



# WIND IN

Liverpool's major new coastal reserve gets its flagship building.



LIVERPOOL SAILING CLUB'S WATERSIDE ELEVATION (TOP LEFT)  
AND LANDSIDE ELEVATION (TOP RIGHT)

CATHY ELWIN AND TOM WORKMAN AT THE WRECK OF LIVERPOOL  
SAILING CLUB'S FORMER CLUBHOUSE (ABOVE AND OPPOSITE)

Three years ago the future looked bleak for Liverpool Sailing Club. The clubhouse, on the Mersey shoreline between Speke and Garston, had been reduced to a burned out shell by an arson attack. Without a base, and with a dwindling and ageing membership, it seemed the club, which started in 1958, could not continue. But against all the odds, the club has not only survived, it has thrived. Work has begun on tearing down the old clubhouse and next year construction will start on a gleaming new building from which a whole range of watersports and water-borne activities will be offered. This stretch of the river will teem with sailing dinghies, power boats, cruisers, canoes, fishing boats, windsurfers and jetskis, and by the time the club celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2008 races and regattas will also be a colourful and thrilling feature.

"We're already planning the celebrations," says Tom Workman, co-president of Liverpool Sailing Club and a member for nearly 40 years. Workman and fellow members worked closely with the Mersey Basin Campaign, landowners Peel Holdings, the Northwest Development Agency and other stakeholders to realise the club's new plans.

**"Liverpool's will be the first of a new generation of sailing clubs."**

"It will be the fulfilment of my dream. We want to see the clubhouse back for the members but also as part of a thriving community, where children and families as well as sailing folk can come and learn about sailing. We want to fill the river with people and boats, the like of which hasn't been seen since the days of the liners." The sailing club has been working with schools and youth organisations in South Liverpool, using blowcars, which are similar to land yachts, to introduce children and young people to the excitement of sailing.

The clubhouse is a key part of a wider initiative to carve a coastal reserve from the exposed,

unused and currently desolate stretch of land between the old and new airports. Support comes not just from local and regional sources, but also from an EU-funded European project called Artery, which aims to find ways to revitalise post-industrial waterside land in Germany, Holland and the UK. "Artery is an excellent example of trans-national working," says Claire Wilson, the Mersey Basin Campaign's European projects manager. "The steering group for the reserve is drawn from the public and private sectors and all partners actively contribute. We are currently creating a blank canvas so that we can consult local people, especially young people, to present ideas for the future of the reserve for informal recreation."

The clubhouse building, which covers around 600 sq metres on three levels, has been designed by Cass Associates, whose founder Richard Cass worked on the Liverpool Garden Festival project a few miles downriver twenty years ago. After years of decline, the project presents an exciting opportunity to celebrate and build on the renewal of the river, says Cass Associates architect Mark Line. In view of its recent history, designing in security was an essential feature, he explains, but the design achieves this without sacrificing stylishness or sensitivity to nearby Speke Hall, a Tudor house owned by the National Trust, who are also one of the partners of the Artery scheme.

"It's a small, but iconic, sculptural building that should become a talking point," describes Line. "It's inspired by



# THEIR SAILS

Words Deborah Mulhearn Photographs Cass Associates & Terry


sail iconography. From the river the form resembles two sails but from the landward side we have minimised the amount of wall with an aluminium roof that slopes down to what is effectively a moat around the building. There is really only one elevation which faces the river, and this will be punctuated with glazing and look modern and bright with a white-painted render." Construction costs are expected to be around £1.25 million, and will be met mainly with public money, including grants from Artery, Sport England and other regeneration agencies.

The club found a champion in Geoff Haslam, a Bristol-based architect and project manager, whose father was a Liverpool builder and founder member of the club. "Somehow they managed to track me down through my mum," laughs Haslam, "and I ended up as the chair of the development sub-committee." Once the decision was made to try and resurrect the club, Haslam steered the remaining members through the funding rounds and planning regulations needed to realise the scheme. He also headed a drive for new membership, which in the club's heyday in the 1960s and 70s had numbered hundreds. But it had shrunk to less than one hundred because of the club's isolation and vulnerability to theft, fly tipping and arson after the mid 1980s, when the airport moved to a new site and left the clubhouse exposed. Membership is now back up to 200 and growing.

"We spent a lot of time translating the ambitions for the club into an

architectural brief, but just as important were the stories around the activities we wanted to include," he says. The new club will be the antithesis of the traditional, somewhat snooty sailing clubs, says Haslam. "It won't be centred around the bar like a traditional sailing club," he adds, pointing out the sailing dinghy fraternity have never been elitist. "It will be family friendly, with a high performance training centre for watersports, high quality changing rooms, café, rescue control and storage facilities. It's going to be the first of a new generation of sailing clubs and the great challenge is to encourage people who would never dream of getting involved in watersports."

Cathy Elwin works for Mersey Waterfront, the organisation established to transform, energise and connect more than 120 km of the Merseyside coastline. It will create a major new waterfront park with a unique sense of place for people to live, work, visit and invest in Merseyside. Cathy points out that whilst the business and airport expansion has brought economic benefits to the area, the creation of the coastal reserve and the new sailing club will provide invaluable recreational resources for local people and visitors. "It will bring the river back into use as an amenity but it's also about engendering a sense of ownership and a great opportunity to draw people in."

For Tom Workman, the lure of the river is irresistible, and there is so much to learn from sailing, he says. "You can genuinely relax and get away from it all, but you also have to be alert. It makes you constantly aware of the wind and the turn of the tide. It's beautiful, but you can go from a flat, calm surface to 6 ft white-topped waves in no time - yes, in the Mersey!" 

Dinghy sailing became a popular sport after the Second World War and increasingly accessible after the 1963 Boat Show when the Daily Mirror newspaper sponsored a new small boat design. Liverpool Sailing Club started in 1958 and was one of the first clubs in the country to appoint a lady commodore. Members sailed across the river to Cheshire, upriver to Widnes and beyond, and sometimes even downriver and back against the tide.



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