

# source<sup>NW</sup>

WATERS | REGENERATION | ENVIRONMENT | SUSTAINABILITY

## SPENDING MONEY LIKE WATER

Bottled water is suddenly fashionable, but is it worth the hidden environmental price?

PLUS

news, reviews, interviews and comment

## WATERSIDE WINNER

An award winning waterside development proves that a little initiative can go a long way.

## OTTERS, ORCHIDS AND OIL

How has the site of the Northwest's biggest oil refinery become one of its finest wildlife sanctuaries?





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Source NW celebrated its first birthday this spring. To mark the occasion over 1,000 questionnaires were

emailed to readers around the region inviting comments and feedback. With bated breath and fingers crossed, we awaited the results.

Luckily, we needn't have worried - the response was overwhelmingly positive. Sincere thanks then, to the many people who answered the questionnaire. Your comments have been hugely useful and have already influenced this edition of the magazine.

One message that came through loud and clear is that the magazine's feature articles are one of its strongest points. Equally emphatic was the interest expressed by many readers in environmental issues and wildlife. Hence the feature story on pages 18-21.

It was heartening too, to find that the round-up of news stories is both useful and appreciated. Sharp-eyed readers may notice the design of the news section is now a little more sophisticated. The aim is to improve the layout without sacrificing the clean and tasteful look that is the goal at Source NW.

The magazine will continue to mature, guided by your comments, as we strive to keep improving it. All comments are welcome and can be sent to me at the address below. Thanks again for your support. **Matthew Sutcliffe**, editor  
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Website [www.merseybasin.org.uk](http://www.merseybasin.org.uk) Cover Blackpool beach (p5)



## Clean, save, enjoy

It's been 32 years coming, but World Environment Day has finally arrived in the Northwest.

**TARN HOWS, CUMBRIA: PART OF WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY IS TO REMIND PEOPLE HOW MUCH THE NORTHWEST HAS TO OFFER**

Organisations across the Northwest are stepping up efforts to improve and showcase the region's environment with the decision to join international celebrations of World Environment Day on June 5th.

A series of clean-ups are planned throughout the region, along with an online pledge committing people to take action to save the environment. Environment minister Elliot Morley and TV presenters Chris Tarrant and Peter Sissons have already signed up. People are also being encouraged to look afresh at opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors, with the Lake District, Pennines and miles of coastline all available.

All the activities are being co-ordinated under the banner Clean, Save, Enjoy.

World Environment Day was established in 1972 by the United Nations General Assembly to mark the opening of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. Traditionally celebrated with activities such as street rallies, parades, tree planting, recycling efforts and clean-up campaigns, last year it drew involvement from over 100 countries.

But while the rest of the world celebrated and took action, World Environment Day failed to make much of an impact on the Northwest.

In contrast, this year's activities signal the intent of some of the region's most influential organisations to grasp the day as an opportunity to galvanise the public into action. The Environment Agency, Northwest Development Agency, regeneration specialists Groundwork and the Mersey Basin

Campaign are all heavily committed to the day.

Also playing a key role is one of the region's biggest companies, United Utilities. According to Bruce Bendell, the company's head of corporate social responsibility, "With Groundwork, we are identifying sites across the region where volunteers from the company will be lending a hand to improve community facilities."

Similarly, the Mersey Basin Campaign's 17 local River Valley Initiative co-ordinators have together organised a further ten local actions, including at least one in every county of the region.

Robert Runcie, regional director of the Environment Agency, encouraged people to sign up to its online pledge. "We're asking people to take simple, easy measures that can add up to a big benefit for the environment." They include replacing one light bulb with an energy saving version or reusing plastic bags when shopping. Details can be found at [www.environment-agency.gov.uk/wed/campaign](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/wed/campaign).

The Northwest Development Agency's chief executive, Steven Broomhead, commented: "It's good to see people and organisations working together for the benefit of the environment and to promote World Environment Day in the Northwest."

The day is not just about work and sacrifice, however. Mersey Basin Campaign chief executive, Walter Menzies, said: "The old idea of the Northwest as damaged and derelict is hopelessly out of date. People need to get out and enjoy and value the environment on their doorstep."

### MORE INFORMATION:

[www.worldenvironmentday.org](http://www.worldenvironmentday.org)  
[www.merseybasin.org.uk](http://www.merseybasin.org.uk)  
[www.unep.org/wed/2004](http://www.unep.org/wed/2004)  
[www.environment-agency.gov.uk/wed/campaign](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/wed/campaign)  
[www.unitedutilities.com](http://www.unitedutilities.com)

## SOUND BITES

Plans are afoot for a multi-million pound scheme to create a vibrant new cultural and retail centre in Northwich, Cheshire, with the **River Weaver** at its heart. The cultural quarter could include a new theatre, library, salt museum and tourist information centre. Steven Broomhead, chief executive of the Northwest Development Agency, said: "This vision presents partners with a real opportunity to build on existing strengths of the town - its waterways, community spirit and distinct heritage - to significantly improve its offer as a retail centre, market town and visitor destination."

The Northwest Development Agency has announced the appointment of a **director for RENEW**, the new regional Centre of Regeneration Excellence. Phil Barton, a former senior civil service consultant for Defra, will head up the fledgling organisation, to be based in Liverpool's Tea Factory. The task for RENEW is to plug the gap in skills and training for people working in regeneration in the region, thus making them more effective. Phil Barton said: "The vision for RENEW is to build on the resources and talent available throughout the region, providing the regeneration skills needed for its future renaissance." More information: Richard Tracey 07810 528 502.

More than **8,000 infant salmon** have been released into the River Hodder, a tributary of the River Ribble in Lancashire, in the hope that they will return in the future as mature fish. In a project arranged by United Utilities and Hodder Consultative, a fisheries organisation, the salmon were reared at a fish farm before being transferred to a specially constructed pond at Hodder water treatment works. The project should help protect the future of salmon in the area.

Two rival bids have been tabled to develop a **casino and sports stadium** complex on a site adjacent to the Manchester Ship Canal. The site is part owned by Salford City Council, which has signed a deal giving first option on the lease to Salford Reds rugby league club. Arup architects are working on the project with the club, part of which would be to construct a new 20,000 seat stadium alongside the casino. However, Peel Holdings, owners of the Manchester Ship Canal, have also submitted outline plans for a casino development. Suggestions that Salford may turn into the Las Vegas of the North are said to be exaggerated.

The **Kyoto Club**, a new initiative from Sustainability Northwest (SNW), has been launched with the aim of reducing carbon dioxide emissions in the region. According to SNW, each person in the Northwest is responsible for 8.85 tonnes of the greenhouse gas every year, making a total of over 61 million tonnes. Described as "the Northwest coalition for a low carbon future," Kyoto Club is looking for "progressive organisations that are committed to shaping the future of the region whilst boosting their own economic performance." More information: [kyotoclub@snw.org.uk](mailto:kyotoclub@snw.org.uk)

## Pleasure beaches

Like to be beside the sea?

The Northwest's beaches are awash with seaside awards.

The hackneyed vision of the Northwest's beaches as dirty and lacking in facilities is to sound its death knell after 15 of the region's finest became proud winners of Seaside Awards.

Organised by ENCAMS - the charity behind the Keep Britain Tidy campaign - the Seaside Awards are presented to those UK resorts and rural beaches that provide a high level of amenities, ban dogs during the busy seasons and have passed the EU minimum legal standard for bathing water quality.

The standard of the Northwest's beaches has continued to rise as this year seven more beaches won the award than last year. Five Northwest beaches won the award for the first time and Southport was given special mention as the region's top beach.

More than twice as many Northwest beaches won the prestigious awards this year than last.

Awards for Blackpool, Lytham St. Annes and Morecambe mean the Seaside Award flag will be flying for the first time ever in Lancashire.

Blackpool tourism and regeneration councillor Eddie Collett called their award, "A brilliant boost to tourism."

"This has been a team effort from many council services, which has resulted in significant improvements in the way we manage the beach, making

them cleaner and safer, and therefore more attractive to visit."

Blackpool has made significant efforts to improve bather and visitor facilities. Increased signage along the promenade, the addition of pram and wheelchair access, improvements in the toilet and shower facilities and regular cleaning of the beach led to first-time awards for both its central and south beach. It joins 375 other beaches nationally which will be flying the Seaside Award flag throughout the coming year.

Joanne Whitaker, regional director of ENCAMS, said: "There will be celebrations all round the Northwest today because of the hard work of beach managers in bringing our beaches up to scratch and scooping an award. Winning beaches - both rural and resort - across the region is the news we needed. It is sure to boost tourist numbers."

But Ms Whitaker also warned about complacency: "Our beaches may be getting better but sadly this progress is not always happening off the beach. I would like to see time and money invested in making the Northwest's seaside towns as clean and safe as the beaches."

A further fillip for the region's beach-lovers came with publication, by the Marine Conservation Society, of the annual Beachwatch report. Despite a rise in the total amount of beach litter recorded in 2003 - due in large part to greater visitor numbers throughout last year's hot summer - the report states that the Northwest's beaches were the least polluted by litter in England.

Now, if only they could do something about the weather...



BEACHES IN BLACKPOOL SCOOPED SEASIDE AWARDS FOR THE FIRST TIME THIS YEAR

The last commercial narrowboat passed along the **Stockport arm of the Ashton Canal** in the 1930s, but the canal may one day re-open if a new campaign gets its way. The canal was built in the 1790s and in its hey day was a thriving part of the local economy, but by the 1970s all except a few metres had been filled in. David Sumner, vice-chairman of the Manchester and Stockport Canal Society, told the Manchester Evening News: "This is a superb opportunity for regeneration. These days, everyone thinks that where there is some water it will improve the environment, and it will." More information: 0161 431 8007.

The Environment Agency is calling for entries to its **Water Efficiency Awards 2005**. Now in their fourth year, the awards "recognise, reward and celebrate those organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors who are helping to conserve our precious water resources through water efficiency activities." With the amount of water used in homes in England and Wales having risen steadily for the past 20 years, the Environment Agency says that the balance between water supply and water demand is becoming increasingly precarious. Completed entry forms must be returned by 30 July, 2004. More information: [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)

Dragon boat racing is not yet a regular attraction on the River Irwell in Salford and Manchester. But it could be. "We'd like to see a big push to bring boats of all ilks back to the Irwell," says Dr Adrian Williams of consultants, APEM, who has just completed a draft report on the Irwell for the Environment Agency. So far, cautions the EA, the idea is no more than an aspiration. More information: Dr Adrian Williams 0161 226 2922.

The town of **Glossop** in the High Peak has secured over £2 million to fund a major regeneration project to revamp the town centre, two former mills and a neglected park. The money will help create a 'regeneration corridor' along Glossop Brook. The Mersey Basin Campaign's development manager, Iain Taylor, who helped put together the funding bid, said: "Residents, businesses and visitors will all benefit from a revitalised Glossop Brook. This is a fantastic opportunity to bring a new lease of life to the brook and at the same time reconnect it to the town's other assets." More information: [i.taylor@merseybasin.org.uk](mailto:i.taylor@merseybasin.org.uk) 0161 242 8200

Plans are progressing for a new £10.5 million **cruise liner facility** in Liverpool. Located in a prime spot on the River Mersey in front of three of the city's most famous and imposing buildings, the facility should handle between 40 and 50 ships per year. They would bring an estimated 25,000 passengers to the city and inject around £6 million into the local economy. The city's former liner landing stage was torn down in 1974 and since then only a handful of luxury cruise ships have visited the Mersey. It's hoped that the new facility, which is part funded by Mersey Waterfront, will open in spring 2005.



WINNERS IN THE NORTHWEST BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT AWARDS 2004

## Irwell plage?

First Paris dreamed up its famous 'plage', an artificial beach created by the Seine every summer. Now Salford could be about to follow suit with its own version on the banks of the River Irwell. The proposal is one of several eyebrow-raising ideas to emerge from an international design competition for a four acre site owned by (who else?) Urban Splash. The competition attracted 75 entries from 19 countries. Other suggestions included the creation of an island in the river. Along with the beach, the winning design from Weston Williams also includes plans for landscaped gardens, as well as buildings arranged so that every apartment has a view of the river.

**MORE INFORMATION:**  
www.urbansplash.co.uk

## Taking stock

Fish stocks in rivers in England and Wales are thriving, with more fish now than at any time in the last hundred years, according to the biggest survey of its kind ever undertaken.

The Environment Agency's (EA) new research, Our Nations' Fisheries, found fish at 98% of sites surveyed, with 50% of sites yielding at least eight or more species.

However, although the national picture shows that stocks of coarse fish look healthy, the number of eels has crashed catastrophically and salmon are also flagged as a cause for concern.

Happily, the Northwest bucks the overall trend. Salmon have been gradually returning to the River Mersey since 2001 and show signs of spreading further through the river system. In fact, in the 17th century the Mersey was famous for its salmon, so their reappearance is the first sign of a return to a more natural state of affairs.



And after an initial programme of fish stocking in 2000, last year naturally reared brown trout were found in the upper

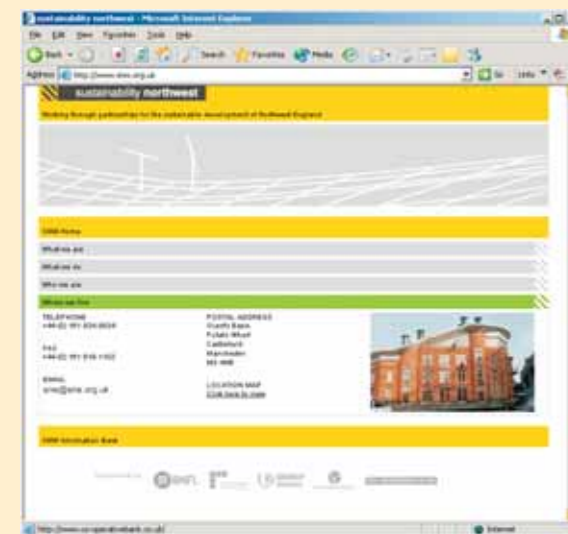
reaches of the River Lostock in Lancashire for the first time in living memory.

The EA credits major clean ups of sewage and pollution and the restoration of natural habitats for much of the improvement. It highlights its own work to improve fish habitats in the region, such as de-silting spawning beds, installing fences to prevent livestock from damaging riverbanks and building fish passes to help fish safely avoid weirs or other man-made obstacles.

In Cumbria, for instance, fish passes have been built at weirs on Cairn Beck, just outside Carlisle, which is a tributary of the River Eden. The passes help migratory fish such as salmon, trout and the rare and internationally protected lamprey to thrive in areas which were previously inaccessible to them.

**MORE INFORMATION:**  
www.environment-agency.gov.uk/onf

## Resources: www.snw.org.uk



**MORE INFORMATION:**  
c.chamberlain@snw.org.uk

It's bold, it's graphic, it's very, very yellow - it must be the revamped website from Sustainability Northwest (SNW). According to the home page, "An independent, pioneering charity, now celebrating its tenth year; SNW works to inspire, innovate and advance the sustainability agenda for England's Northwest through a partnership ethos."

SNW's old website was showing its age. As soon as the bright new site pops up on your screen, you know it's a quantum leap forward. "We wanted a site that is fresh, clean, easy to navigate and not overloaded with distracting information," explains SNW's business manager, Ceri Chamberlain. There's also a pleasing attention to detail - even the scroll bar turns SNW's trademark egg yolk yellow.

There's also a large window in which plays a Flash movie highlighting the region's approach to sustainability. "The site is designed to be both useful and inspirational," says Ceri, and this is the bit that's meant to inspire. The plan is to change the presentations regularly.

So it looks much better, but how well does it work?

The answer is that it should work very well indeed. SNW sent out 2,500 questionnaires before

it even started developing the site, asking people not just what they wanted from it, but how websites fit into their use of digital media in general, including email and text messaging.

The message was clear, says Ceri. "Keep it simple, keep it easy to navigate, don't use pop up menus and keep the search function intuitive."

Thankfully, that's exactly what SNW and the site's developers, led by Creative Concern, have done. Everything runs off the home page using simple drop down menus with names like "What we do" and "Where we live." It couldn't be easier.

But a good website needs to be more than just an advert for the organisation. So SNW decided its new site should provide a one-stop shop for all kinds of resources on sustainability in the Northwest. Hence the inclusion of a special 'information bank' section.

A standing ovation then, for a site that was well worth the wait.

## Green companies win eco-honours

### Business, the environment and regeneration share centre stage at the Northwest Business Environment Awards.

Over 260 representatives of some of the region's most innovative companies and organisations gathered on a sunny day in Bolton to find out the winners of this year's Northwest Business Environment Awards.

Among the 16 winners in four categories was Staveley Mill Yard in Cumbria, which is on track to become the biggest employment site in the Lake District National Park. Situated next to the fast flowing River Kent, the mill harnesses the river to supply around 20% of its power through hydroelectricity (full story, page 17).

The awards celebrate the success of businesses and organisation that, like Staveley Mill Yard, have made environmental management or regeneration an integral part of their business. Categories include best environmental practice, environmental technologies, waterside regeneration and the media. They were presented at a luncheon hosted by the Mersey Basin Campaign and the Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) at the Reebok stadium.

The NWDA's chair, Bryan Gray, opened the proceedings by noting that the environmental industries sector in the Northwest numbers around 700 companies and employs some 24,000 people. He said that the NWDA's job is to "lead the region on strategies for sustainable economic development."

Walter Menzies, the Campaign's chief executive, commented: "Although the Northwest has an industrial legacy of environmental mismanagement, our businesses today and of the future are leading the way in pioneering sustainable solutions that are transforming our waterways and making environmental good practice for business."

More publicity, more funding and a slicker, more professional awards ceremony mean that the profile and

status of the awards has risen sharply in recent years. In each of the last two years, the number of entries has doubled from the previous year.

The challenge now is to keep the momentum going. According to the organisers, the priority is to attract more entries - and entries of an even higher standard - along with a bigger awards ceremony. There is also the potential to make awards in new categories.

This year the awards were expanded to include a media category, aimed at recognising the important role the media plays in reporting the region's environmental success stories. Also for the first time this year, a special 12-page supplement on the awards has been produced, 15,000 of which will be distributed with May's Northwest Business Insider magazine, and which is also available on www.merseybasin.org.uk.

The Awards are supported by the Environment Agency, Envirolink Northwest, ENWORKS and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) Northwest.

#### THE WINNERS ARE:

- Environmental Technology Award**  
**Winner** Ellesmere Port based  
**Adastra Exhaust Systems**
  - Runner-up** Wirral based Amec Group Limited
  - SME Environmental Technology Award**  
**W** Greater Manchester based Gentrionix Limited
  - RU** Penrith based Second Nature UK Limited
  - Waterside Regeneration Award**  
**W** Trafford Council for Sale Waterside Development
  - RU** Sefton Council Tourism Department for Southport Pier and Pavilion
  - SME Waterside Regeneration Award**  
**W** Windermere based Staveley Mill Yard
  - RU** Whitehaven Development Company for Whitehaven Harbour
  - Best Environmental Practice Award**  
**W** Liverpool based Jaguar Cars
  - RU** Cheshire based WWB Minerals
  - SME Best Environmental Practice Award**  
**W** Skelmersdale based Daryl Anodising
  - RU** Colne based Janesville Products Limited
  - Media Reporting Award**  
**W** BBC Inside Out
  - RU** Patricia Roberts for her reporting in the Manchester Evening News
- MORE INFORMATION:** www.merseybasin.org.uk

June 5  
**World Environment Day 2004**  
One of the principal vehicles through which the United Nations stimulates worldwide awareness of the environment and enhances political attention and action. The World Environment Day theme selected for 2004 is Wanted! Seas and Oceans - Dead or Alive? The theme asks that we make a choice as to how we want to treat the Earth's seas and oceans.  
*More information:* www.unep.org www.worldenvironmentday.org

June 11  
**Community-based Urban Greening**  
With 80% of the UK population living in urban areas, trees, woods and green spaces in towns and cities play an important part in improving our quality of life. Featuring speakers from the Peabody Trust and Red Rose Forest, along with key note speaker Hazel Blears, Minister of State.  
*Venue:* The Lowry arts centre, Salford  
*More information:* 01902 828 600

June 15  
**Getting to Grips with Quality at the Tap - Health, the Customer and Regulations**  
CIWEM conference looking at how deterioration in water quality can be managed and rectified; an understanding of customer and regulators' expectations; clearer identification of responsibilities for those issues outside company control and detailed case studies.  
*Venue:* The Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester  
*More information:* Frances Eldon 0113 242 4200 franceseldon@aquaviro.co.uk

June 18 - 21  
**Mersey River Festival**  
The largest free maritime festival of its type in Europe. Featuring tall ships, racing yachts, street theatre, an international shanty festival, military displays and more.  
*Location:* Liverpool docklands and waterfront  
*Contact:* 0151 233 3007 www.merseyriverfestival.co.uk www.visitliverpool.com

June 23  
**You've Been Framed - Sustainability and the Water Framework Directive**  
One-day conference organised in conjunction with the Chartered Institute of Water and Environmental Management. A stimulating day is promised along with the chance to join the debate both regionally and nationally.  
*Venue:* Liverpool John Moores University  
*More information:* r.m.alkhaddar@livjm.ac.uk

June 30  
**National Aquatic Litter Group**  
Water quality in rivers and canals is improving steadily, but all the investment and hard work can be seriously undermined by the problem of water borne litter. The National Aquatic Litter Group holds its annual meeting to go over the issues, with speakers from Defra and ENCAMS.  
*Venue:* Ashdown House, London  
*More information:* ian.cole@encams.org

July 16  
**North West Regional Assembly annual conference**  
Speakers include Alun Pugh, Minister for Culture, Sport and the Welsh Language, Ian McCartney MP, chair of the Labour Party, John McGuire, president of the Northwest CBI, Tom Bloxham, chairman of Urban Splash, Mervyn Pedely, chief executive of the Co-op Bank and Lloyd Grossman, acting chairman of the North West Cultural Consortium.  
*Venue:* Brindley Art Centre, Runcorn  
*More information:* Jill Millington 01942 737 928 jill.Millington@nwra.gov.uk

July 25  
**Salford Triathlon**  
Rapidly becoming a permanent highlight in the summer calendar, the ITU World Cup triathlon returns to Salford for the second year in a row. Featuring a swimming leg in Salford Quays, this is Salford's fourth triathlon. Last year's event attracted around 40,000 spectators.  
*Venue:* Salford Quays and Manchester city centre  
*More information:* www.salford.gov.uk/triathlon

## The good that comes with responsibility

Walter Menzies delivers a shot across the bows for the sceptics on corporate social responsibility.

There's a growing backlash against corporate social responsibility, sometimes known as "corporate responsibility". As Stefan Stern says in a recent RSA Journal, "CSR is bound to fail in companies where it is adopted for reasons of public relations. This is not only dishonest, it is misguided." He's right of course. There is far too much greenwash and hype, and not enough action.

So it is good to be able to report on Landcare - an ambitious initiative at the leading edge of company and community relations in the Northwest, and nationally for that matter. This has produced real money - about £1 million - and enabled action for the environment by over 70 community groups.

Since 1988 Landcare has supported local people to transform derelict and neglected land into new healthy spaces for the community. Waste ground has been turned into parks and play areas, rubbish dumps have been turned into nature areas and local woodlands and contaminated sites have been regenerated into safe open spaces for people and wildlife to enjoy.

How has it worked? Landcare is a grant-making programme funded by the landfill tax credit scheme raised on the disposal of wastes generated by United Utilities in their business: green taxes being retained in the region rather than being returned to the Treasury! Groundwork Northwest has managed the programme with real professionalism. An independent steering group, which it has been my privilege to

chair, has carefully assessed all of the project proposals and determined the allocation of funds.

From the very beginning we have favoured small projects, driven by local communities, which make a real impact on the problem of local dereliction: the kind of projects that are so often overlooked by big public sector reclamation schemes. Random examples from the list of 70 include a former dredging site in Nantwich, a community park on a disused quarry in Cleator Moor, a wildflower orchard in Oldham, greening in Moss Side, a nature trail in Lostock, and a haven for the elderly in New Brighton.

This has been an exemplar of a leading company - United Utilities, with its FTSE 100 position, turnover of £1.9 billion and 17,000 staff - working in real partnership with Groundwork as the link to local community action.

Ironically, United Utilities is being so successful in reducing its wastes streams that the landfill tax credits generated by the waste are drying up! So, can corporate social responsibility be more than just waffle? An unqualified YES - when there is energy, imagination and leadership, as well as strong partnerships between business and organisations such as Groundwork, which can be relied on to deliver.



**MORE INFORMATION:** Walter Menzies  
w.menzies@merseybasin.org.uk

## Floating boom could lead to cleaner river

A litter trap could soon be in place on the River Darwen in Lancashire if a feasibility study currently underway leads to the green light. The study was commissioned by the Environment Agency (EA) as part of the Darwen River Valley Initiative.

Annual clean-ups of the Darwen at Houghton Bottoms over the past ten years have removed shopping trolleys, household and industrial waste, litter and sanitary items.

The first step in the study was to investigate various options for the litter trap. Specialist consultants Black & Veatch are now researching the preferred option, a boom that would sit on the surface of the water and deflect debris to a floating skip.

The boom would be able to rise and fall with varying water levels and would therefore do nothing to worsen flooding in the area. Nor would it interfere with local wildlife.

The litter trap is likely to be located just downstream of where the River Darwen is joined by the River Blakewater, one of its major tributaries, in Witton Country Park. The Blakewater is a recognised source of a large quantity of waterborne debris.

As well as helping the EA to determine where litter and debris originate, the trap would also help show the type and volume of debris brought out of the river. It is hoped that it might also stop litter becoming ensnared on trees in the rural middle and lower stretches of the river, which leads to the 'Christmas tree' effect of them appearing to be decorated with rubbish.

Also within the area, United Utilities is tackling problems caused by storm water drains that

overflow in times of very high rainfall, which will help reduce the amount of debris in the river. Solutions will be in place for 2005.

Life cycle costs for the litter trap are relatively low compared with alternatives and the boom is an excellent short term measure, which could be easily removed leaving minimal scarring to the local landscape. The feasibility study report is due in summer 2004 and will help to decide the future for litter in the River Darwen.

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## Off with the trolleys

An end may be in sight for a long running problem that has blighted the River Tawd in Skelmersdale for years. Shopping trolleys from stores in the town centre regularly end up dumped in the river where they snag litter and create an eyesore.

Local shops and supermarkets are placing automatic locking devices on the wheels of some trolleys. Poles have been added to others so they cannot pass under height restrictions at exits. It's also been suggested that staff receive extra pay for rounding up stray trolleys.

Nationally, an estimated 100,000 shopping trolleys are stolen from shops every year and many end up in rivers and canals. The problem is particularly acute in Skelmersdale, where in October 2001 a major clean-up removed no less than 135 shopping trolleys from the Tawd.

Once the new measures have been in place for two months they will be evaluated to see how effective they have been.

Ian Gaskell, environment officer at the Environment Agency in Preston, has been a driving force behind the scheme. He commented: "This is a big step in the right direction but it's only been possible because the shops, shopping centre management, district council and Lancashire Constabulary have all worked together to agree a solution."

The Mersey Basin Campaign's Judith Allnutt, whose area covers the Tawd, said: "This initiative means that it may become practical to carry out work to improve the river as a habitat for wildlife. Hopefully one day we will see fish back in there."

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## Endangered species faces new threat

As mink begin to encroach on the Wirral, a small population of water voles is under threat.



Action is being taken to protect one of Britain's most endangered species at a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) on the Wirral. Evidence of a small colony of water voles was discovered at the Dibbinsdale Local Nature Reserve two years

ago, but there is mounting concern that one of the species' most voracious predators, the North American mink, has moved into the area.

Paul Corner, the Mersey Basin Campaign's local co-ordinator on the Wirral, has been working to protect the water voles at Dibbinsdale since 2001. "When we discovered signs of water voles we were immediately concerned that they were threatened by periodic flooding at the site," says Paul.

Together with Peter Miller of Wirral Ranger Service, Paul designed a project to reduce flooding and create an ideal environment for water voles. Pools for reed beds were excavated, the river channel de-silted and the riverbanks reprofiled. Invasive plant species such as Himalayan balsam and nettles were also tackled.

Since then there have been signs that water voles are returning to the site and a survey planned for this summer should reveal the extent of the recolonisation.

Despite such local successes, the collapse in Britain's water vole population over the last 20 years has been little short of devastating. During the 1990s alone an estimated six million water voles disappeared from England and Wales. The

population has now been reduced by up to 90%, making it one of Britain's most endangered mammals.

A survey carried out in 1996-98 revealed a loss of 96% of water vole sites in the Northwest in little more than a decade.

As a result, any newly discovered colony, however small, is of great interest. The colony on the banks of the River Dibbins is in an area already classed as an SSSI for its important woodland, wetland and grassland habitats.

Blame for the plight of the water voles has been apportioned to two main factors. One is a dramatic loss of habitat. The other is predation by mink. Some mink escaped from fur farms by accident, but ironically others were released by animal rights activists during raids on fur farms.

### the collapse in Britain's water vole population over the last 20 years has been little short of devastating

And last year anglers on the Wirral began to report finding evidence of mink on an increasingly regular basis. Mink are a problem for anglers because they can also decimate populations of fish, as well as frogs and waterfowl.

Paul responded by setting up a survey of the mink population with the help of local angling clubs. The next step will be to place live cage traps in the areas that show up as mink hot spots. Trapped mink will be removed from the area.

"It is impossible to totally eradicate the mink," says Paul, "as they will always move back into the area due to the large national population. Our aim is to control the mink so the local water vole population can grow and the predation of fish and birds is at a more natural level."

**PHOTOGRAPH BY SIMON BOOTH**

**MORE INFORMATION:** Paul Corner 0151 343 9869

## On the lookout for safer canals

A new scheme to fight crime and anti-social behaviour on canals in Manchester city centre has been launched in the hope that it will encourage more people to use them. Canal Watch is similar to traditional neighbourhood watch schemes that are familiar in residential areas. Over 80 businesses, residents and boaters along the Rochdale Canal from Castlefield to Piccadilly Village have already signed up to the scheme. Partners in it include Manchester City Council, Greater Manchester Police and British Waterways. Pictured at the scheme's launch are chief superintendent Justine Curran, PC Colin Heil and project co-ordinator Sarah Flynn of the Mersey Basin Campaign.



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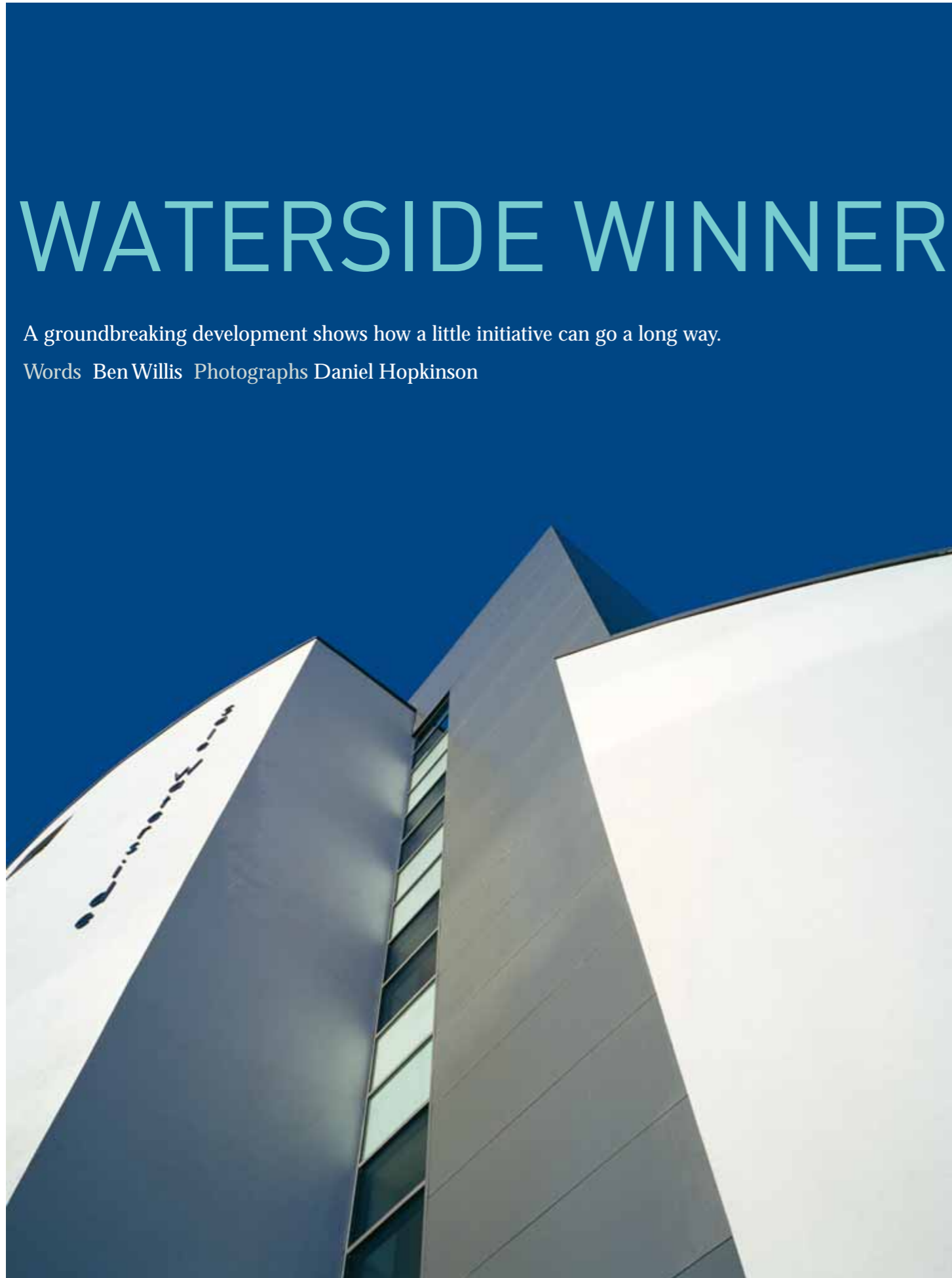
### Mersey Basin Campaign corporate sponsors include



# WATERSIDE WINNER

A groundbreaking development shows how a little initiative can go a long way.

Words Ben Willis Photographs Daniel Hopkinson



In the late 1990s visitors to Sale in Greater Manchester might have been forgiven for not knowing that a canal flowed but half a mile from where they stood. Access to the Trafford suburb's stretch of the historic Bridgewater Canal was restricted by a large road and a brick wall. The only way past the wall to the canal path was through a small, scruffy opening and down some crumbling steps - hardly a fitting approach to the canal that heralded the dawn of the industrial age.

Things could hardly be more different now. Gone is the road; gone is the wall; gone is the tatty hole. In their place is a clutch of new, cleanly designed civic and commercial buildings, among them a new council office, arts centre and theatre. Public interaction with the canal has been thrown wide open through the creation of a spacious landscaped piazza around which the new buildings are arranged. Visitors fancying a drink or just a sit down beside one of the world's great navigations can pull up a chair outside the pubs and restaurants that fringe the piazza and take in the view.

The rapid transformation of Sale's water frontage has taken place under the banner of a Trafford Borough Council initiative known as Sale Waterside. First launched in 2000, the scheme came out of a growing feeling that the area's most prized asset - its waterway - was being hidden away. The canal was still used widely by pleasure craft, but apart from the occasional die-hard jogger or dog-walker, its enjoyment from dry land was limited.

Its sad plight, says Trafford Borough Council deputy leader, Cllr Pauleen Lane, was down primarily to the presence of the road, which formed a barrier between the waterway and the town centre. As a result, although the presence of the town hall next to the canal hinted at a town centre function to the waterfront, the reality was that it had become cut off and lifeless. "The canal had become almost an irrelevancy," Cllr Lane says. "The towpath was a massively underused asset and was generally regarded as a threatening environment."

This did not go unnoticed. In the late 90s, through the sale of its defunct finance building, the council had raised

around £1 million, which it decided to put towards sorting out the canalside site once and for all. But, according to Cllr Lane, because of the relatively small size of this pot of money the council was also realistic about its ability to attempt anything ambitious on its own. Instead it opted to go down the public-private route, whereby it would use its limited finances to lever in a much heftier investment from the private sector.

"We spent a few thousand pounds knocking down the wall and tidying up the site," Lane explains. "We wanted to show to developers the full potential of the site so they would be interested in investing in it. We had accepted that some of the site should be for commercial use so that it didn't become dead after six, when the old council offices used to shut down."



**The new architecture is set within a spacious piazza, arranged around a sunken amphitheatre, which is likely to become the town's beating heart.**

In the end a deal was struck with a private firm, Cofathec, to turn the site into a major new waterside destination for Sale. The early twentieth century town hall was restored to its former glory and a complex of new civic and commercial buildings put up, effectively bringing Sale town centre down to the water's edge. Most importantly of all, perhaps, the new architecture is set within a spacious piazza, itself arranged around a sunken amphitheatre, which come this summer is likely to become the town's beating heart.

The whole development was delivered through the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), a government scheme usually used for new hospitals, schools or police stations. Under PFI, a private sector developer pays for the construction of a new building, leases it back to the public sector - say the NHS - and takes on its management for an agreed period of time.

Because PFI is essentially a value-for-money form of procurement, it is frequently criticised for sidelining the design element of new schemes. But it would be hard to level that particular criticism at Sale Waterside. Although functional, the scheme's


architecture is nonetheless contemporary and well thought through. A central atrium space forms the entrance hall to the library and houses the council's 'front office' functions. Generously glazed, it is flooded with natural light and has more the airy ambience of an airport terminal than a dowdy civic building. Outside, the piazza bears comparison to the space outside Paris' Pompidou Centre - a magnet for visitors and performance artists in the summer months.

According to its architect, AJ Taylor from HLM design, Sale Waterside is an outstanding example of what can be achieved on a tight budget when there is the local will to make something special happen. "A lot of the work was cost-driven, as the overriding issue was to make it commercially viable," he says. "But we're very pleased with it, as is the client, and it shows what can be done when you work closely with the partners."

Apart from its high quality architecture and buzzing

public space, though, Sale Waterside is significant because of its implications for future water-based regeneration projects. With the Northwest Development Agency working on a waterside regeneration strategy for the region, the search is on for schemes that can demonstrate the full potential of using water as a catalyst for regeneration. Indeed, such is the success of the Sale Waterside that it recently scooped the 'waterside regeneration' category in the Northwest Business Environment Awards, run by the Mersey Basin Campaign.

Will Horsfall, regeneration manager at the council, says the main effect of the development has been a renewed interest among developers in the potential of the borough's water frontage. The area adjacent to Sale Waterside is now a prestigious location for new housing and apartments, capitalising on the canalside town centre location.

But beyond Sale's own boundaries, Horsfall believes the scheme holds important lessons for water-led regeneration generally. "This sort of development is more common in large urban areas like Birmingham or [central] Manchester," he says. "But this scheme shows that you can make something out of urban canalside in smaller towns like Sale." 

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Bottled water is trendy, but is it worth the price?

Words Louise Tickle

# SPENDING MONEY LIKE WATER

“A bottle of Evian must travel over 750 petrol-guzzling miles until it lands on a supermarket shelf in the Northwest.”

The British palate is not renowned for its discernment and our national cuisine has never had much of a reputation for delicacy or sophistication. A smaller proportion of our disposable income is spent on grocery shopping than is the case in much of the rest of Europe and we are roundly derided by our continental cousins for requiring food to be cheap, fast and microwavable.

In one area of consumption, however, we are fast becoming a nation of decadents, connoisseurs, gourmets even, demonstrating an astonishing level of profligacy in pursuit of the perfect glass of... water.

Supermarket shelves are stacked high with bottled waters from across the country and around the world; water that has been filtered through ancient rocks into groundwater aquifers, water that has burbled its way down mountain springs and water bottled straight from a tap, in much the same way as anybody could at home. Any product claiming to be 'mineral water' is highly regulated, but 'natural spring water' is subject to less stringent testing. Tap water that is sold on in bottles as 'table water' will already conform to strict, frequently monitored EU and UK standards.

What all these types of bottled water have in common is the fact that they cost vastly more than standard tap water. Their other similarity is that all have benefited from canny marketing campaigns that have seen their UK market value reach £1.2 billion in 2003 with an increase in consumption of nearly 20% by volume on 2002.

The bottled water companies do not make overt claims that their water has health benefits that tap water does not. Indeed they are careful not to draw comparisons. Instead they promote the 'purity' of the source and the health and lifestyle benefits of drinking more water. With advertising campaigns showing shiny happy people bouncing up mountains, zooming down ski slopes, and swigging the stuff down in the company of their improbably beautiful metropolitan friends, it becomes difficult to see ordinary tap water hitting quite the same spot.

But consider that tap water is available across the Northwest at less than a tenth of a penny per litre. Buy even Sainsbury's plainest table water and it will cost 288 times as much. Choose a fancier brand, say the elegant frosted glass bottle containing Royal Deeside Natural Spring Water and you will pay 1,466 times more. Royal Deeside is drawn from the springs of the Balmoral Estate and from an aesthetic viewpoint, it certainly comes in a classier bottle than Sainsbury's own-brand.

Aesthetics and royal connections aside, the question remains; for a nation that prioritises cheapness in its foodstuffs and buys from supermarkets that trumpet good value, why are we drinking bottled water in such vast quantities and why are we prepared to pay so much for it?

Part of the answer appears to be lifestyle. In a straw poll of bottled water enthusiasts, the fact that this product is easily available, healthy and calorie free means it is a popular choice for people managing busy lives on the run. Aspirational factors were also cited, with it now being seen as unfashionable and even a bit stingy to offer tap water rather than handing a stylishly designed - and clearly expensive - bottle of mineral water to guests who are over for dinner. Finally, there is a taste argument. In rare cases tap water can taste chlorinated, and in certain areas, has been rumoured to contain traces of the contraceptive pill and other pharmaceutical nasties.

But consumers are accustomed to seeing past the marketing spin they are fed by big business and do not generally appreciate being taken for a mug at the same time as being stung for their cash. Do we think sucking on a 'sport-nipple' will make us fitter? Or that our friends will like us more if we give them water in a good looking bottle?

Until the recent 'Dasani' fiasco, it could have been argued that bottled water had bucked the cynicism of increasingly savvy consumers and had somehow added collective good sense, but now it seems that the tide may be turning.

Unsurprisingly, customers took exception when Coca Cola took potable water straight from the tap, 'purified' it and in the process contaminated the renamed (and re-priced) Dasani with excess levels of a carcinogen. Coca Cola had to remove Dasani from the shelf, bottled water producers went into crisis mode and there was much talk of the gloss having come off the industry. Mass media coverage of the scandal appears to have been a wake up call to the bottled water buying public.

[continued over]

Vital as they are to public health and promoting higher consumption of water, however, the taste and safety arguments are not the only ones to consider. The environmental impacts of our consumption of bottled water are significant. The more of it we want, the more plastic bottles must be driven around the world until they get to where we buy them.

Anna Watson, a recycling expert at Friends of the Earth (FoE), points out that globally 1.5 millions tonnes of plastic is used by the bottled water industry. Most of this will never be recycled.

“Ninety billion litres of bottled water are drunk each year and a quarter of that is consumed outside its country of origin,” she explains. “Clearly that has to be transported and that will burn fossil fuels.” No data currently exists for ‘water miles’ travelled by brands sold in the UK, but take any brand in the soft drinks aisle of a central Manchester supermarket and it’s easy enough to work it out.

A bottle of Evian will travel 754 land miles from its source until it lands on that supermarket shelf. Closer to home, water from Armathwaite in Cumbria which goes into several different brands including Aqua Pura, Eden Falls and Cumbrian Natural Mineral Water, will complete a journey of 106 miles from the Lake District to arrive next to its better travelled neighbours from Badoit, San Pellegrino and Perrier.

Each journey is taken on petrol-guzzling lorries along traffic-clogged motorways and water is not a light product to transport, meaning that

fuel requirements are relatively high. By contrast, United Utilities’ finest H<sub>2</sub>O generally travels by gravity along aqueducts and through pipe networks with little fuel required to get it from source to tap.

Water miles aside, manufacturing and disposal of plastic bottles has a hefty environmental footprint. Plastics take a long time to degrade naturally and the current disposal options are mainly burning or burial.

“Burning plastics is essentially the same thing as burning fossil fuels,” Anna Watson at FoE points out, “and there is another problem with that because plastic bottles often have chemicals added in their manufacture to give them rigidity and flexibility - when those are burned,

they can give off dioxins which are known to be dangerous.”

The other option is to bury bottles in landfill sites. But according to Claire Visco of Sustainability Northwest, the region has enough landfill sites to last only about another five years. Despite the European Landfill Directive that requires local authorities to move away from landfill, environmental groups say that the current landfill tax of just £15 per tonne is not a sufficient incentive to persuade councils to develop better recycling facilities. Around 80% of our waste still ends up on the dump. As consumption of bottled water continues to rise, a growing number of plastic empties will continue to make their way to the local tip.

Encouraging people to sort their waste and lobby the council for better recycling services is the message from campaign group Wastewatch, whose marketing officer Richard Newson explains that the broken triangle displayed on the bottom of a plastic bottle only indicates that it is potentially recyclable - action has to be taken to make that happen.

“In the hierarchy of waste, reusing something is far more efficient than recycling it,” he says. “The good news is that environmental impact assessments have shown that recycling plastic bottles is a good idea. So any contribution

EU and UK law means that United Utilities in the Northwest does 360,000 separate tests of the water supply across the region every year. Testing is audited by the Drinking Water Inspectorate and all results are publicly available. If any sample fails to meet stringent statutory standards, water companies must investigate the cause, provide an explanation and address the problem. Investment in the quality of the Northwest’s drinking water runs into billions of pounds since privatisation and compliance with quality standards has risen from 95% in 1991 to 99.81% in 2003.

The professionals in charge of supplying and regulating the public water supply are careful not to criticise the principle of consumer choice. But it is clear from their collectively incredulous response that they are utterly bewildered by the fact that so many people pay so much more for a product that is essentially the same as tap water.

Frank White, head of drinking water quality at United Utilities, acknowledges that matters of taste are up to each individual. “Everyone has a choice and what you drink is a matter of personal choice - and of course you can spend a thousand times the price of a glass of water from the tap if you want to,” he says with a chuckle.

## “Everyone has a choice and what you drink is a matter of personal choice - and of course you can spend

## a thousand times the price of a glass of water from the tap if you want to,” he says with a chuckle

the public can make is a good one and will save the resources used in making plastic from virgin fossil fuels.”

There are, however, only so many ways to reuse a plastic water bottle. So until ordinary consumers of bottled water suddenly transform en masse into a vociferous lobby for recycling plastic bottles - which seems unlikely - the only good environmental option seems to be that we must drink less of the water that goes into them.

Making the decision to choose tap water is underpinned by rigorous regulation of the water industry that supplies it.

The chlorine added to water might occasionally give off a slight whiff, he explains, but this is easy to remove. “If people don’t like it, they can just draw some water off, leave it standing overnight and any chlorine traces will evaporate, or more modern perhaps is to use a water filter.”

It doesn’t seem an onerous undertaking, so unless image and status matter more than price and the planet, it might just be time to turn the tap back on. **S**

## The tap water challenge

To find out whether people could tell the difference between bottled water and what comes out of the tap, we convened a panel of testers eager to live it up at a water tasting session held at the Lowry Hotel in Salford.

On the panel were David Ward, The Guardian’s north of England correspondent; Claire Ebury of issues-led consultancy Creative Concern; Iain Taylor and Caroline Riley of the Mersey Basin Campaign; and Source editor, Matthew Sutcliffe.

The tap water, costing 0.095p/litre (Cumbria) was up against Sainsbury’s Still Spring Water, 26p/litre, (Pennines), Wasdale Springs, 69p/litre (Cumbria), Willow Natural Spring Water, 86p/litre (Cumbria), Royal Deeside Natural Spring Water, £1.32/litre (Aberdeenshire), and Hildon Natural Mineral Water £1.32/litre (Hampshire).

Panellists were asked to state which sample tasted best, which tasted worst, and which was tap water.

After much swirling of glasses and expert sniffing, results were split. Only two testers correctly identified the tap water, but one of these said it was the best tasting of all the samples.

Another person felt that the tap water tasted worst, but three other mineral waters also got the thumbs down. The most expensive, Royal Deeside, fared worst when two testers said it was their least favourite.



The tasters (L-R): Iain Taylor, David Ward, Louise Tickle and Clare Ebury.

The winning water was mid-priced Wasdale Springs with three votes in the ‘best tasting’ category and none in the ‘worst tasting’. Even so, one panellist thought he could detect a rough aftertaste of river water, and preferred Willow with its perky, fresh and invigorating nose. All testers agreed that they were stretching to the utmost their taste buds’ capacities to distinguish any difference whatsoever and there was general consensus that one sample tasted remarkably similar to another.

	Best tasting	Worst tasting	Tap water?
Wasdale Springs	3		2
Willow	1	1	
Sainsbury’s Still Spring Water		1	1
United Utilities tap water	1	1	2
Royal Deeside Spring Water		2	
Hildon Natural Mineral Water			

## 60-second expert

• The value of the UK bottled water market was £1.2 billion in 2003 and the volume of water consumed was up by 18% on 2002.

• Drink a litre of United Utilities tap water and you will pay less than a tenth of a penny for the pleasure; buy a bottle of Royal Deeside Spring Water, and at a cost of £1.32 per litre, you will pay 1,466 times as much.

• Ninety billion litres of bottled water are consumed globally each year and a quarter of that is bought outside its country of origin.

• A bottle of Evian will travel a minimum of 754 land-miles on a gas-guzzling lorry to reach the soft drinks aisle of a supermarket in central Manchester; closer to home, Cumbrian Natural Mineral Water will travel 106 miles, again by lorry, to sit on the same supermarket shelf. Tap water will generally travel by gravity alone to reach your kitchen.

• Plastic water bottles, even though they are recyclable, will usually end up in landfill, or will be burnt, emitting dangerous dioxins into the atmosphere.

• Tap water is stringently regulated by EU directives and UK legislation and is subject to rigorous testing, with United Utilities alone carrying out 360,000 random tests per year on tap water throughout the region.

• The compliance levels of tap water in the Northwest have risen from 95% in 1991 to 99.81% in 2003.





## NO REST FOR THE OPTIMISTIC

“Every single one of us is capable of being much more than we think we are, given the right kind of push and pull.”

Optimism, it seems, can keep you awake at night.

“I sometimes find it quite hard to sleep because I’m so excited,” says Ruth Turner, non-executive director at social research company Vision 21. “There are just so many possibilities for making things better.”

Still in her early 30s, Turner has already had plenty of excitement in her life. Given the scope of her career to date - co-founder of two businesses, award winner, member of the Labour Party’s National Executive Committee, board member and more - it’s perhaps surprising she isn’t asleep the moment her head hits the pillow.

It was Turner, along with co-founder Anne MacNamara, who brought The Big Issue up north from London to a humble portacabin in Manchester’s Piccadilly Gardens. That was in December 1992, when she was aged 22 and newly graduated from Salford University.

“It was a very, very exciting time,” says Turner, and one conducted in an atmosphere of “beautiful, creative chaos.” Inevitably, mistakes were made. For the first issue “we ordered 20,000 and sold about 2,500. So we used these stacks of unsold magazines as seats because we didn’t have any chairs.”

It was also a time when Turner learned many lessons that have stayed with her and cemented her positive outlook. “One of the things which I’ve learned and held with me is that most things are possible if you work hard, are resourceful, and are not daunted by the fear of failure... it’s about inciting and inspiring enough people who are prepared to put some effort into it, to go with you.”

Under Turner’s editorship, The Big Issue in the North won a hatful of awards and weekly circulation climbed to over 60,000.

But with The Big Issue as her first and only ‘real’ job, in 2000 Turner moved on and soon found herself working for Vision 21, a social research company set up by Simon Danczuk, a former social research manager at The Big Issue. The company carries out community consultation into a rich mix of social issues, working with the public on topics ranging from begging to regeneration projects.

“The age of deference is over,” says Turner. “For too long the mistake was made to do things to people, rather than doing things with people.”

It was the idea that projects tackling social problems should be based on sound evidence that appealed to Turner. But there has also been a growing appreciation among organisations in a range of fields that people need to feel involved in the changes that affect them if the benefits are to be long lasting.

One organisation Turner is working with is Mersey Waterfront, ensuring that local people in Liverpool, Sefton, Halton and the Wirral are able to have a say as projects to refocus attention on some 70 km of the River Mersey’s waterfront are designed and delivered.

“There’s absolutely no point in building and developing great things,” Turner points out, “if they then fall into rack and ruin through vandalism or neglect or not being loved and cared for.”

How organisations talk to people and gather evidence is another question, however, and this is where Vision 21 comes in. These days there is a sophisticated tool kit of techniques available to help facilitate the conversation. It might be as simple as conducting a survey. Or for more intensive research there are the many different kinds of focus groups, on up to citizens’ councils or citizens’ juries, which can last for three or four days.

But if the conversation between organisations and the public goes well, the pay off can be huge. Organisations become more effective, while the impact on members of the public can be transformational. Turner tells the story of how Vision 21 were asked by the NHS to find 30 people who had never previously been involved in public life to be part of a new citizens council. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence wanted to bring a public perspective to decisions on how drugs and treatments should be used in the NHS. Over 35,000 people came forward. Now when the company contacts people on the original list they are often no longer available. Instead, they have been motivated to volunteer their time to other organisations.

The point for Turner is that individuals and organisations alike have to be inspired to want to make a difference. “I think that you can create an environment in which people start to believe that it’s possible to make a difference and that generates its own momentum and excitement.”

“If you assume that you are surrounded by good people who want to do their best ... then people really live up to that and really respond and that’s when big things become possible.”

**1992** Graduated from Salford University with an honours degree in English and History. Soon after, co-founded the Big Issue in the North.

**1998** Became board member and later executive committee member of Sustainability Northwest, which works to promote a sustainable future for the region.

**1999** Awarded Ernst & Young’s Community Entrepreneur of the Year award for the north of England, along with Big Issue in the North co-founder Anne MacNamara, in recognition of their application of business excellence to the social sector.

**2000** Became non-executive director at social research company Vision 21, based in Manchester. Elected to the Labour Party’s National Executive Committee (NEC). Re-elected in 2001 and in 2002 and sits on the NEC Business Board, the Organisation Sub-Committee and the Selections Panel.

**2001** Appointed as the first ever lead representative for the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, based in the Northwest of England.

RUTH TURNER  
NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CO-FOUNDER, VISION 21

TURNING POINTS

WORDS: DAVID WARD

David Brockbank could have sold the family mill in Cumbria and retired to the Caribbean a millionaire. Instead, he’s created a rural economic miracle.

# CUMBRIAN TIGER

The Kent in Cumbria earns for itself the title of the fastest flowing river in England as it gallops from the heart of the Lake District to Morecambe Bay. Dippers dip and kingfishers fish in fast waters flowing past meadows bright with speedwell, celandines and daisies.

In less pretty times, the Kent was an unfailing source of power for industry and there were once 80 mills along its banks. Now only one 50-year-old water turbine is still turning.

To find it you have to go round the back of a café just off the main street in Staveley, a busy but not particularly picturesque village between Kendal and Windermere and home to a hugely successful - and partly water-powered - rural regeneration project.

The turbine is on the site of a 17th century fulling mill. In 1830, wool gave way to wood as an entrepreneur began turning out cotton reels for Lancashire’s mills. A century ago, the mill switched to producing wooden handles for pick axes and the like. But in the last quarter of the 20th century, business sagged: they estimate that every new JCB cost them 30,000 pick axes and 30,000 shovel handles.

So in 1981, David Brockbank’s father summoned his accountant son, then 25, back from London to a mess of sheds on the banks of the Kent to help shore up the family firm.

Brockbank saw the mill was not making much money and took control five years later. He mechanised (they could turn out a hammer handle in five seconds), tripled production and cut staff from 60 to 25. But it was clear that the writing was on the mill wall.

“Any business is dependent on its employees and we couldn’t get people to work here,” said Brockbank. “We couldn’t pay good wages and our workers couldn’t afford houses here.

“We would train them up but when they married they couldn’t afford to stay in the village and moved to Kendal or Carnforth. The real watershed was the Conservative government’s decision to sell council houses. When that stock went, that was the death knell for us.”

The crunch came in 1995. At that point Brockbank could have sold the site for £8 million and retired to the Caribbean to drink rum punches. But his family had been connected with the mill for 100 years and he did not want to quit.

“You can only sell something once,” he said. “Once you have sold it, it’s gone.”

Within ten years, he has created a rural economic miracle, a site where 200 people work. Give him a couple more years and the jobs total will double, making Staveley the biggest employment centre in the Lake District national park.

It is already a model of how business activity can thrive in one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world. Not that Staveley Mill is beautiful; no one is going to give it a Civic Trust award for elegance and it is certainly not a tourist attraction.

But it works: here you will find, in units converted from a coppiced wood drying shed, a baker, a cheesemonger, a catering equipment supplier and a pair of upholsterers. Across the way, a mountain bike business thrives in the sheds where broom handles were once stored. Elsewhere in the jumble of buildings is a joinery, a motor engineer, a day nursery, the café (much loved by cyclists) and a specialist who, far from the madding crowd, devises crowd control systems.

There are now 36 businesses on the site; more will come when a planned three-storey block of offices, with thinking time views of church, bowling green, river and fell, is complete.

The beginnings were humble. “I had no planning permission, no building regulations permission and no bank approval,” said Brockbank. “I had to build up an income stream quickly. I couldn’t afford anyone to do the work for me

**Here you will find, in units converted from a coppiced wood drying shed, a baker, a cheesemonger, a catering equipment supplier and a pair of upholsterers.**

so I set off with the Reader’s Digest do-it-yourself manual.

“We have been successful because our rents are affordable and we provide layouts the way our tenants want them.

“And,” added Brockbank with the stains of a morning’s tarmac still on his jeans, “we do all the work ourselves.

“The businesses here now are profitable and successful and the people who work here are more skilled and better paid than before. I believe that what we have here is a blueprint for other rural communities in Cumbria and across the country.”

Small wonder then that Staveley Mill Yard has just won recognition for Brockbank in the Northwest Business Environment awards, run by the Mersey Basin Campaign.

The Kent, meanwhile, supplies 20% of the site’s power; a planned new turbine would boost that to 30%. And, if Brockbank gets his way, a string of community hydroelectric schemes may be introduced to provide electricity for communities along the river. Without disturbing the dippers and the kingfishers.

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**Otters live and swim** in the River Gowy, which used to form part of the border between Wales and England. It is also the river that runs through a 1,350 acre oil and chemicals complex belonging to Shell UK at Stanlow in Cheshire, then under the Manchester Ship Canal and ultimately empties into the River Mersey. According to Chris Mahon, the director of the Cheshire Wildlife Trust, the otters often take a look at Stanlow then head straight back to Wales.

But otters once again may make the area home thanks to the development of the Gowy Meadows wildlife reserve. The lowland grazing marsh spans nearly 410 acres, bounded by the River Gowy north of Chester, with the A5117 to the north and the M56 to the south.

In 2002, the land's owners, Shell, leased it on a peppercorn rent to the Cheshire Wildlife Trust to create the reserve. Over-grazed and mismanaged for years, the site's importance as a home to rare flora and fauna is only now being realised. Plans are to inundate the land in the winter with waters from the Gowy, creating a wet grassland habitat for wading birds, otters, water voles, harvest mice, barn owls and dragonflies.

"We've got water voles on the site already," says Mahon. For readers of *Wind in the Willows*, the character Ratty was a water vole.

"We are trying to make sure that the colony is protected. We don't want them flooded out. We are hoping to create opportunities for otters to stay there and breed, which would be wonderful to have a thriving population of otters in the county again. The main use is going to be by over-wintering birds as a sort of overflow site of the Mersey and its internationally

## OTTERS, ORCHIDS AND OIL

The site of the biggest oil refinery in the Northwest is now a haven for wildlife.

important bird populations. We are already seeing good increases in populations of snipe - a nice, stripey little bird with a long beak - lapwing and so on. These are becoming - not rare - but certainly pressurised by development. It is going to be quite a haven."

Established in 1962 as a campaigning environmental watchdog, the Cheshire Wildlife Trust has since become more of a project management organisation. "We found over the years that our campaigning activities have not fallen by the wayside, but we found working in partnership to be much more productive. For example, here we wouldn't be able to do what we are doing without the Environment Agency's engineers for the sluices and so on. We wouldn't be able to finance it without Defra and the countryside stewardship grant, which pays for the management, nor without Shell being the landowner who generously leased us the land. So it is a very happy partnership really, everybody is a winner, and wildlife is too."

Everything is set for flooding to occur this winter. The pasture will be formally 'opened' on June 9th. The Trust will be organising site visits, talks and guided walks in the afternoon and its annual general meeting in the evening, inviting guests from all partners to share the day and formally kick it off.

"Five to ten years down the line, from a natural history point of view, we will have a pretty established regime by then. The vegetation we want to encourage will be pretty well established. We'll have access and interpretation for visitors and hopefully a visitors' centre."

The Gowy Meadows project works on two levels. Not only does it allow the land to return to its natural use as a wet grassland, but it also serves to protect the adjacent Stanlow site from the dangers of flooding. According to the Environment Agency, reports of flooding in England and Wales are now on average nearly twice as frequent as they were 100 years ago. Due to climate change, experts predict that the risk of flooding generally is likely to see a very significant increase over the next century.

Stanlow is the second largest oil refinery in the UK, refining up to a million tons of crude a month. Floods that affected the refinery complex in the 1990s - and the consequent environmental impact - made it clear something needed to be done to protect the installation, which was a major supplier of vital products into the UK economy. In 1998, the Environment Agency commissioned a full report on how to improve the flood defences of land adjacent to the River Gowy, which outlined a number of improvements within the refinery complex as well as improving the value of the existing washlands of the Gowy Meadows for nature conservation.

This major piece of work has demonstrated how the Environment Agency, Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Shell UK have worked together in a public-private-charity partnership. [\[continued over\]](#)

Words Erikka Askeland

Photographs RSPCA, Shell UK





### 60-second expert

- In 2002, Shell UK leased 410 acres of land at its Stanlow site in Cheshire on a minimal rent to the Cheshire Wildlife Trust to create the Goway Meadows wildlife reserve.
- Stanlow's importance as a home to rare flora and fauna is only now being realised. Plans are to inundate the reserve in the winter with waters from the River Goway, creating a wet grassland habitat for wading birds, otters, water voles, harvest mice, barn owls and dragonflies.
- The success of the project relies on a partnership approach involving Cheshire Wildlife Trust, the Environment Agency, Defra and Shell.
- Stanlow is the second largest oil refinery in the UK, refining up to a million tons of crude a month.
- The wake up call for the refinery came in 1989 when a burst pipe spewed 157 tonnes of crude oil onto the Mersey foreshore, leading to an unprecedented fine.
- Following the spill, Shell implemented a series of ongoing changes. According to its most recent environmental report, emissions and discharges at Stanlow are now at record lows.
- As well as Goway Meadows, the refinery site itself is a haven for wildlife. There are badgers, orchids, falcons, moorhens, grey partridges, herons and one of the only two breeding pairs of ravens on the Wirral.

Partnership plays an important role in Shell's work to reduce the impact that the business of oil refining has on the local environment. But at Stanlow, Shell also employs a policy of continual improvement that has seen emissions of air and water pollutants reduced considerably over the past 10 years.

The wake up call came on a warm summer's day in 1989, when a corroded 17-year-old pipeline suddenly burst. It was carrying thick, Venezuelan crude oil from a terminal at Birkenhead to the refinery at Stanlow, 157 tonnes of which spewed onto the Mersey foreshore. The company was fined an unprecedented £1 million by the then National Rivers Authority (later reorganised to become the Environment Agency) and spent millions on the clean up.

"As a result of the spill we did some specific things, not least of which was to install a sophisticated loss monitoring system on the pipeline between the Tranmere terminal and Stanlow," says Shell Stanlow's environment team leader, Mike Brown.

"Certainly since the Mersey oil spill, Stanlow as a site became very involved in what the public thought of us. Obviously we didn't want things like that to happen again."

Investment and a change of attitude are the keys to the plant's successful reduction of harmful pollutants. According to its most recent environmental report of 2001-2, emissions and discharges are now at record low levels.

In 1994, the plant made a £30 million investment into reducing biological oxygen demand (BOD). While oil floats, and can therefore be extracted from atop water-filled interceptor pits, some chemicals used at Stanlow dissolve. BOD is a measure of soluble organic material pumped out as effluents. These components are dissolved in water and will be broken down through the action of naturally occurring bacteria, but this process requires oxygen. Large amounts of BOD in water tends to leach oxygen from waterways that

otherwise support fish and other wildlife. Shell treats BOD in effluent using bacterial 'biopolishers'.

"We are very concerned about the quality of the effluents that we put out of this place," explains Brown. "These biopolishers accelerate the process of breaking down these soluble compounds. That takes out the demand on oxygen in the effluent that leaves the site, so it has got a much lower biological oxygen demand. The soluble substances are broken down by our own bacteria and the water going out is a much better quality and far less likely to deplete the oxygen and affect the aquatic ecosystem."

Times have changed since the legislative wilderness of the 1970s, when companies in the UK were allowed almost free reign to pollute the environments in which they operated. Legislation restricts the amount of polluting emissions plants like Stanlow are allowed to produce, but Shell says it does even better than legislation requires.

"We have got ISO 14001, which is the international environmental management standard," says Brown. "Part of the requirement of that is continuous improvement. We have that very phrase in our health and safety policy, so we do strive to do it."

"The [Environment Agency] sets limits on us for air and water discharges but it is fair to say we are well inside those limits, and we are still trying to improve even on that."

Although spills still occur, as happened in 1997 and 2001, Shell has measures in place to recover the spills, which according to Shell make the impact on the environment almost negligible. Tanks at Stanlow and Tranmere are housed in compounds designed to hold the contents if the tank ruptures. Ships unloading petrochemicals on the Manchester Ship Canal are surrounded by a 'bubble barrier' formed with compressed air that limits any spills leaching out into the water.

The sprawling, industrial complex - which has grown and developed from a small bitumen plant established in 1924 - is also a site for wildlife. It comes as a surprise to some that the site, which proliferates with thick scrub, grassland and wetland, provides more of a wildlife haven than a seemingly benign housing estate.

"The Goway Meadows is next to the refinery, but in actual fact within the confines of the refinery we've got some pretty good nature reserves in their own right," says Brown. "We use a Wirral wildlife ranger, Malcolm Ingham, who comes into the site frequently to keep an eye on the wildlife. There are some fairly rare things here."

Rare things include the second documented pair of breeding ravens on the Wirral, who nested last year on Stanlow's Hillside. A badger sett has been found in the crude tank farm, and the site hosts delicate orchids, peregrine falcons, moorhens, grey partridges and herons.


**"So it is a very happy partnership really, everybody is a winner, and wildlife is too."**



Shell is happy to foster a culture among its employees to engage and actively participate with the local environment. "Some of the operatives on the refinery are really interested in this and that helps us to look after it," says Brown. "They have a genuine interest in it, and they'll get on to Malcolm when they see something that he'd be interested in. He's got good contacts with our own people."

"We have 140 different varieties of bird seen on site. Lots of operatives here want this to carry on. They won't do things if they think there is a nesting bird around. They leave it alone."

Ingham, who demonstrates a passion for the animals and plants that thrive on the Wirral, produces a quarterly Stanlow wildlife report that keeps Shell employees informed of the species that live alongside them. "I've said it many times before and I make no apology for saying it again, Stanlow is a haven for wildlife of many different species from badger to raven and from orchid to cowslip and its getting better," wrote Ingham. "But there is no room for complacency; the pressure is always there, whether it is from illicit dumping of rubbish or from the pressures of the industry itself."

"Nature is a wonderful opportunist, even in a large refinery environment like Stanlow; she claims every available piece of unused land and nurtures it until eventually it supports a diverse number of flora and fauna species." 

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## Catchment acupuncture

Dr Amanda Wright of the Mersey Basin Campaign reports from the recent research conference on Integrated River Basin Management in the Northwest: Problems and Solutions, sponsored by United Utilities.

The traditional reliance on heroic engineering and technocratic solutions are no longer enough if the rivers and waterways of the Northwest are to continue getting cleaner, according to Professor Malcolm Newson of the University of Newcastle. A new approach is needed that recognises the complexities of a river's ecosystem.

Professor Newson made his comments as the keynote speaker at a one day research conference at Manchester Metropolitan University, organised by the Mersey Basin Campaign. The conference examined the research priorities in river basin management through five themes: rural impacts; urban impacts; heavily modified and artificial water bodies; estuaries; and whole catchments. It attracted over 170 delegates from across the country.

Coining the phrase "catchment acupuncture" to describe the approach, Professor Newson explained that it is based upon understanding the blockages to the river system and identifying action "hot spots" for remediation and restoration.

Following Professor Newson's opening comments, the conference discussed a sweeping range of topics.

The following is an edited summary of the day's discussions and presentations.



**"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."**  
Aldo Leopold 1949

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#### Highlights

**Dr Mark Shepherd**, ADAS, chaired a session discussing the impact of agriculture and the rural environment on aquatic systems, and especially the problem of diffuse pollution. He said the biggest challenge ahead is the transfer of knowledge from researchers to those who are working to bring about change on the ground.

**Catherine Saunders** from UKCEED explained the urgent need for better communications to help improve trust and understanding between the farming community, decision makers and the scientific community. She said Defra is considering changing the phrase 'diffuse water pollution from agriculture' after concern from farmers.

**Professor John Handley** moved the conference onto the impact of urbanisation, demonstrating how water quality declines as the human population increases and questioning whether groundwater would ever return to its natural state. He presented a shopping list of research priorities, including the need for full documentation of the environmental history of the region, as well as the clarification of the legacy of contaminated land, diffuse pollution, groundwater impacts and canalisation.

**Dr Kevin Taylor** highlighted the often-overlooked issue of sediments, saying they are a major component of aquatic systems but have received scant attention in urban environments. He concluded that in order to reach future water quality targets, monitoring programmes and management strategies must include sediments.

**Dr Keith Hendry** opened a session on heavily modified and artificial water bodies by highlighting that 75% of the River Mersey and 100% of the River Irwell are heavily modified. Research priorities include a clear definition of what 'maximum ecological potential' means for them under the Water Framework Directive; the impacts of habitat modification on key species; and the impact of sediments upon water quality and biota.

**Grahame Newman** spoke about the UK's network of navigable waterways. There are around 5000km of operable waterways (60% canals and 40% rivers), of which 3000km lie abandoned. Estimates by British Waterways places the value of these waterways at £1.5 billion to the UK tourism economy.

**Dr Rick Leah** opened the session on estuaries by discussing the developing typology used by the EU, which currently places all estuaries in Northwest England in the same category. Dr Leah highlighted the problem of intersex and gender reversals in some estuarine species through endocrine disruptors, saying there is insufficient monitoring of contaminants.

**Dr Peter Jones and Roger Proudfoot** from the Environment Agency asked when the target of 'good' ecological status would be reached for estuaries. For the Mersey, historical changes to the estuary will probably mean it is classified as a Heavily Modified Water Body and so aims for good ecological 'potential'.

**Professor David Kay** initiated the day's final session on whole-catchment issues, an approach he demonstrated when investigating faecal contamination across the Ribble catchment in light of the EU Bathing Water Directive.

**Professor Keith Beven** addressed the issue of how to make predictions about futures that are uncertain, for example in the context of climate change. Turning to the idea of environmental models, he proposed that within 10 years there would be an integrated model of the entire UK.

**Dr Kevin Nash** pointed out that the Mersey catchment was historically rich in fish, the tidal Mersey around Warrington containing a large fishery for salmon and sea trout in the 17th century. After virtually disappearing by the 1960s, these populations are now in recovery. Even so, there remain over 950 in-river obstacles across the Mersey catchment, creating a barrier to the movement of migratory fish.

Finally, **Dr Joe Howe** discussed stakeholder participation in river basin management, highlighting the drivers for increased participation, such as the Aarhus Convention. He suggested that plans for river basin management provide a forum for considering diverse stakeholder needs, ensuring transparency, integration and positive outcomes.

# A WALK ON THE BRIGHT

Don't let the prophets of environmental doom get you down. It's time to celebrate our successes, says Julian Taylor.

Rarely has a region suffered a longer or more sustained assault on its environment than the Northwest, the cradle of the industrial revolution. Add to that the shock tactics and doom mongering which dominate the headlines, and it's easy to feel overwhelmed by the near constant state of crisis that seems to engulf the environment. All too often the good news is drowned out by the bad.

Don't despair.

Every once in a while it's important to remember that the years of hard work do pay off. We need to enjoy the many small victories that together add up to a celebration of success.

My friend Professor Tony Bradshaw reports that he regularly finds a peaceful line of three herons fishing on the River Mersey where it flows past the bottom of his road. Five years ago there were none. This year, for the first time in a century, a family of seals has made itself at home on a local sandbank in the river.

Five miles up river an unpromising lane winds between chemical works to Pickering's Pasture. The pasture was once a fearsome industrial waste heap. Now it is a popular park full of meadow flowers and cowslips.

The truth is that England is growing greener. There are more birds, flowers and large mammals now than for decades. Rivers, lakes and beaches are all cleaner. Less air pollution means more sunshine.

Birds and animals are a useful indicator of the health of the environment. The good news is that the recent Bird Atlas of Lancashire shows both increasing numbers and wider distribution of breeding species. On the River Ribble, the winter geese number 30,000, and up to 80,000 wigeon have been counted.

At one time roe deer were almost extinct in England. Now I see them every week. The numbers of red deer have climbed to around 400,000.

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# SIDE

Once derided as the dirty man of Europe, now Britain's rivers, lakes and beaches are substantially cleaner. Nowhere is the change more startling than in the Northwest. Recent detailed surveys from the Environment Agency show that cleaner water is allowing otters to recolonise the nation, including the Northwest. In Lake Windermere the number of char is on the up, and - perhaps the ultimate accolade - salmon are returning to the Mersey.

The amounts of heavy metals and herbicides washing into the sea have been greatly reduced, although nitrates remain a real challenge. Even so, the numbers of both common seals and grey seals in our coastal waters have doubled.

In another measure of success, the number of Northwest beaches winning Seaside awards this year has more than doubled to fifteen. Among those recognised for their cleanliness, facilities and water quality for the first time are beaches in Blackpool, Morcambe and Lytham St Annes. It's a far cry from the days, not so long ago, when parents refused to allow their children into the polluted sea.

The smogs of 50 years ago have also been banished, **"The truth is that England is growing greener. There are more birds, flowers and large mammals now than for decades."** with the result that winter sunshine in Manchester has leapt threefold. The threat of acid rain is waning with the reduction of sulphur dioxide and sulphuric acid in the atmosphere.

So let us celebrate. The Northwest, perhaps the most polluted area of Europe, is now well on the way to recovery. Public will, strong enforcement and lots of money are restoring the River Mersey and much of old Lancashire. Heavy metal deposits are down to pre-industrial levels. Almost no derelict coal tips remain unrestored. Thousands of orchids are moving in and so are skylarks. People swim across the Mersey for pleasure.