

Bridgewater Basin Floating Ecosystems

“The project has the potential to positively impact upon the experience of the many thousands of people who visit, work, reside or pass through the area everyday whilst also encouraging native wildlife” Anthony Simpson, Chair of Petersfield Group

Background

Canals, modified rivers and old Victorian park lakes can lack a little interest and be sterile, but that doesn't have to be the case. This project aims to breathe new life into the underused basin by using an artistic as well as a scientific approach to improving the aesthetic, while at the same time creating a haven for wildlife.



Project

Working with aquatic scientists Biomatrix Water Solutions, a series of active floating ecosystems were designed, constructed and assembled to fit exactly into the frame of the basin with gaps allowing for any floating detritus to be easily scooped out. They work a bit like a big green Meccano set, being planted up bankside before being adjusted and joined together in the water and then floated into position and secured.

The ecosystems "float" but are attached to risers so they can, quite literally, go with the flow. They will rise and fall with any change in water level which on some canals and rivers can be essential.

City Centre,
MANCHESTER

BENEFITS



Quality
of place



Land and
biodiversity

COST



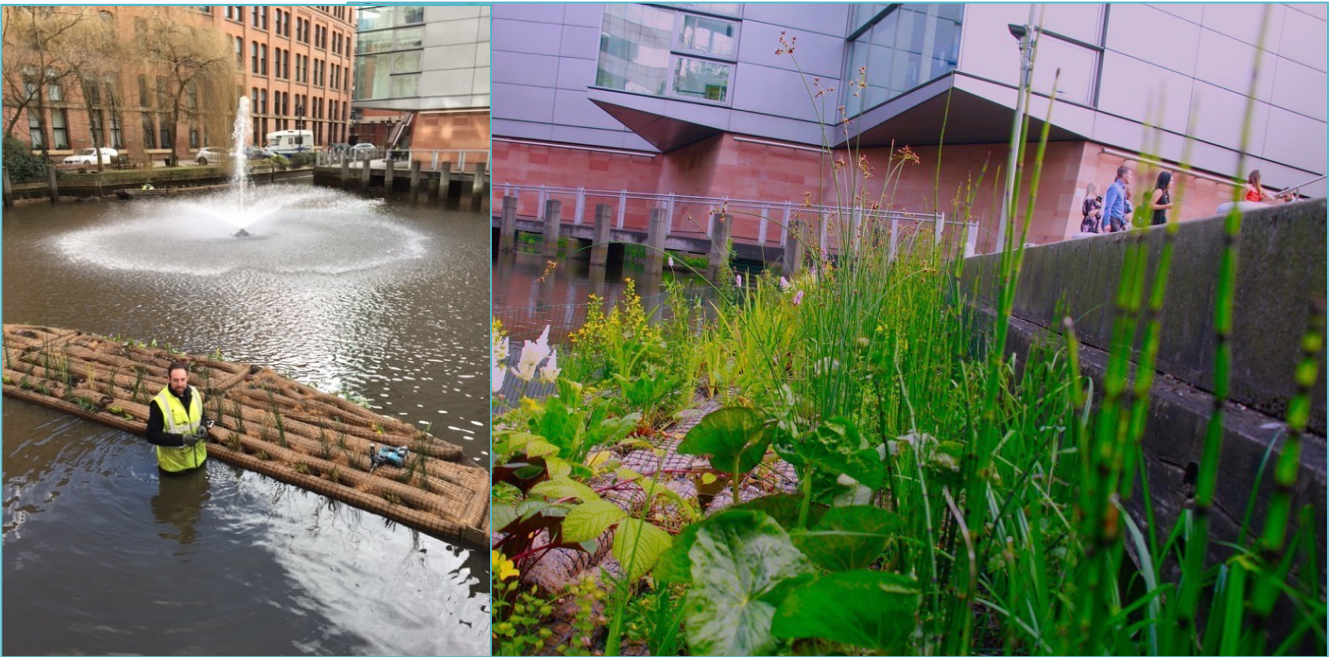
TIMESCALE



Outcomes

Plant selection was key, and designers BDP, Biomatrix and the National Trust's Head Gardener at Dunham Massey provided expert advice and came up with a selection of useful and beautiful plants, both native and non native. The planting scheme was based around the concept of **Synesthesia**, in which sounds can evoke thoughts of colour. Based on this, plant species were chosen to help evoke the sense of spectacle that would come with a musical composition; perfect for the Bridgewater Hall – home of the world famous Halle orchestra.

Many of the plants will provide a valuable food source for bees and other insects that in turn will feed birds and bats. Underwater, there's even more going on. Using clever "dynamic media", nylon strands are fixed to the underside of each island, creating a swaying mass of artificial "roots" perfect for fish to hide in and spawn against. These "roots" also encourage bacteria colonisation which helps improve water quality and reduce pollution.



Learning

Pioneering work in North Manchester at Boggart Hole Clough helped establish the project's viability, while a broad project partnership helped make a good project into an excellent one which was nominated for the World Canal Awards in 2016.

The project also lends itself to excellent volunteer involvement; over thirty volunteers from a range of organisations took part in the planting of the islands.

Future

Community volunteers will help with the ongoing management of the ecosystems which have been designed to be very low maintenance. There is the potential to develop more islands in the basin and along the canal network with this project acting as a replicable demonstrator of success.

For further information

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Canal and River Trust - <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/>