

# Adapting the Landscape

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Linked by a ship canal and a world famous river, the two great cities of Manchester and Liverpool span an area with a £50 billion economy and a population of over six million people, making it comparable to entire countries such as Denmark, Finland, Norway or New Zealand.

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## Adapting the Landscape

Manchester and Liverpool have already embarked on a course of innovation, growth and renaissance over the last decade or more. The 'Adapting the Landscape' research study is about using landscape, place and sustainability to help unlock even higher levels of prosperity, wellbeing and quality of life.

Adapting the Landscape provides a framework for landscape adaptation and investment that can tackle climate change, support improvements in people's quality of life and underpin economic growth.

The project identifies the contribution that natural landscape resources can make to the future development of the Lower Mersey Basin, the area covered by this study. At the same time the approach provides a toolkit for identifying and prioritising investment that can be applied to any area.

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## In the beginning...

Adapting the Landscape has included an extensive baseline study of the area, the development of a series of scenarios for the future and a number of stakeholder sessions, including a symposium. Out of this research, the study team has developed a framework that tackles a number of critical challenges for the study area and suggests a new approach to the land based on a number of core thematic strands.

The central objectives of the framework are to enable the region to adapt to and mitigate against climate change, achieve a better quality of life, pursue continued and sustainable economic growth and increase the resilience of the area.

**The vision for the area is that of a more productive, playful and engaging landscape. A landscape that delivers for the people, an axis of innovation connecting two city regions and a living, breathing, sustainable 'bioregion' that produces food, generates energy and helps us to tackle the critical issue of climate change.**

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## **Why adapt this landscape?**

Much of the area is inaccessible or fragmented by roads and rail. What could be an active and beautiful landscape is often closed off, unloved and can be uninspiring. There are also significant pressures on the land – overstretched infrastructure, congestion, population growth, flooding and climate change – as well as enduring pockets of deprivation, poor health and lack of opportunity, despite the significant progress of regeneration and development in recent years.

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## The opportunities

Long-term prospects for the Lower Mersey Basin show both population growth and economic growth. It is this longer-term context of economic growth that this framework can help to address.

With existing small and large-scale regeneration initiatives and investment programmes in the area, such as Peel Holdings' many development proposals, Housing Growth Points, Housing Market Renewal areas and the Manchester and Liverpool city region programmes, it is imperative that this approach complements rather than counteracts these plans.

Adapting the Landscape comes at a particularly opportune moment for the development of the Northwest as it focuses on bringing together spatial and economic planning in the Integrated Regional Strategy. This provided a major impetus for the research and the work will

go on to inform the Northwest Regional Development Agency's land regeneration priorities from 2010.

This framework offers a genuine opportunity for the Lower Mersey Basin and its communities to demonstrate a new approach to development which: increases the resilience of the area and helps it to adapt and address climate change; gives people and businesses a new and inspirational reason to relocate to the area; creates activities and opportunities to improve health and wellbeing; and increases the value and productivity of the land.

Adapting the Landscape celebrates the River Mersey and the Manchester Ship Canal to help create a distinctive approach to landscape adaptation that reflects unique local assets. This will be brought to life through projects large and small, all of which should be connected both physically and through the way in which they transform the spaces and places that bring our region together.

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## The themes

The 'Adapting the Landscape' study has used a scenarios-based approach to explore three strands that sit at the heart of a revitalised Lower Mersey Basin watershed:

### **Mersey Bioregion**

This is centred around a move towards a more self-sufficient, sustainable region with an emphasis on localism, renewable energy production, the growing of food and energy crops and a landscape well adapted to climate change.

### **Innovation Axis**

Here, the key is to connect the city regions and major towns with stronger communications set in an area of attractive and marketable green infrastructure. There would be a focus on jobs and opportunities through the connection of knowledge centres and growth industries, including environmental technologies and services.

### **Mersey Playgrounds**

This strand recognises the importance of high quality, accessible local environments where people can play, travel and work. Waterways will become destinations and leisure routes; flood alleviation measures will be used to create new landscapes and culture and art will be used to transform the visual experience of the region.

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## What could be achieved?

Some of the possibilities include:

### **Green the cities.**

Take the landscape of the Mersey Basin into the heart of the cities with more street trees and enhanced green infrastructure.

### **Embrace the waterfronts.**

Create and improve green access along the river and other waterways, stretching into the heart of the city regions and where possible, new water bodies.

### **Create a diverse landscape.**

Make the Mersey Bioregion the most dynamic, productive and biodiverse landscape through land art, farms and planting.

### **Manage a productive landscape.**

Produce energy from wind, tides, biomass and the sun.

### **Facilitate an accessible landscape.**

Establish a fine grain network of paths and bridges to accompany existing strategic arteries with an emphasis on localism.

### **Create a landscape for prosperity.**

Continue the Mersey's history of innovation. In centres like Daresbury it is environmental technologies leading our way into a low carbon future.

### **Build a resilient and playful landscape.**

Utilise funding for flood defences to respond to flood risks and create iconic cultural landmarks, public space and new biodiverse habitats as part of 'Mersey Playgrounds'.

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## The project team

The area covered by this study has been defined as the Lower Mersey Basin watershed, an area that has diverse natural and industrial landscapes and which critically includes the Manchester and Liverpool city regions.

This project has been led by URS Corporation working with WXY Studio, West 8, Urban Practitioners, Barnes Walker and Creative Concern. This handpicked team has a breadth of strategic, global and local knowledge in economics, climate change, architecture, planning and sustainability.

A multi-disciplinary group drawn from the Northwest Regional Development Agency, Mersey Basin Campaign, Natural England, Homes and Communities Agency and Peel Holdings has worked closely with the project team providing advice and critical comment throughout the process.

For further information please contact  
Richard Tracey  
[richard.tracey@nwda.co.uk](mailto:richard.tracey@nwda.co.uk)

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