

IDEAS

latchford
LOCKS

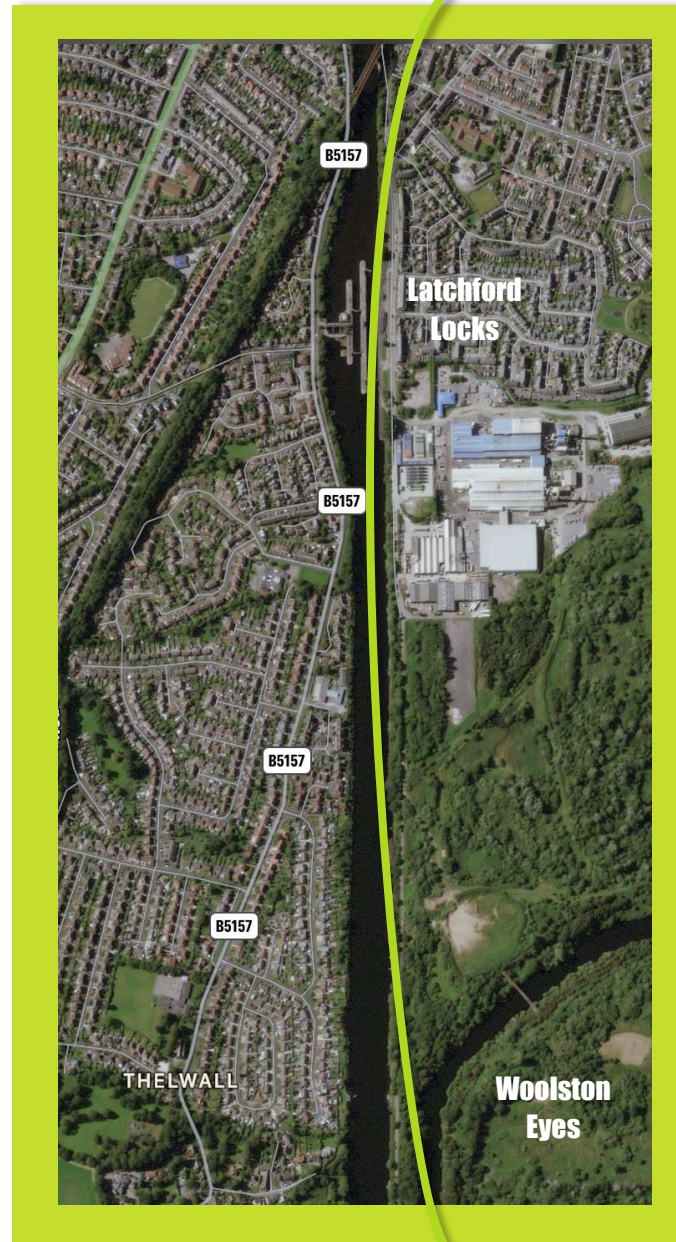
WOOLSTON
eyes



LATCHFORD LOCKS & Woolston Eyes

Learning about local history and heritage helps to inspire a sense of community and belonging. Buildings and locations of historical interest not only create and enhance a sense of place – providing a layer unique to the fabric of that location - their preservation can teach us about the importance of conservation and sustainability. If we understand the historical and cultural importance of our surrounding environment, not only will it give us an added sense of identity, we will be more likely to look after it. Similarly, if local nature and wildlife is easily accessible and enjoyable for all there will be more of us who care about its protection.

Latchford Locks and Woolston Eyes are two locations within close proximity that at first glance, have little in common. One is an industrial resource - part of the infrastructure of the Manchester Ship Canal linking Liverpool and Manchester, the other an important nature reserve, designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Yet both share the benefit of the local waterways and have the same owner: Peel Ports. Both sites also form part of the historic landscape of the local area and have the potential to offer not just the local community, but the residents of Warrington, a wonderful green destination with significant heritage.



The crossing at Latchford Locks (soon to be refurbished) forms part of the Transpennine Trail, linking the town north of the Manchester Ship Canal to that of the south. The road running alongside the canal that takes walkers and cyclists past the Woolston Eyes nature reserve to Woolston itself is an important green link, connecting residents north and south of the River Mersey.

With the housing development at Edgewater Place, the forthcoming apartment blocks along the Manchester Ship Canal and the existing attractive Victorian housing on streets surrounding a lovely village centre, refurbishment and improvement of the Locks and attention to the environs of Woolston Eyes would provide residents with a green and characterful destination on their doorstep.

In this booklet we suggest ideas for Latchford Locks and Woolston Eyes that would require some funding, although we have tried to keep proposals realistic. The ideas depicted as images are impressionistic only – they are not detailed renders. Other proposals may be preferred and any suggestions would of course be subject to approval of Peel Ports, the local community and Woolston Eyes. Consideration could be given to an application for funding by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

ABOUT LATCHFORD LOCKS

“The locks at Latchford are the first locks that ships have to negotiate after entering the Manchester Ship Canal at Eastham 21 miles away.

Between Latchford and Salford Quays there are three other sets of locks - at Irlam, Barton and Mode Wheel, giving a total of five locks over the canal's length of 36 miles. At Latchford the water level is raised by 16 feet 6 inches. The lift of the three higher locks varies between 13 and 16 feet, while at Eastham the amount of lift is variable depending on the state of the tides.

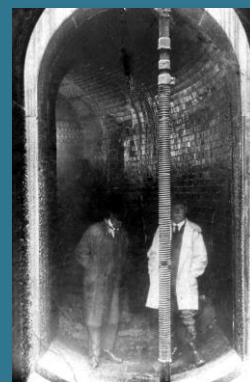
In January 1890 the River Mersey broke through its retaining banks and flooded the cutting including the partially constructed locks at Latchford, this was immediately followed by a period of hard frost lasting six weeks in which time it was not possible for any work to be done. The lock walls are not totally solid, they have culverts built into them complete with sluice gates to allow the lock chambers to be filled and emptied as required. The gates are controlled by levers which protrude from the tops of the walls.

Alongside each set of locks are sluice gates and these along with Woolston Weir and other sluices further down the canal are used to maintain water levels over the length of the waterway.

The construction of the canal was completed by December 1893 when the Directors of the canal company hired a Mersey ferryboat to take them the full distance of the canal from Eastham to Manchester. January 1st 1894 saw a convoy of vessels carrying dignitaries including Warrington Councillors cruise from Latchford Locks to the docks at Salford followed by cargo vessels. The first ship to unload a cargo on that day was the S.S. Pioneer of the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS).

On May 21st 1894 the MSC was officially opened when a ribbon was cut by Her Majesty Queen Victoria aboard the Admiralty Yacht ‘Enchantress’.”

Mike Kenwright, Latchford History Group



LATCHFORD LOCKS *ideas*



Entrance to locks, Thelwall New Road

Informed not just by the history and heritage of Latchford Locks themselves, we have also taken ideas for the Locks from the design and colour palette of the Victorian pontoon designed for the Manchester Ship Canal at Ellesmere Port, the control tower at Latchford swing bridge and other locations and inspiration from Victorian colour palettes and floral art.

Whilst not all of the locks will be accessible to the public, there is no reason why the 'off limits' areas cannot still be an attractive place for the public to enjoy, even from a slight distance.



What would be required?

Paintwork to building

Art on recycle material panels to cover the metal railings

Images on recycled plastic panels / recycled hoardings to cover wire fence

Oversize plant pots and planters with evergreen hedging – secured to the ground to prevent removal

Artwork with depictions of the locks historically on large panels

If the cost of resurfacing the docks /walkway is too great, then a thorough clean-up of the ground

LATCHFORD LOCKS *ideas*



Central dock, Latchford Locks

Continuing the theme of Victorian colour schemes, with a nod to William Morris and the arts and crafts movement, along with some interesting signal boxes and control towers of the same era, we have reimagined the buildings on the dock, even if the surrounding area is not directly accessible to the public. The locks can still be visually interesting, even if not open to the public.



We have also suggested recycled hoarding depicting historical images and information about the locks for the railings around the buildings. The railings could be painted black, softening the current rather austere bare metal finish.

What would be required?

Painting and artwork on recycled panels

Oversized planters and planting

Benches for areas open to the public

Repainting the white platform borders

Latchford Locks signage on the platform

Signs and display boards depicting Latchford Locks' history

Hedging / planting

Cleaning / repairing dock surfaces

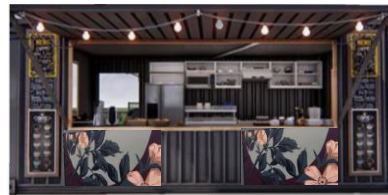
LATCHFORD LOCKS *ideas*



Main Locks / dock area (for use by the public during daytime hours)

There are grassed areas at Latchford Locks that could be made attractive green spaces for the public during daytime hours.

A café would also be a real attraction here. One idea is using an old, refurbished shipping container – good reuse of existing materials and reflective of location. Alternatively, if a temporary café is preferred, then a local mobile café business may be interested, particularly at weekends.



What would be required?

- Café – either mobile or fixed with facility and space to put away chairs and tables when closing
- Planting of hedging around grassed area
- Oversized planters and plant pots
- Fold away garden area seating and tables
- Tidying / repairing platform / footpath

LATCHFORD LOCKS *ideas*



The Thelwall Lane side of the dock area, if it remained largely accessible to the public could also be a great location for a café and public seating area. Open during the day only, it could be an attractive community space for local residents and for those using the Transpennine Trail - an opportunity to enjoy the waterfront and watch passing maritime traffic. There are also local businesses who could provide custom.

What would be required?

- Some clearing of scrubland
- Resurfacing of the dock, or clean up
- Safety barriers
- Space for facilitating docking
- Local business interest



LATCHFORD LOCKS *ideas*



We have suggested recycled hoarding depicting historical images and information about the locks for the railings around the buildings. The railings could be painted black, softening the current rather austere and forbidding bare metal finish. Similarly, the unsightly fencing bordering business premises on Thelwall Lane could be screened off.



What would be required?

Painting the railings black, to make their appearance less forbidding

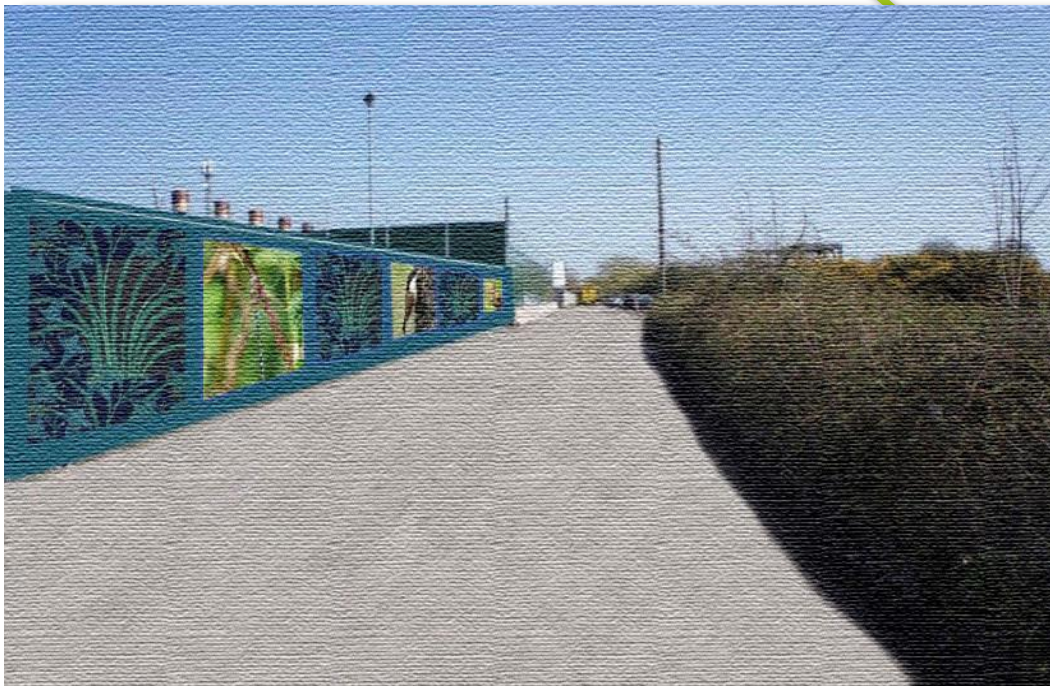
Recycled material hoarding with attractive colour scheme and prints of Latchford Locks

Plants and planting

Information board

Ideally resurfacing the road, but the cost may be prohibitive. An alternative idea could be considered.

Recycled material hoarding with attractive colour scheme and prints from Woolston Eyes



LATCHFORD LOCKS & WOOLSTON EYES

Green links

There is potential for great green links between Woolston, Woolston Eyes, Latchford, Thelwall Grappenhall and the town centre, some of which is already provided by the Transpennine Trail. However, Thelwall Lane, which runs alongside the north side of the Manchester Ship Canal at the Locks, skimming the edge of Woolston Eyes, would really benefit from some attention. There are large potholes along the entire stretch of road, making it difficult for wheelchair users and those with prams to negotiate. It also has the potential to be dangerous for cyclists.

There is a lot of litter and detritus there and no public refuse facilities. Bins could be provided with arrangement for collection coordinated with local businesses on Thelwall Lane.

The fencing surrounding nearby businesses, while obviously necessary, is ugly and somewhat forbidding. Similar fencing around Woolston Eyes detracts from the natural beauty of the site.

While resurfacing the entire road may be prohibitively expensive, particularly as Peel Ports are in the process of refurbishment plans at the Locks themselves, there may be a more cost effective and greener solution to provide attractive access between the Latchford Locks and Woolston Eyes for all.



ABOUT WOOLSTON EYES

Not much is known about the area known as the Eyes before the Middle Ages, but we know people were in the area during the Bronze Age, and that the Anglo-Saxons reached the region around 700 AD. In fact, the word 'Ees' is Saxon for land near a looping watercourse, so the Germanic settlers must have arrived on the banks of the Mersey about this time.

During the winter months the Mersey flooded across the meadows of Thelwall. In the summer it is likely that sheep were grazed on the fertile fields which were probably too wet for arable cultivation in a pre-land drain era. At the time of the famous salmon hauls of the mid 18th century, certain transformations to the Ees meadows were underway, as the effects of the Industrial Revolution began to be felt. Powder mills with workers cottages were constructed where the north bank of No.2 bed currently stands.

The major change to the area was the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal in 1895, which radically altered the landscape, beyond simply the imposing presence of the new waterway itself. The long meanders of the Mersey through Statham were cut off and became redundant, as did the old canals to the north and the wharves.



The old water meadows largely disappeared under the deposit grounds which were constructed from the 1920s onwards.

The various farmsteads which had managed a living on these lowlands ceased to exist with the arrival of the first dredgings, apart from one, which continued as a working farm until No.3 bed was constructed upon the site in the late 1950s. The old farming lifestyle that had existed up until then was swept away.

The Woolston Eyes Conservation Group, a voluntary organisation formed in 1979, manages the rich and varied wildlife of the deposit grounds with the agreement of the Manchester Ship Canal Company, owners of the land. The Group's aim is to promote the study and conservation of the wildlife and habitat of the area with particular regard to the ornithology. In 1986 the Reserve (which is over 200 hectares) was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in order to protect its wintering wildfowl especially Teal, Shoveler and Pochard. In 2004 the SSSI was revised to include the nationally important breeding population of Black-necked Grebe, Pochard and Gadwall.

The group undertakes management work to preserve or maximise the ornithological value of the Reserve, provides and maintains hides for the use of the public and permit holders, keeps the paths open and discourages disturbance.

The group is a registered charity.

WOOLSTON EYES *ideas*



The entrance and roadway alongside the north of the Manchester Ship Canal and which leads directly to Woolston Eyes and Woolston itself is in rather poor condition. This means that it can be dangerous for cycling and difficult for wheelchair users and those with prams or pushchairs to navigate.



In the event that the cost of road resurfacing is too great, we would suggest a wood effect recycled plastic walk / cycle way, not only alongside the road but also taking visitors through the scrubland and trees nearer to the canal for great views.

It would also be beneficial to have high level lockable gates, open during the day from an early hour but locked in the evening save for access for Woolston Eyes and Peel Ports staff.

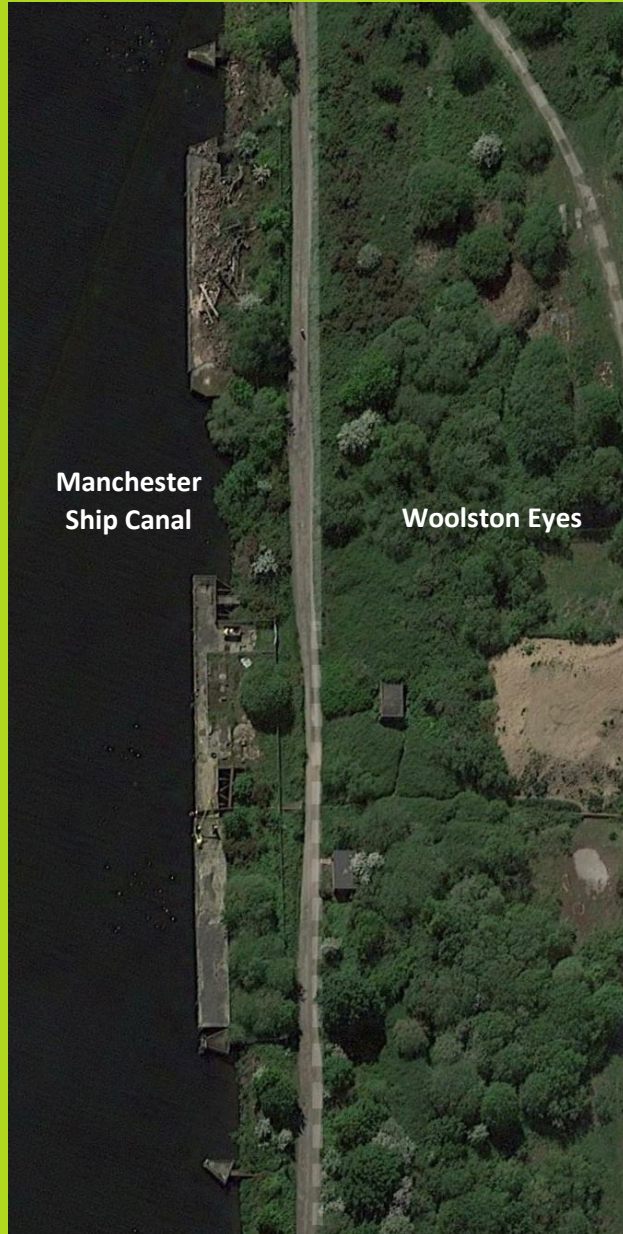
What would be required?

Wood effect recycled plastic boardwalks

Lockable high gates with Woolston Eyes design & logo

Recycled plastic hoardings with Woolston Eyes wildlife images to cover unsightly metal fencing

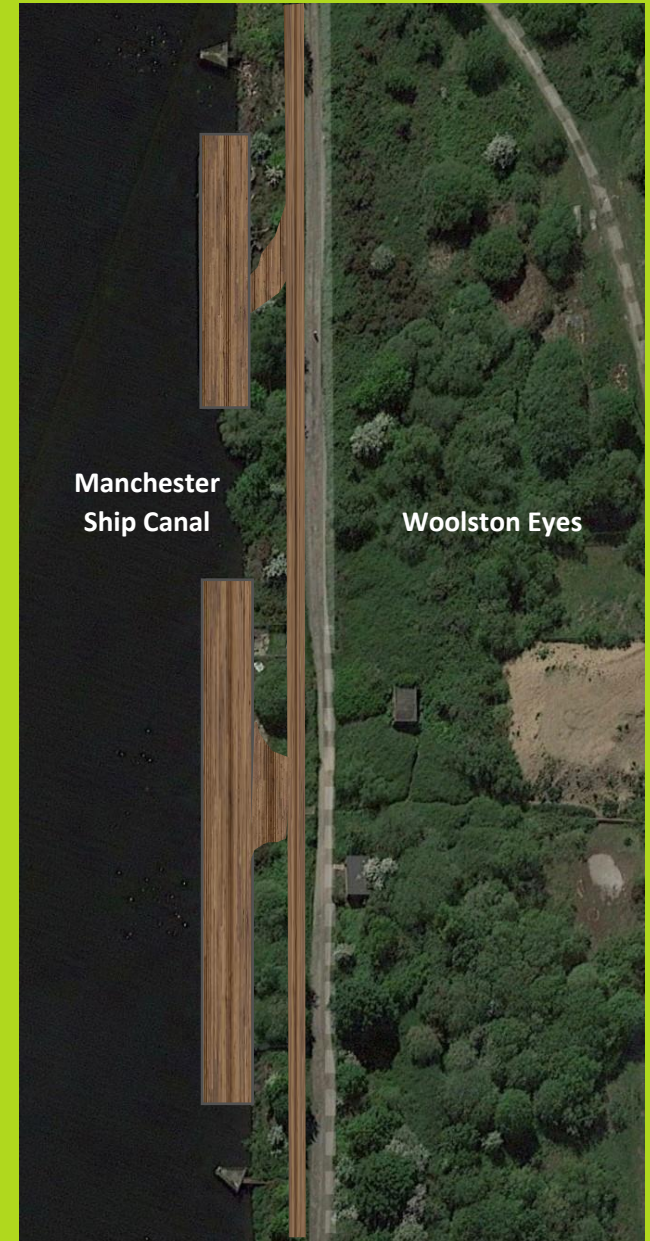
WOOLSTON EYES *ideas*



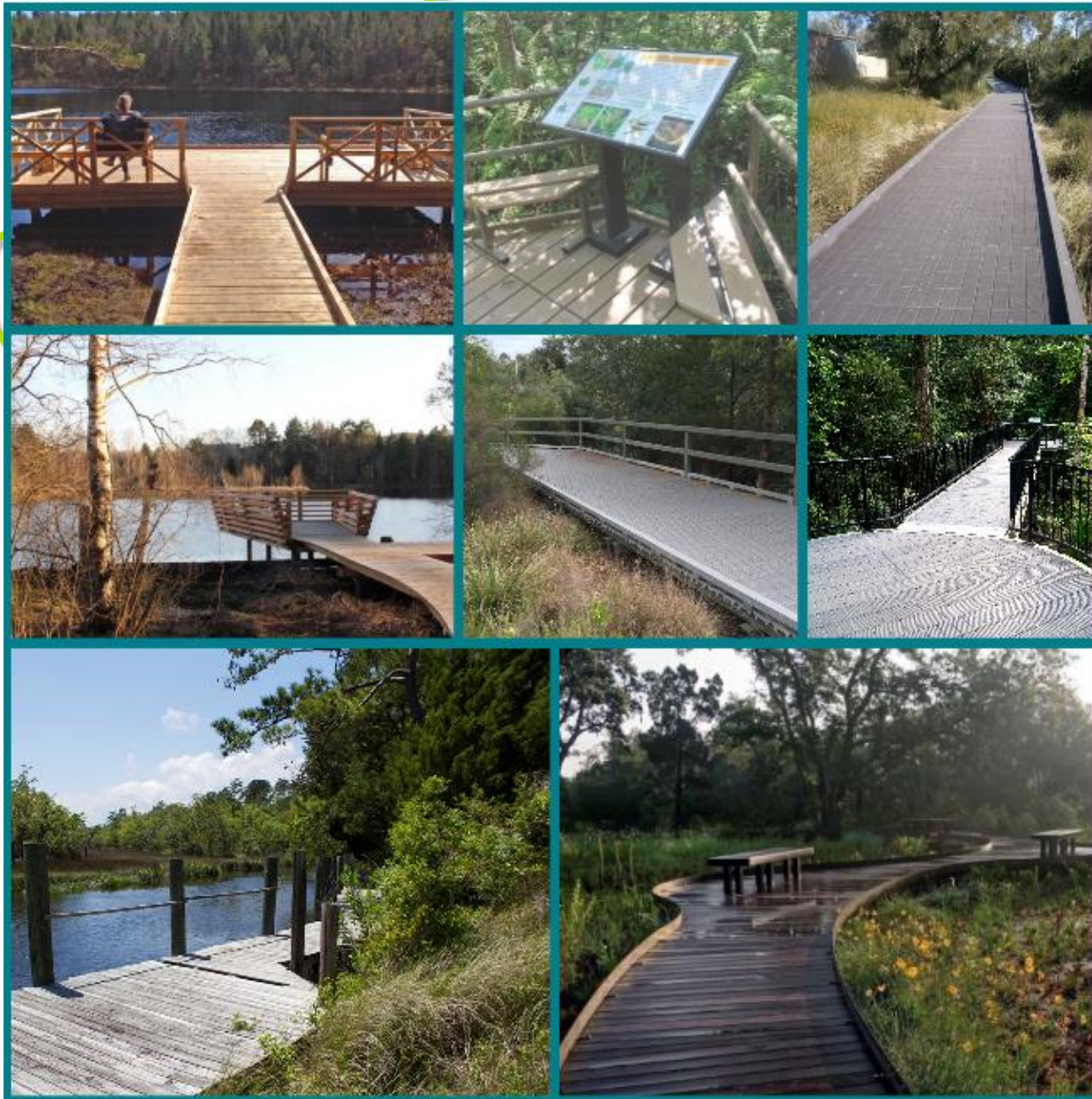
As the road / path between Woolston Eyes and Manchester Ship Canal takes heavy vehicles it is not in good repair. Given the length of the road is almost 1 mile long it may well be too expensive to resurface it to a standard that will withstand this kind of loadbearing on a regular basis. It may also not be cost effective because it is not a road open to public traffic.

Non-vehicle users of the road also miss out on views of the Manchester Ship Canal itself, as it is shielded by trees and is covered in somewhat wild scrubland. While it would not be desirable to remove too much scrubland, a boardwalk through it, taking pedestrians, walking frame and wheelchair users, pram users and cyclists on a winding journey through the planting, at times reaching the canal edge, at others, simply passing trees, plants and flowers could offer a safe and attractive travelway without incurring the cost of recurrent road repairs and maintenance.

There could also be viewing decks, possibly using existing platforms as on the left.



WOOLSTON EYES *ideas*



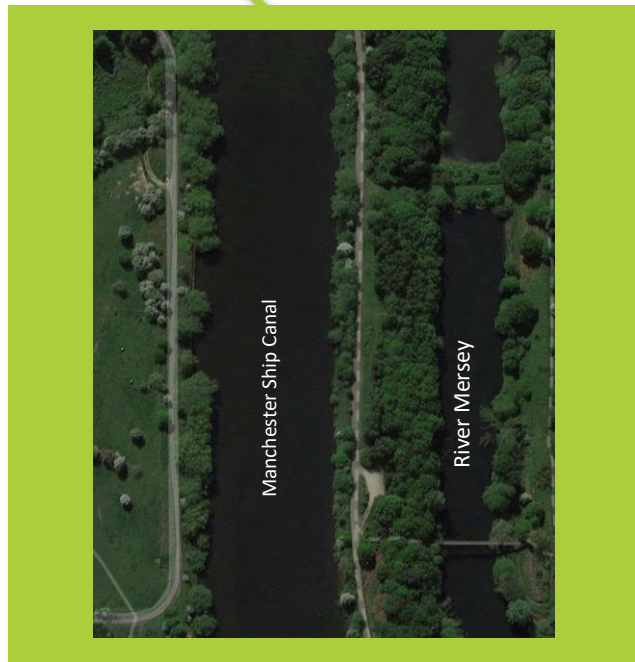
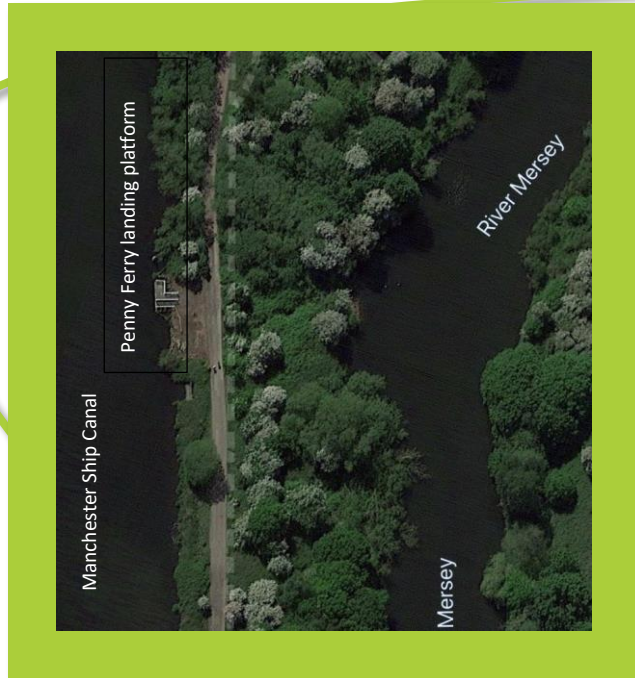
About recycled boardwalks

There are now many businesses offering public structures and furniture created from recycled plastic. The standard of design appears to be good and it could be a great way of reusing some of our plastic waste. In terms of sustainability, not only would it be beneficial to us in terms of repurposing plastic, but according to, [Go Plastic](#), structures in such material are -

“Strong and durable - they have an expected lifespan of 40 years - the boards are exceptionally low maintenance, rot proof and splinter free.

Solid recycled plastic profiles made from 100% recycled plastic are ideal material for boardwalks, walkways and jetties, especially in wetland areas such as marine developments, nature reserves and coastal areas.”

Another company, [Plaswood](#), not only produces recycled plastic boardwalks and jetties, it also produces picnic tables, benches, planters and bins. They also say that *“Plaswood does not require treating with preservatives and will not leach any harmful chemicals into the earth or waterway.”* – obviously all claims need to be verified – but this could be a more realistic proposition for inclusive, attractive and safe access along the Manchester Ship Canal to Woolston Eyes than entire road resurfacing that will likely need ongoing maintenance.



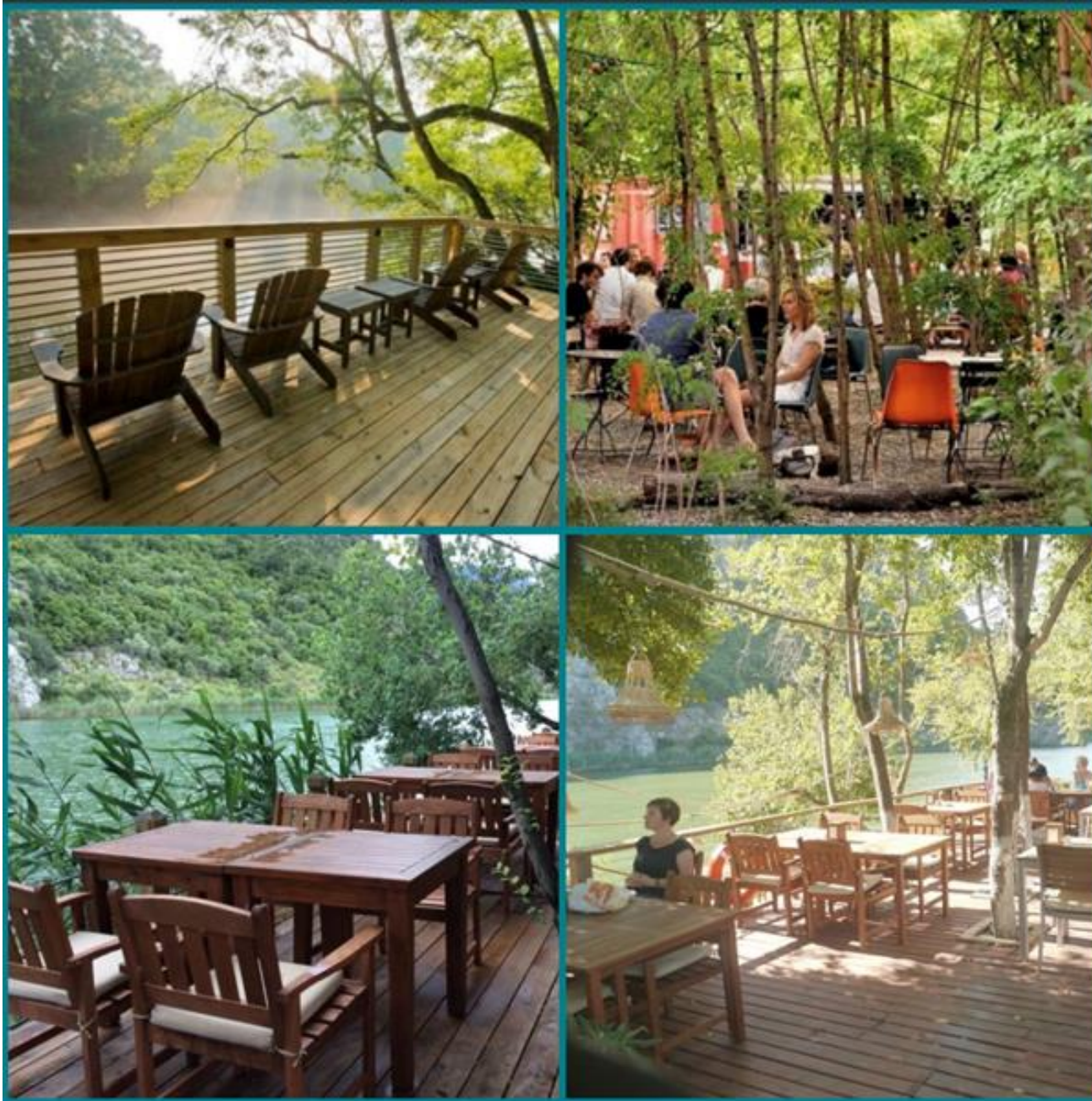
The River Mersey

If you take a set of worn wooden steps – located just off the main pathway running alongside the Manchester Ship Canal, there is an incredibly picturesque spot to be found on the banks of the River Mersey. It really is a delight to climb these steps and be greeted with such beautiful scenery. It is quite a unique destination, too, given its location between the ship canal and the river.

It's *almost* a welcoming stop for visitors; it seems to want to be a destination but it is not quite there yet. It has the steps that lead to it but nowhere really for people to linger and enjoy the view.

As with anywhere beautiful and tucked away – there is always a risk of trespassing, vandalism and misuse should more be made of this area – but trespassing occurs anyway – the key is to deter trespassing in the first place with security measures, not deprive the public of a location that has so much potential to become a real beauty spot.

WOOLSTON EYES *ideas*



These are just ideas for a river bank resting spot. This is on the Manchester Ship Canal side of the River Mersey, not on Woolston Eyes itself. There would need to be a way of accessing the area at ground level or with provision of a sloping pathway to allow access for wheelchair users and those who find stairs difficult.

Visitors would need to be respectful of the nearby wildlife across the river on the Woolston Eyes site – but people generally are. The majority of those who visit or pass Woolston Eyes do so because they want to enjoy the natural world on their doorstep. Again, the few who may not respect the area and wildlife would do so anyway – viewing / seating area or not.

How viable a coffee stand would be here would need to be considered. It may not be cost effective to do so – or it may be viable only at weekends.



WOOLSTON EYES *ideas – access for all*

Woolston Eyes provides us with a unique opportunity to see wildlife at close quarters. The site has a number of hides and viewing spots.

Crossing the bridge to Bed 3 at Woolston Eyes brings you to a rather steep grassy pathway, which would not be easy for those less mobile or with pushchairs to negotiate. A short boardwalk taking you to the first hides, and perhaps an accessible viewing platform at this spot would provide more people with an opportunity to see this wonderful place.





A Victorian hidden gem

Another significant piece of heritage linking Woolston Eyes to Latchford Locks is the footbridge across the River Mersey from Thelwall Lane to No 3 bed at Woolston Eyes. Built at the same time as the Manchester Ship Canal, in the 1890s, it is one of only two remaining iron suspension bridges remaining in the UK. Nominated in 2016 for a heritage award introduced by the Institution of Civil Engineers North West, this historic structure is considered to be an extremely important example of Victorian civil engineering.

However, it is now in desperate need of restoration. Bringing the bridge back to its former glory would not only be an important step in preserving our local heritage, it would be a real attraction for both historians and nature lovers far beyond Warrington's boundaries.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this booklet is to suggest ideas that would -

- *Preserve and enhance two important heritage sites in north Warrington*
- *Help to further our sense of place*
- *Create an attractive and interesting destination at Latchford Locks for residents in the local area and beyond*
- *Offer unique locations to learn about local history and nature within a short distance of each other*
- *Improve access for all – including wheelchair and walking frame users, pushchairs and prams*
- *Offer an opportunity to enjoy the waterways of Manchester Ship Canal and the River Mersey with a dock based café and seating area*

It is appreciated that before any changes were made approval and permission would be needed from Peel Ports, who are already undertaking significant refurbishment to the Locks and crossing, to make it safer for the public. It is also appreciated that Peel Ports already undertake significant charitable work for the benefit of local communities.

Funding will be required for any of these ideas. We would propose giving consideration to an application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund and perhaps even build partnerships with organisations such as the Land Trust. There are also important community groups and the local public who may have opinions and ideas of their own with regards to these suggestions. Nothing is set in stone and Our Green Warrington simply want to start a conversation about our local heritage, sustainability, creating a sense of place and improving access to green space for all!

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