 years on, the once glorious site lies almost in ruins. The only things that grow in the main pavilion are weeds and piles of rubbish. Apart from a few surviving features, much of the rest of the once manicured landscape is now heavily degraded. A crude perimeter fence ensures most people stay away, but it is not enough to keep out the fly-tippers and motorcyclists.

So what went wrong? “The garden festival was a phenomenal effort and attracted a lot of people, but the next bit was a disaster,” says Walter Menzies, chief executive of the Mersey Basin Campaign. “No-one had really worked through a convincing post-festival plan for the site, so it’s been festering ever since.”

This autumn a masterplan for an urban village on the site was unveiled by its new owner, Langtree McClean, and despite a catalogue of false starts over the years

there is at last real optimism that the development will proceed. The news is rekindling the memory of the garden festival, but 20 years of decline will not easily be forgotten.

Although the Merseyside Development Corporation put around £40 million into the garden festival, in the process transforming over 100 acres of landfill and derelict land, what came next was less successful. At the time the long term plan for the site had been to use part of it for leisure and recreational purposes and the other part for housing. The housing element did eventually materialise in 1986 when 600 homes were built on a portion of the site, but other ventures hit the rocks.

In the early 1990s, one company tried to turn part of the site into a theme park, but this fell flat after failing to make any money. Then in 1998 Wiggins, a development consortium, bought the site but gave it up last year following a string of unsuccessful planning applications.

Liverpool’s garden festival site, it seems, fell victim to the same affliction that has affected numerous other regeneration schemes around the Northwest and, indeed, the country.

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PICTURES:  
THE GARDEN FESTIVAL  
SITE TODAY



PHOTOGRAPH BELOW:  
SITE OF SPEKE GARSTON COASTAL RESERVE

It goes something like this: thousands, more often millions of pounds of public money are poured into the capital costs of a regeneration project – land reclamation work, building, landscaping. But inadequate planning and limited sources of finance for long term management conspire to undermine those early good intentions, and decline once again sets in.

“It’s easy to get hold of capital, but revenue funding is much harder to secure,” says Alexandra Rook, a principal consultant for the Civic Trust. This is partly because local authority budgets are so stretched that they are often unable to take on the long term running of sites, Rook explains. “Parks and open spaces are seen as local authority responsibilities, but they’re not a statutory service so their budgets get pushed into high cost areas like social services and education.”

Another factor, says Mersey Waterfront director Louise Hopkins, is that public funding bodies have traditionally underplayed the proportion of their regeneration grants that goes towards the revenue costs of a scheme – the expenses incurred through long term management and maintenance. This is in spite of some funding sources, particularly Europe’s Objective One pot, coming only on condition that schemes they finance are maintained to the same standard achieved upon completion for at least ten years.

“Roughly ten per cent of the capital costs of a scheme can be set aside for maintenance,” Hopkins says. “But if your project is worth say one million, that means only £100,000 can go towards maintenance, which over ten years is not a lot.”

Mersey Waterfront is a co-funder of Halton Borough Council’s waterfront estate team (see box). Through this pilot project, Hopkins says, the partners are trying to show how a well-managed public area can have beneficial impacts on anything from crime to health.

“Funding bodies need to recognise that more of their grants should be going towards revenue costs,” she says. “But the benefits of long term maintenance are hard to measure, and therein lies the problem because it means there’s a reluctance to put in the extra resource. What we’re hoping to demonstrate

through the Halton pilot is that good management is about more than just making a place pretty; it can have a fundamental impact on people’s lives.”

In attempting to find new ways of funding and organising long term maintenance of public open space, the Halton pilot is not alone. Across the Northwest a number of new mechanisms are emerging that offer possible solutions to the management challenge.

Happily, given its recent past, one such initiative is being developed to rescue – hopefully once and for all – Liverpool’s garden festival site. Last year, after the Wiggins consortium pulled out, developer Langtree and house builder David McLean formed a partnership to buy the site.

To protect the site’s large swathe of open space for the future, Langree McClean have engaged the services of the Land Restoration Trust (LRT), a partnership of government agencies set up two years ago to reclaim and

manage derelict land. Under a deal struck with the trust, the developers will undertake the restoration of the site’s open space and also crucially pay the trust a lump sum, or dowry, to fund its long term management. The trust will invest this money and use the interest generated to provide a sustainable source of revenue funding for the site.

“Money spent on this site in the past had a short term benefit but nothing has been carried forward,” says Euan Hall, the trust’s chief executive. “The advantage of the dowry is that it will provide secure money to manage the site. We invest capital from the private sector and hive off the interest, so unlike with the public sector where budget priorities move from thing to thing, this cash is guaranteed for the site.”

“The festival was a phenomenal effort and attracted



Case study:  
Mersey Waterfront Estate Team,  
Halton

The Mersey Waterfront regional park is an ambitious project to revitalise 135 km of coastline stretching from the Wirral to Southport by creating a chain of open spaces and nature reserves along the Mersey, Dee and Ribble rivers.

Apart from improving the general quality of life for people living in the area, another of the scheme’s priorities is to create a visitor and tourist attraction that will contribute to Merseyside’s overall economic

prosperity. One of the main concerns is therefore how the regional park will be maintained.

“When Mersey Waterfront came about, we realised that if we were serious about this, we would need to present a first class, quality product,” says Ian Lifford, head of landscape services at Halton Borough Council, one of the authorities involved in creating the park. “It was clear that on a lot of the sites there was a great deal of room for improvement.”

In partnership with Mersey Waterfront, Halton Council has been instrumental in setting up a pilot project known as the Waterfront Estate Team, a group of individuals

dedicated to managing and maintaining the five main waterside sites in the authority’s area.

Martin Grimes is the team’s leader. A typical week for the team, he says, involves regular site visits and routine maintenance work, such as fencing, mowing and cleaning up any litter or graffiti.

“Basically, we’re trying to raise standards so people will immediately see a good quality site that is clean, safe and well maintained,” Grimes says. “We visit sites daily so we fix anything needing it straight away.

The trust is just one method by which a long-term source of revenue funding can be generated. Another concept that is rapidly gaining currency is that of a management company.

This model is being put to good use on the Speke and Garston Coastal Reserve, a formerly derelict site currently undergoing transformation into a nature reserve. To ensure this transformation is sustained, says Louise Morrissey, head of land and planning at the reserve’s landowner Peel Holdings, a management company is being created that will lease the site from Peel and assume responsibility for its maintenance and further development. The company will be formed of two main partners – Peel and the Mersey Basin

“It’s a win-win situation, because we’re a vehicle they could use to meet their corporate green targets. We hope this formula will be a success and therefore a benefit to others over time.”

Elsewhere, other methods are being employed that attempt to tackle the maintenance issue by minimising the overall need for it. Sinderland Brook is a stretch of river running through the National Trust’s Dunham Massey estate in Cheshire that has recently been restored to complement a new housing development on an adjacent site.

Rather than try to artificially steer the course of the river away from the housing development or create large man-made flood defences, the restoration deliberately sought to create a wide flood plain that would allow the river to meander naturally and follow its own course. The advantage of this approach, says Nick Haycock, director of the environmental

a lot of people, but the next bit was a disaster.”

Campaign – who will pay an annual sum into a central maintenance pot.

“The principle is shared care,” says Morrissey. “We will spend a certain amount of the maintenance fund each year, but the idea is that there will always be some left in case of emergencies.”

The company is also hoping to raise further funds by attracting sponsorship from the numerous companies based in the Speke and Garston area. “Companies would pay a certain amount into the pot in exchange for a certain amount of profile for being involved and being our sponsor,” says Morrissey.

consultancy Haycock Associates that worked on the scheme, is that it minimised the need for extensive engineering work to ‘lock in’ the course of the river, all of which carries considerable costs both in the short and long term.

“When you rely heavily on engineering, you end up with a lot of capital assets in place, in the form of expensive geo-technological measures to keep the river bank in place,” he explains. “These can degrade within 15 to 20 years with catastrophic effects. By allowing the river to erode and move naturally at Sinderland, and not relying on a lot of subtle engineering techniques, we have probably halved the costs of long term maintenance.”

We find that if things are left, they decay further.”

Apart from the day-to-day maintenance, the team also works with the council’s rangers and countryside managers on overall development of the sites. “Because we see the sites every day we’re much more intimate with them, so we’re able to offer advice on things like planting that add to their overall conservation or amenity value,” Grimes says.

In its two to three year lifetime, the team is hoping to win four of

the Civic Trust’s Green Flags, awarded to high quality open spaces. So far, one of its sites, Victoria Promenade in Widnes, has been successful in this ambition.

The challenge now, says Ian Lifford, will be to secure a future source of funding for the initiative, which at the moment relies on money from Mersey Waterfront and the council’s neighbourhood renewal budget.

“However it’s funded, this has got to be the way forward,” says Lifford. “If we didn’t have this our sites would decline and go back to what they were. Hopefully what we’re demonstrating through this is that quality is a real priority.”

PHOTOGRAPH BELOW:  
THE MERSEY WATERFRONT ESTATE TEAM, HALTON

As public funding sources continue to be squeezed, the likelihood is that long term management and maintenance will increasingly come to rely on innovative techniques such as those being tried in Sinderland Brook, Halton and elsewhere.

“These kind of things will be key in the future,” believes the LRT’s Euan Hall. “As long as they can change their budgets annually, local authorities will always be looking to find money from somewhere. And unfortunately one of the first things that gets targeted is open space and parks budgets.”

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60-second expert

- To get started, a regeneration scheme needs capital funding to pay for things such as land remediation and building work, but equally important is revenue funding to maintain the project over the long term.
- Sometimes as little as ten per cent of a scheme’s budget will be spent on revenue funding, leading quickly to neglect and decay.
- The problem is compounded when inadequate plans are made for a project’s legacy, such as in the case of Liverpool’s garden festival site, which has lain derelict for 20 years.
- Limited sources of public revenue funding have prompted the advent of innovative techniques to pay for long term management, such as dowries and management companies.





# CELEBRITY MAKEOVERS

Two new reports try to sprinkle a little stardust over the Lancashire hills.

Words David Ward

Photographs Len Grant and Don McPhee

Not long ago, The Times carried a feature on doorstops. One was the work of international designer Philippe Starck and very nice it was too. But it cost £150.

If Starck can charge that for a simple device for keeping a door open, how much would he ask for an exclusive shed on an allotment in Accrington?

Questions of price were far from the minds of Anthony Wilson, the man behind Factory records and the Hacienda, and his partner Yvette Livesey when they were commissioned to do some blue-sky thinking about the future of east Lancashire.

As they prepared their report, they toured

all these crappy, run-down, brown, wooden sheds and I suddenly realised: 'Are you going to want to hang out in an allotment like this?'"

That's where Starck made his appearance among the broccoli and the runner beans. "British Steel," mused Livesey and Wilson in their report, "might well be

"Bringing in a celebrity does get people talking, whether positively or negatively."

the region, sometimes thinking not just what had not been thought before but also the unthinkable. And sometimes the utterly heretical.

"I have been trying to encourage allotments," Ms Livesey told the Guardian. "But, driving through Accrington [home town of both Ms Livesey and Holland's Pies], I saw

interested in designing a steel frame and do colourful powder coating; maybe a domed roof, not a hipped roof. Designed by Philippe Starck maybe..."

This idea was not greeted with delirious enthusiasm on Baxenden Ley allotments, 1000ft up near the Alma pub on the southern approach to Accrington.

[CONTINUED OVER]





## 60-second expert

- Anthony Wilson, the man behind Factory records and the Hacienda, and his partner Yvette Livesey were commissioned to do some blue-sky thinking about the future of East Lancashire.
- Their report, Dreaming of Pennine Lancashire, contains a wish list of ideas including allotment sheds designed by Philippe Starck, a fashion tower in Burnley, a curry mile on the banks of the Leeds-Liverpool Canal and a football theme park.
- Predictably, reactions to the report have been mixed, but arguably that is partly the point – to get people thinking in new ways about East Lancashire.
- Meanwhile, the West Lancashire town of Skelmersdale has also had the celebrity makeover treatment, this time by Red or Dead designer Wayne Hemingway and his wife Gerardine.
- The Hemingways take a more hands on approach to regeneration. Wayne Hemingway launched into the development business by writing angry articles on the “Wimpeyfication” of Britain.
- That led to an offer to work with Wimpey to produce new homes in Gateshead – one of which the couple now live in – and they have designed the apartments in the Birch in redevelopment in central Manchester.

ABOVE: **PENNINE LANCASHIRE WOULD HAVE TRENDY NEW ALLOTMENT SHEDS**

BELOW: **WAYNE HEMINGWAY IN ONE OF THE APARTMENTS HE HELPED DESIGN**



“I don’t hold with that in any shape or form,” said Brian Watts, 40 years an allotment holder and chairman of the Baxenden plots.

The blue-sky duo did not stop at chic sheds. They also suggested, in a list they call “a series of consummations devoutly to be wished”, a fashion tower, a curry mile on the banks of the Leeds-Liverpool Canal and a football theme park. And they also want to embrace Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Hyndburn, Pendle and Rossendale within the generic name Pennine Lancashire.

While Livesey and Wilson have been causing sharp intakes of breath with ideas that are certainly original if not obviously practical, another designer couple have had the builders in.

Wayne and Gerardine Hemingway, founders of the fashion label Red or Dead, have joined with developers to carve 90 apartments from the Birch in, a 70-year-old office block next to Manchester’s Affleck’s Palace, the emporium where they launched their fashion empire. They have already worked with Wimpey to produce new homes in Gateshead and now have a few ideas about restoring the original vision for Skelmersdale.

So are the trendies taking over from earnest local council planners and regional regenerators? Not quite. But they can attract attention. And that’s the point.

“Having a familiar name helps, which is a shame for those people out there whose ideas are as good as or better than ours,” said Hemingway, who is not just a rag-trade man: he has a degree in geography and town planning.

He launched himself into the development business by writing angry articles about the “Wimpeyfication” of Britain. Wimpey then invited him to talk and the result is his Gateshead housing scheme, real bricks on real ground. The Hemingways are so pleased with the homes that they have bought one themselves.

Livesey and Wilson did not have to worry very much about practicalities and costings, brick colours and roof lines. That was not their job; they were imported to the Lancashire mill towns to set hares running. “Bringing in a celebrity does get people talking, whether positively or negatively,” suggested Mike Damms, chief executive of East Lancashire chamber of commerce. “It has a catalytic effect and the outside world takes more notice.

“The Livesey-Wilson report was part of our collective review of the area. Of course some of it is a bit silly. But sometimes you need to look at things rather differently. The report has caused a proper debate about what should be the values, almost what the brand should be, of east Lancashire over the next 10-15 years.”

The Hemingways are already being judged by those who live in, or are thinking about living in, the homes they have designed. You can wander round the bijou show apartment at the Birch and think the kitchen/diner/sitting room is a pretty efficient use of space even if you can’t stand the stripey wallpaper.



**MORE INFORMATION**  
[www.elevate-eastlancs.co.uk](http://www.elevate-eastlancs.co.uk)  
[www.skelmersdale-vision.co.uk](http://www.skelmersdale-vision.co.uk)

But with Livesey and Wilson, it’s the ideas that are judged by councillors and corporations, allotment holders and newspaper readers. Gladys Robinson, from Great Harwood, was not at all happy about the Pennine Lancashire label. “East Lancashire is a good, solid sensible name,” she wrote in an indignant letter to the Lancashire Evening Telegraph. “Who wants a posh name? The people who live in East Lancashire are not posh. They are good, intelligent, hard-working citizens and like the name East Lancashire.”

But Roger Frost, mayor of Burnley and chairman of the town’s civic society, said many people seemed to like the proposed new name for the region and added that the report had certainly set people in councils, commerce, industry and education arguing and discussing. Personally, he was a little wary about the fashion tower, fearing it was a throwback to the town’s textile past, which is rapidly becoming only a memory.

“The report has both its supporters and detractors,” he said. “A number of people like the ideas. Others think they are just a lot of Tony Wilson and are not too keen. But he has latched on to the issues we are talking about in the area. He has made us think about how we see

## “Are the trendies taking over from earnest local council planners and regional regenerators? Not quite. But they can attract attention.”

ourselves, about our heritage and what our future should be.”

Baxenden’s allotment holders, who collectively represent the diversity of humanity and the way it organises its vegetable patches, are happy to do some thinking but will not be easily convinced about chic shacks and stylish uniformity. Their existing sheds are made from anything that comes to hand – old windows, old doors, old timber. “We are recyclers of the first order,” boasted Frank McVan, allotments society treasurer and, with his wife Sheila, grower of amazing dahlias and chrysanthemums. “We were recycling before anyone thought of it. Much of the pleasure you get from an allotment is making do and mending. You spend as little as possible and you get the benefit.”

“I’m happy with the way things are,” added Brian Watts. “You could call it an organised muddle. Everyone does his or her own thing. That’s the way it is.”

Pennine Lancashire (or whatever you want to call it) has to preserve its sturdy individuality while considering big questions about its destiny. Which is why Livesey

“There were lots of things that annoyed us that we thought could be better. One of those was housing and the liveability of environments.

Anyone can have ideas on how to live. It depends on what position you have whether you can put those ideas into practice. When you are in the public eye, you have access to be able to do things.”

One thing was not just to develop the Birch but also to make sure that some of the apartments, with prices starting at £80,000, would be made available to key workers and first time buyers.

“Because we were reasonably well known as designers, people thought they could link up with us and gain some economic advantage,” added Hemingway. “That has ensured that the projects we are doing reach fruition, that we can make money for people and ourselves. That gives companies like Wimpey confidence.

“People look at our development in Gateshead and say it’s not that special. But we say that if it has gone two per cent in the right direction, we’ll be singing and dancing in the streets. We have met housebuilders on their terms and worked with them to inch their way forward. We realise they have to make money.”

A fashion designer might call that cutting your coat according to your cloth. **S**

David Ward is the Guardian’s highly-respected Northern correspondent. He has worked for the paper in Manchester for almost 30 years.





Words & photograph Matthew Sutcliffe

## Who you gonna call?

PC Kath Juckes and the  
Birch Green Dirt Busters

**How does one person's** desire to bring a little nature back into her life end up with the police, fire brigade, local businesses, council workers and volunteers removing three hundred tons of litter and debris from a small stream in Lancashire?

John and Maureen Fleet live in the Birch Green area of Skelmersdale. Theirs is the fifth house from the end in long row of identical homes built in the 1960s, when planners across the country were experimenting with 'new towns'.

For John and Maureen, arriving in Skelmersdale in 1977, it seemed idyllic. The planners left patches of nature undisturbed amongst the estates and when the Fleets moved to Birch Green in 1981, if Maureen left the bedroom window open she could hear a stream bubbling along through Westhead Clough, less than a hundred yards away.

But Skelmersdale has not turned out the way it was supposed to. Low employment and a host of other problems meant that cracks were soon showing in its utopian vision. Over the years the clough became neglected and choked with rubbish. Maureen just wanted to hear the stream again.

John and Maureen are chairman and secretary of the Birch Green Estate Management Board. If there was a nerve centre to the operation to clean up the clough, it was their kitchen table. Visiting members of the Birch Green Dirt Busters, as they have become known, find that hot drinks and biscuits are in constant supply and there's always a bowl of sweets on the table.

And if there was a key individual in this team effort, it was PC Kath Juckes, community beat manager in Birch Green for the last three years. Kath Juckes is exactly the kind of bobby people want more of on the beat. Everyone on her patch knows her and she knows everyone. She's down to earth and friendly but can also be stern, in a manner befitting an officer of the law.

"Kath was the motivator," says Judith Allnutt of the Mersey Basin Campaign, who helped organise the clean up. "She was very good at getting groups involved and getting them to give what we needed, and she persuaded them to provide all sorts of extras. She was the one who mobilised everybody."

As Kath Juckes explains: "I volunteered for the estate management team with John and Maureen and they roped me in to help clean up the clough."

Years of fly-tipping had covered the clough under a huge pile of rubbish. "On top of the silt and natural debris there were stolen motor bikes, couches, mattresses, fridges, beds and shopping trolleys – you name it, we had it," says Kath.

Excavating it all from the clough with virtually no funding was no simple matter. The success of an earlier, smaller clean up encouraged people to get involved, but even so people had to be cajoled and favours called in. Local volunteers and school children pitched in and the local Asda, Lidl and Farm

of work all told, which I mean is absolutely phenomenal."

Having the clough looking better seemed to get people thinking. Says Kath: "People were out washing the fronts of their houses and wiping the windows, and you don't see that very often – and it's continued."

The changes didn't go unnoticed. "It put Birch Green on the map quite frankly because once we uncovered the water feature the press came and took photos, and then Radio Lancashire got involved. The media coverage went on for weeks."

Kath continues, "In the end, even the people who started off

“Kath was the motivator. She was the one who got everybody moving.”

Foods helped to feed the volunteers. United Utilities, the Northwest's water company, also helped out, as did the Environment Agency. So too did the fire brigade, who blasted clean a water feature that had been put into the stream bed when Birch Green was built. Lost beneath silt and rubbish for fourteen years, its re-emergence brought back childhood memories for many local people.

West Lancs District Council also came up trumps in the person of its ground maintenance manager, Gary Peter. He sent workmen to help with the clean up and to cut back the privets and trees around the stream. He also encouraged local contractors to get involved in the three-week long effort.

"Joe Lidel from Ribble Reclamation gave us a JCB and someone to drive it for six days at no cost," says Kath Juckes. "We estimate we did about twenty thousand pounds worth

saying it was a waste of time became very positive. There's still some fly-tipping, but nothing like what it was."

As John Fleet says, "We've got to try and educate people about the environment. And it's not an easy thing. The majority of people are decent, it's just the odd one who doesn't care where they live. We've just got to try and put some pride back into people's lives."

#### MORE INFORMATION:

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Words Joanne Birtwistle

## Eazyfone entrepreneur

The Northwest businessman who  
is turning old mobile phones into profits.



**Pete Petrondas** is a natural born entrepreneur. Fresh out of college aged 18 he set up his first company; making letterheads and business cards. "But I wasn't making enough money," says Petrondas of the small print business that is still in existence today.

To supplement his income Petrondas got a job at The Mobile Phone Store. It was this shop floor post, where he gained valuable sales experience, people skills and customer service skills, which started him on the path to setting up his own, rather more lucrative, mobile phone business.

Petrondas worked his way up the hierarchy to become store and then area manager, before being recruited as a business centre manager by Celltalk, a business to business contract mobile phone distributor.

Then, aged just 25, Petrondas made the leap. "I saw the money that Celltalk was making, it was a very big growth industry at the time, and I thought I could do it myself," he says. So in late 2000 he left Celltalk and set up Eazyfone doing the exact same thing: contract mobile phones to consumers and businesses.

While the company grew rapidly, complications with a service provider meant it could all have been over just as quickly. Explains Petrondas: "Luckily enough they decided to settle out of court so we got paid but at that point we had no forward strategy, we didn't have the ability to provide the same packages anymore."

Many an entrepreneur would have packed it all in at that stage. Instead, Petrondas decided to remodel the business and give it a second chance: "We started to realise that when customers upgraded they'd have redundant or surplus mobile phones sat in a drawer. That's when I had the idea that there were all these phones with some value being left in cupboards throughout the country."

On average, UK consumers update their mobile phones every 12 to 18 months and with 15 million being bought each year, that's a lot of perfectly usable older models gathering dust or going to landfill. Petrondas had hit upon a big idea.

Eazyfone started to work with local charities, like the MAST hospital appeal in

UK consumers update their mobile phones on average every 12 to 18 months and buy 15m handsets every year.

Macclesfield, offering fund raising for the groups by collecting old and redundant mobile phones from the public. "We launched that as a sideline around 2002 while we were going through this big change with the contract side of things. We then thought what a fantastic way to do two things; help the environment and also raise as much money as possible for the groups that take part," says Petrondas.

Soon the recycling side of the business took over. "We started targeting churches because they are always looking for new roofs and things like that," he says. And Petrondas found that these groups would use the press to encourage the public to collect and donate mobile phones: "So we got loads of PR and press coverage. And we got thousands of mobile phones back."

It really does seem that everyone is a winner. Not only does the company allow individuals and charities to realise some

value from old phones, it also helps to divert them from landfill, which reduces pollution, and it provides a low cost communication solution for areas that have poor landline infrastructures, such as Africa.

Explains Petrondas: "It's usually not cost effective for the government in these countries to start building more landlines and transmitters. Mobile technology is very fast growth as it's much cheaper for the governments to build mobile infrastructure."

Of course, it has to be affordable for the end users in these countries as well: "We call it ultra low cost technology. Whereas people would not usually be able to afford the sort of technology we provide, we are making it possible for them to do that. We have quite a low cost to procure that mobile phone from the British consumer and we are able to pass that saving on to consumers in other countries."

Oh, and the company is a huge commercial success as well. In 2002, the first year the company switched to mobile phone recycling, Eazyfone turned over around £360,000. Petrondas says the company is on target to turnover £2.7 million in 2005.

And this successful marriage of good business and environmental practice has been recognised elsewhere: in May this year Petrondas won the Environmental Champion award at the Northwest Business Environment Awards.

But it doesn't stop there. The company has big plans, including expansion into Holland in mid-October, followed by France and Spain in the first quarter of 2006. "We believe Holland will be more successful than the UK because of the attitude of consumers; people are more geared towards recycling in Europe," says Petrondas.

#### MORE INFORMATION:

www.eazyfone.com



All the noise is coming from a cavernous rectangular room, two stories high, with a large square entrance on one side through which sunlight is flooding in from the bright courtyard outside. It smells like the metalwork room at school – it is, after all, a workshop. There are metal people dangling from the high ceiling.

More precisely, overhead are suspended swirling clouds of steel fibres, ingeniously constructed so that from the correct viewpoint the lines mesh to reveal a body-shaped void at the centre.

This is where some of Britain’s most successful art is made, the workshop at the heart of Antony Gormley’s new purpose-built studio in London. Three young artists – Gormley’s assistants – are cutting, welding and beating his artworks into being.

In the courtyard a matching pair of Gormley’s striking metal figures punctuates the space and a stainless steel clad staircase rises up to a tastefully minimalist office, where Gormley has agreed to an interview in a room overlooking the workshop.

If you don’t already know Antony Gormley the artist, you’ll almost certainly know his art. Think of the *Angel of the North* in Gateshead – or, more recently, the 100 cast iron statues gazing out implacably across the Irish Sea from Crosby beach in Merseyside, which make up the installation called *Another Place*.

When *Another Place* was unveiled last summer it attracted the kind of national media attention that is rarely seen in one of Merseyside’s regeneration areas.



The Guardian featured a front page picture of the iron men. Like much of Gormley’s art it has proved popular with the public as well as the media and the critics. Local coastal rangers estimate that the number of visitors to the beach has doubled since its arrival. The original projection of 600,000 visitors during the installation’s stay, until November 2006, looks sure to be comfortably beaten.

“The moment Antony topped the sand dunes and saw the beach he sort of went ‘Yes’,” says Rod Yeoman, the director of South Sefton Partnership, who played a important part in bringing *Another Place* to Crosby.

Gormley explains: “What I like about Crosby beach is that it’s a working beach, not a romantic, escapist idea of nature as wilderness. It’s got the wind farm, it’s got the community centre, it’s got the great container ships coming and leaving the Mersey docks. It’s got the piles of scrap iron.”

He continues: “*Another Place*, in a way, says ‘Here we are’ at the beginning of the twenty-first century in a post-industrial world, facing the sea. The beach is a very important interface between the known, the given, the made and the earth and its systems, like the rhythm of the tide.”

*Another Place* was first shown in 1997 at the German port of Cuxhaven, from where thousands of people emigrated to America, many fleeing the rise of Nazism (Crosby is its fourth beach, the first in the UK). So the location of Crosby beach close to Liverpool, another



great port of emigration, also resonates with the work’s themes.

But things have moved on since 1997 and to Gormley *Another Place* has taken on new significance. “I think people quite rightly see other associations. With more awareness of asylum seekers and greater global mobility it seems that it’s less about the Pilgrim Fathers or refugees going to America than about people coming here and us having an opportunity to think about what kind of society we offer.”

Like the life-size statues on Crosby beach and the body-shaped spaces in the steel fibres, the human body is the constant that runs through Gormley’s work. His own trim 6’ 4” frame in particular has provided the model for many of his works, including *Another Place*.

“I suppose I go to the body because it is the universal human condition,” he says. “The body is where we all live.”

His work is also partly a reaction to the move towards the abstract in twentieth century art. “I go to the body,” he says, “in reply to the failure of modernism to provide an art that reflects the way we feel as well as the way we might think or see.” It is a reaction to “the obsession with composition and relationships of pure elements that is responsible for draining the feeling from art.”

There is a depth of thought behind Gormley’s work, something approaching a philosophy. Indeed, in the early 1970s the young Gormley set out to follow the



hippie trail to India, eventually spending almost three years away, during which time he studied meditation with a Burmese guru and considered becoming a Buddhist monk. It was in India that he decided to make a serious stab at being an artist. When he arrived home in 1974 he enrolled at the Central School of Art in London, before going on to Goldsmiths and the Slade.

“I start from an aspiration that art can be anywhere and for everyone,” he says. And the reaction to *Another Place* suggests he is doing something right. People have taken the statues to heart, regularly dressing them up – during the Ashes a cricket team suddenly appeared. There is even a story about a bride in her wedding dress donning wellies to have her picture taken with one of the statues.

So successful has *Another Place* been that local MP Claire Curtis-Thomas has already initiated a campaign to make it permanent. Whether the campaign will succeed is hard to say, not least because Crosby is a complex site. Careful negotiations were required to stage the work in the first place and the permissions granted are for 18 months only.

Even so, with the Capital of Culture arriving in Liverpool in 2008, it’s hard to refute the idea that Gormley’s stunning installation should stay in place at least until then. [S](#)



The human body is the constant that runs through Gormley’s work – in particular, his own.

PHOTOGRAPH ABOVE:  
ANTONY GORMLEY

ALL OTHER  
PHOTOGRAPHS:  
ANOTHER PLACE

# PUBLIC BODIES

Artist Antony Gormley describes the thinking behind *Another Place*, his installation on a Merseyside beach. Words Matthew Sutcliffe Photographs Matthew Sutcliffe, Pete Moss & courtesy Mersey Waterfront



Winter is the perfect time to visit one of the country’s top ten most important wetlands.



# FLOCKING TO THE MERSEY

Words Tim Melling

Photographs Steve Young



LEFT: CURLEW  
BELOW LEFT: WADER FLOCK  
BELOW RIGHT: REDSHANK



**Remember the TV show Family Fortunes**, where contestants had to guess the most popular public answers to simple questions? I wonder what answers you’d get if you asked what people associated most with the River Mersey. The Beatles, the ferries, the Liver building, Albert Dock or the Cathedrals? I suspect that not many would conjure up an image of one of Britain’s richest bird sites. But the Mersey Estuary is currently in ninth place in the league of the top UK wetland sites, regularly supporting more than 100,000 ducks and wading birds.

The Mersey rather hides its light under a bushel compared with say, Morecambe Bay, where thousands of people can easily enjoy the waterfowl spectacular from countless viewpoints. On the Mersey, it’s difficult to access the inner estuary, the area where most of the wildlife-rich salt marsh and mudflats are to be found. The Manchester Ship Canal is a barrier to access on the south side, and there aren’t too many access points on the north side either.

When visiting the Mersey Estuary, timing is everything: time of year and time of day. During the summer, most of the Mersey’s birds will have flown to the Arctic or Scandinavia to breed. They return during September and October and will remain until March or April, when they fly back north. So autumn and winter are the best times to visit the Mersey.

The state of the tide is also important, as it governs the birds’ activity. At high tide, birds head for an undisturbed roosting place. When the falling tide exposes the food-rich mudflats and

salt marshes, they leave their roosts for breakfast. So the best time to visit the Mersey is about an hour after high tide when the birds should be feeding close to the upper shore. As the tide recedes, the birds will disperse further and further across the vast expanses of intertidal flats.

The Dunlin is the commonest wading bird, comprising almost a half of the Mersey’s 100,000

numbers of locally bred Ringed Plovers that spend the whole winter on the Mersey.

The Shelduck is unique among British ducks in that both the male and female have showy plumage; bright red beaks, green heads, black and white bodies with a chestnut breast band. They nest underground in rabbit burrows so the incubating females do not need the camouflaged plumage shown by other types

MAIN PHOTOGRAPH:  
FLOCK OF GOLDEN PLOVERS  
BELOW: TURNSTONE

“One cubic metre of Mersey Estuary mud contains enough worms and shellfish to equal the number of calories in sixteen Mars bars.”

birds. The Mersey is the top UK site for this species, supporting more than any other site. They are rather small, brown and nondescript in winter, but their beauty comes from the spectacular choreographed flock movements. They feed in large flocks on the mudflats but will readily take to the air. When airborne, they have a coordinated movement that seems to flow through the flock in waves. The effect is mesmerising as the flock changes from dark to white in waves as each bird twists in turn to reveal either the dark back or the white belly.

Some birds don’t spend the whole winter on the Mersey, but use it as a sort of motorway service station where they refuel as they migrate vast distances. Arctic breeding Ringed Plovers spend the summer in the Arctic and the winter in West Africa. These tiny cousins of the Lapwing call into the estuary for a few days in spring and autumn to replenish the reserves they have used up on the first leg of the exhausting journey between the two. The envy of human dieters, migratory birds like the Ringed Plover can rapidly use up their fat reserves. Less desirable is their ability to put on fat with equal speed. These migratory birds play leapfrog with smaller

of duck. Thirty years ago the entire British population of Shelducks used to migrate to the Heligoland Bight after breeding, a remote area off the coast of north west Germany.

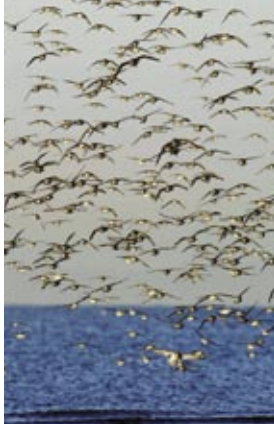
Like all ducks, Shelducks moult all their flight feathers simultaneously, rendering them completely flightless for a time. Coupled with their showy plumage, this makes them extremely vulnerable to predation, which is why they flew to this remote sandbank. However, Shelducks have been moving to the Mersey to moult in increasing numbers. More than 15,000 Shelducks (about 20% of the UK population) have stayed to moult on the Mersey in recent years, and



it is now the single most important site in the whole of the UK for this species.

[CONTINUED OVER]





Turnstone is a species that was long overlooked on the Mersey – they were missed during the regular high tide counts at Seaforth and the North Wirral Foreshore because they don’t roost with the other waders. They were discovered roosting on Liverpool’s dock walls at the mouth of the Mersey, which are not easily visible. About a thousand Turnstones normally feed on the barnacle beds on the Egremont foreshore and on the groynes in that area.

Ringling studies on Turnstones have shown that they are both long-lived and extremely site faithful. One Turnstone has returned to the same barnacle bed at Egremont for nearly twenty years, yet it flies thousands of miles each year to breed in Greenland. It seems strange that it travels the globe, yet its knowledge of the world comprises just a few hectares of tundra in Greenland, and a small area of foreshore in England.

The Mersey in winter supports more than 7 per cent of the entire Icelandic breeding population of Black-tailed Godwits. These birds have extremely long legs and bills enabling them to probe deep in the Mersey mud for food. In flight, they have strikingly black and white plumage, including a black tip to a white tail, which gives them their name. In the same manner that our swallows



fly south for the winter, so do Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits. The estuaries of the Northwest are particularly important wintering sites.

More than 10,000 Teal regularly spend the winter on the Mersey Estuary, making it the second most important UK site, after the Somerset Levels. These tiny ducks are only about half the size of a Mallard, and instead of quacking they make a high pitched, bell-like whistle. They breed in marshes in Scandinavia and Russia, but flee before the onset of the freezing winter. This is the time of year when most Liverpoolians are dreaming of vacating Merseyside for a holiday in the warmth. But for the Teal, the Mersey Estuary in a mild winter haven.

Meanwhile, Peregrine Falcons have cottoned on to the fact that there are many birds around for them to feed on. In recent years, they have moved into Merseyside and now nest on buildings on both sides of the river. This is quite a dramatic step for a bird that is more at home on remote moorland crags and sea cliffs. They can regularly be seen perched on Hamilton Square Chimney in Birkenhead, or on tall buildings in Liverpool itself.

But the bird that has really put the Mersey on the

birdwatchers’ map is the rare and elusive Leach’s Petrel, a small dark seabird with a white rump and a forked tail that ranks among the most difficult to see of all British birds. The name petrel is thought to derive from St Peter who walked on water as these birds patter over the surface in a similar manner. It only nests on remote, uninhabited Scottish islands such as North Rona and Sula Sgeir. Furthermore, it only ever returns to these nesting islands at night, spending the daylight hours many miles out to sea. It also winters at sea off the coast of western Africa.

So why is the Mersey so famous for them? During September, Petrels migrate south at night from Scotland towards Africa, flying above the Irish Sea. When strong northwesterly winds blow at this time of year, disoriented birds get blown across Liverpool Bay and into the Mersey. Keen birdwatchers eagerly watch the weather forecasts during September and after a strong blow, you will usually see large crowds of birdwatchers sheltering against Perch Rock in the hope of catching a glimpse of one of these special birds. New Brighton is generally reckoned the most reliable place in Britain to catch sight of a Leach’s Petrel.

So what does all this tell us about the quality of the

Tim Melling works for the RSPB in the Northwest and regularly writes for bird and wildlife magazines.



ABOVE: PEREGRINE  
BELOW:  
LEACH’S PETREL  
FACING PAGE FROM TOP:  
WADER FLOCK,  
BLACK TAILED GODWIT,  
BATHING MALE TEAL, DUNLIN

Mersey Estuary? As the water quality has improved in recent years, a greater range of invertebrates (worms, shellfish etc) has developed, which in turn supports a greater range of birds. So next time you look across the sandflats and mudflats of the Mersey Estuary and you think it is a barren waste, remember that there are over 100,000 birds out there who disagree with you. [S](#)



## 60-second expert

- Most people are surprised to learn that the Mersey Estuary is in the top ten most important wetland bird sites in Britain.
- It regularly hosts more than 100,000 birds and is considered internationally important for three types of duck and four types of wading bird.
- Winter is the best time to see birds on the estuary. Each autumn birds arrive on the Mersey all the way from the Arctic. They choose the Mersey partly because they consider it a warm and sheltered site to spend the winter and partly because of the superabundance of food.
- It has been calculated that the worms and shellfish in one cubic metre of Mersey mud have the same number of calories as sixteen Mars bars.
- Parts of the estuary are designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or as Ramsar sites, which covers wetlands of international importance.

## Accessing the Mersey Estuary

### On the north side of the estuary

Park in the Hale Head Car park (map reference SJ473814) and walk south to the lighthouse where you can walk east or west along the Mersey shore. Dunlin, Redshank and Teal can be seen here, amongst lots of other species. Park at Oglet Bay car park (SJ449820) and again walk east or west along the Mersey shore. This area is also good for Dunlin, Redshank, Teal and Shelduck.

### On the south side of the estuary

Park at Eastham Ferry (SJ362819) at the country park and enjoy views across the Mersey. At low tide Dunlin, Redshank and Teal can be seen on the exposed mudflats. Very few birds to be seen at high tide. On-street parking at New Ferry (SJ342855) can give access to New Ferry Bay, a favoured site for Black-tailed Godwits and Pintail when the mudflats are exposed.

On-street parking at Egremont (SJ319920) will give views of the coastal defence groynes. These groynes are used by roosting waders use at high tide. This area is also the best feeding site for Turnstones when the falling tide exposes the barnacle beds.

On-street parking near Perch Rock at New Brighton (SJ310942) gives access to the North Wirral Foreshore; a favourite feeding and roosting area for wading birds. This site is also a favourite spot to look for rare Leach’s Petrels and other seabirds such as gulls, terns and skuas.

## Important Bird Populations on the Mersey Estuary

A site is considered to be of international importance for any species of bird if it supports more than 1 per cent of the European population. The Mersey Estuary is internationally important for three species of duck and four species of wading bird and so qualifies as a Special Protection Area, a status reserved for only the most important bird sites in Europe. It also qualifies as a Ramsar site; a wetland of international importance. This recognises wetlands as vital links in a chain where migratory birds can stop and refuel en route between their breeding and wintering grounds. To be considered nationally important, a site must regularly support more than 1 per cent of the UK population of any species.

### Internationally Important Populations

Species	5 year mean peak count*	% UK population	Ranking in UK
Shelduck	11,459	19%	1st
Teal	11,211	7%	2nd
Pintail	838	4%	10th
Dunlin	49,067	12%	1st
Black-tailed Godwit	1,543	7%	8th
Redshank	5,559	6%	3rd
Turnstone	1,067	8%	2nd

### Nationally Important Populations

Wigeon	10,335	3%	10th
Golden Plover	2,671	2%	25th
Grey Plover	1,382	3%	17th
Lapwing	10,814	3%	13th
Curlew	1,682	2%	12th

\*These figures are based on the latest published counts of birds during the winters 1996-97 to 2000-01. (The Wetland Bird Survey 2000-01 Wildfowl and Wader Counts. BTO/WWT/RSPB/JNCC)



# SMALL (AND CLEAN) IS BEAUTIFUL

New research is revealing the good news behind some of the Northwest’s forgotten rivers.

Picture the river Mersey, and you’re likely to think of its sweeping estuary, Liverpool’s magnificent waterfront with its grand architecture or the famous Albert Docks. But big rivers are not the whole story of a region’s water environment – they are in fact just the end of a story that begins with the small streams and tributaries that feed into our grandest rivers along their journey to the sea. Often neglected, forgotten and unappreciated, these small rivers are now the focus of research carried out by the Mersey Basin Campaign in association with regional universities. Perceived for years as unpleasant, polluted and litter-strewn places, researchers wanted to find out whether their water quality was indeed as poor as people believed. Could an unloved local waterway have the potential to encourage regeneration by providing a pleasant, natural environment for residents to live and work beside?

Research

In 2002 the River Medlock, a tributary of the Mersey, was the first to be looked at in research backed by the Mersey Basin Campaign, with a wide ranging PhD study into water quality and quantity. The research looked at how pollution is trapped and transported by sediment particles in the river – a significant problem because the Medlock is prone to flash floods that stir up the sediments. In 2004, a year-long monitoring project then looked in more detail at animal life in the river, investigating the invertebrate species that reveal the river’s water quality. The second tributary to be examined was the River Irk, a tributary of the upper Mersey studied over a 12-month period by Denise Patfield of Manchester Metropolitan University, supervised by Dr Kevin Taylor. While major environmental research projects can take years to come to fruition, the benefit of smaller studies can be to create a more immediate impact. Mike Cummins at Action Irk and Roch says that the improved water quality in the River Irk means that local residents are already noticing increased wildlife. “There’s kingfishers bombing up and down, I’ve seen herons every time I’ve been out recently and last year there was a green sandpiper on the river. We’ve got to use this evidence – both the good and the bad – to produce local political pressure to work on improving things like the road run-off, because this kind of thing shows how good it could be if the multitude of problems that still exist got dealt with.”

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Findings

In both studies it was found that river water quality was better than had been realised. Investment and tighter regulation having clearly had a positive impact on the levels of sewage sludge input, heavy metal pollution, and excess levels of phosphorus and nitrogen that damage fish and invertebrate habitats through eutrophication. The good news was tempered with worrying findings of raised pollution levels in the sediment on the river substrate. This is partly the legacy of the Northwest’s industrial past, but also includes sediment from today’s building sites together with run-off from roads, gardens and agriculture. Concentrated in the river sediment, this pollution diffuses out into the water over time. More seriously, when flash flooding occurs, as it frequently does, these pollutants can be quickly released back into the water, undoing all the good work that has been achieved through better environmental behaviour by local businesses and farms. Overall, however, these studies have to date been remarkably encouraging. With findings that show the water is cleaner than anticipated, our forgotten rivers can start to be used once again as a community resource, whether for angling, canoeing, boating or simply enjoying the wildlife that is returning. As well as studying the Mersey’s forgotten tributaries, the River Ribble in Lancashire is also coming under the microscope. One of its tributaries, the River Tawd in Skelmersdale, is the focus of a year-long water quality study by the Campaign and Manchester Metropolitan University. The research is looking at sources of pollution leaching out from disused mines – findings will be available next year. With a growing body of evidence demonstrating the positives and negatives of the region’s smaller rivers, it is hoped that these studies will collectively demonstrate the potential for local people to once again make use of and enjoy their waterways.

Opinion: The next big step in healing the Northwest’s environment is to make the Mersey whole again, says Dr Keith Hendry.

# MOVING THE MERSEY

Dr Keith Hendry is an aquatic scientist with many years of experience in water quality and fisheries management. He is managing director of aquatic consultancy firm APEM Ltd.

What is it about salmon and the epic migrations they make that captures our imaginations and reminds us of nature’s majesty and power? Perhaps it’s that wildlife filmmakers have become so adept at portraying the salmon’s story. We follow their perilous journey from the open ocean back to the rivers and streams where they were born, battling strong currents, leaping waterfalls and dodging hungry seals along the way. Or perhaps it’s because the filmmakers most often show us the mass runs of Sockeye salmon returning to the streams of Alaska’s still-pristine wilderness. So it’s a surprise to discover that for most of its history the River Mersey too saw mighty annual salmon runs of our own native

“For most of its history the River Mersey saw mighty annual runs of Atlantic Salmon.”

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species, Atlantic Salmon. As late as the 1700s workers on the river complained of having too much fish to eat. That all ended with the terrible poisoning of our environment that accompanied the industrial revolution. By the 1970s the Mersey and many of its tributaries were a kind of toxic soup that no fish could survive in, let alone salmon, which demand cleaner water than most species. Who would have thought back in 1985, at the outset of the Mersey Basin Campaign, that salmon would be breeding in one of the river’s headwaters a mere twenty years later? The discovery of young salmon in the River Goyt this summer is a landmark in the restoration of the Northwest’s environment. There can be no doubt that the water quality improvements in the catchment are nothing less than startling. It is an outstanding achievement and all involved, including the Campaign, United Utilities, the Environment Agency and Peel Holdings should be justifiably proud. But a handful of young fish in one tributary hardly constitutes a return to the Mersey’s great salmon runs of centuries ago. The

question is how to protect and encourage their return. And that will demand some really visionary thinking. It will mean tackling an engineering project on a scale rarely seen in the Northwest since the Victorians. It will mean moving the Mersey. One of the major obstacles that remains for migratory fish in the Mersey is the poor water quality in the Manchester Ship Canal, which the river joins for several kilometres near Davyhulme in Manchester (the other is impassable weirs, but while fish-passes around them are expensive, they are easy to build). Indeed, most experts had assumed that the Ship Canal remained too polluted for salmon to move through. We don’t have to look far to see what happens when salmon are caught in poor quality water. The recovery of salmon on the River Tyne has been dramatic, making it the most prolific salmon river in England. But problems remain. When water quality in the Tyne falls – most commonly in hot summers – substantial numbers of migratory fish like salmon and sea trout pay the penalty. The same thing could easily happen in the Ship Canal. It would be ironic if the return of breeding salmon also heralded a return to fish dying on the Mersey in large numbers. What is needed is a long term solution to the threat of periodic and regular deteriorations in water quality. The only realistic answer is to reconnect the Mersey with its headwaters by cutting a new seven kilometre river channel adjacent to the Ship Canal through Partington. Some may consider cutting a new channel utter madness, but who would have considered the presence of salmon in the Goyt conceivable even a few months ago? Moreover, such an engineering scheme would have been a mere trifle to the Victorians, who built the Ship Canal in the first place. Let’s think big and leave an eternal legacy for future generations by making the Mersey whole again. Perhaps one day we’ll see TV pictures of salmon streaming in huge numbers up the River Mersey. What better way to prove to ourselves and to a sceptical world that the once damaged environment of the industrial Northwest is, after all, well on the way to recovery?





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