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ISSUE FOUR

east

Wireless Web
Community Champions
Shaping Up
Pipe Dreams Come True



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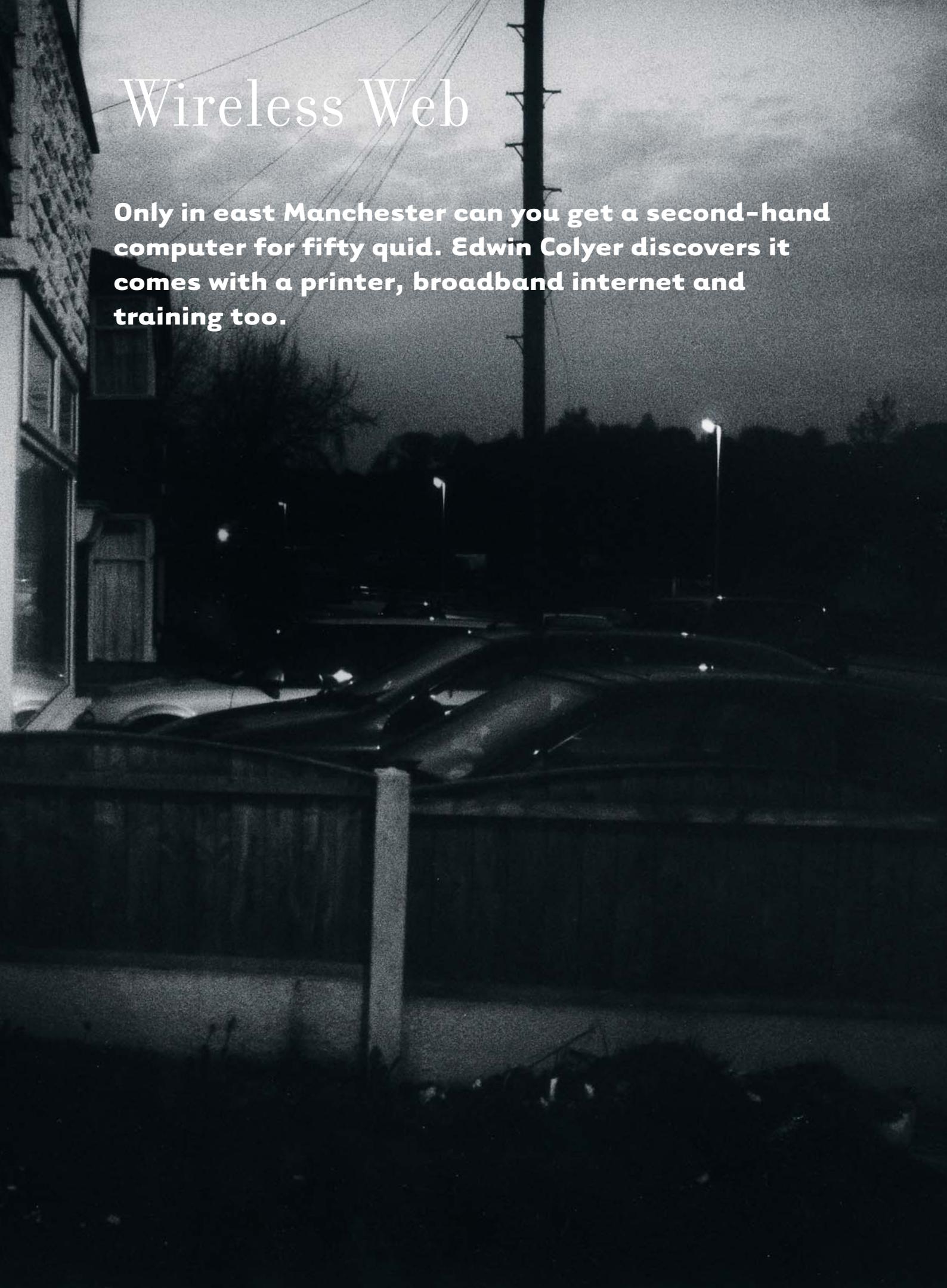
the magazine about regeneration in east manchester

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Wireless Web

Only in east Manchester can you get a second-hand computer for fifty quid. Edwin Colyer discovers it comes with a printer, broadband internet and training too.



But east Manchester was one of the more deprived areas in the UK and hardly anyone had web access – only 19% of people even had computers at home.

8.20am: Eastserve installers collect the day's hardware from their warehouse.

The setting sun bathes the streets in a glorious orangey-gold, then dips behind the dark silhouettes of the city centre skyscrapers. Day dwindles to dusk.

But the streets are quieter tonight. Across east Manchester people are settling down for a night in – not watching TV, but surfing the world wide web. Children search out answers to their homework, parents look for cheap holidays.

Jed Shaw even missed the sunset. Since he got in from his taxi-driving shift he's been sat in front of his newly acquired computer, putting the finishing touches to a calendar he has designed for his Under 9s football team, Eastlands FC. He has already been on the internet and arranged a few pre-season friendly games with other local teams.

This is east Manchester in the digital age – homes with computers, broadband internet access and IT-savvy residents. This is east Manchester in the age of Eastserve.

What began as a pilot project in 2001 to hook up 450 homes to the internet has now expanded into an award-winning initiative, making available subsidised computers, training, affordable broadband access and technical support to the 60,000 households of east Manchester.

"We are targeting the age-old class divide issue," says Peter Molduano-Przychodzki, Principal Resident Support Officer at Eastserve. "We are using computers and the internet to help bridge social divides and give everyone access to all the opportunities in this digital world."

"When we launched there was a big push to give people better access to council and other public services via the internet," Peter continues. "But east Manchester was one of the more deprived areas in the UK and hardly anyone had web access – only 19% of people even had computers at home. No matter how good a job the council made in developing online services, people round here would not have computers or the skills to use them, and be further disadvantaged."

But even in its earliest days it quickly became apparent that providing broadband access in the area would not be easy. Around a quarter of homes did not have a BT landline (people couldn't afford one, or just used a

mobile instead), and BT had no plans for enabling the local exchange for broadband connections.

"We quickly realised that the only answer to the lack of infrastructure was to set up our own wireless network for the area. We would then have full control over the technology, wouldn't have to dig up streets and could make our service affordable for local residents," says Peter.

The resulting Eastserve network is based on Wi-Fi technology. Today "Wi-Fi hotspots" are usually found in cafés, railway stations and airports; they allow people to access the internet from their laptops without having to plug in any cables. east Manchester is effectively the biggest Wi-Fi hotspot in Europe.

Through two main distribution points Eastserve links users to the rest of the online world. These distribution points send and receive data to and from more than 60 smaller aerials called access points. Access points communicate over a much smaller area and distribute the internet traffic to each individual aerial on customers' homes. These are then wired up to their home computer.

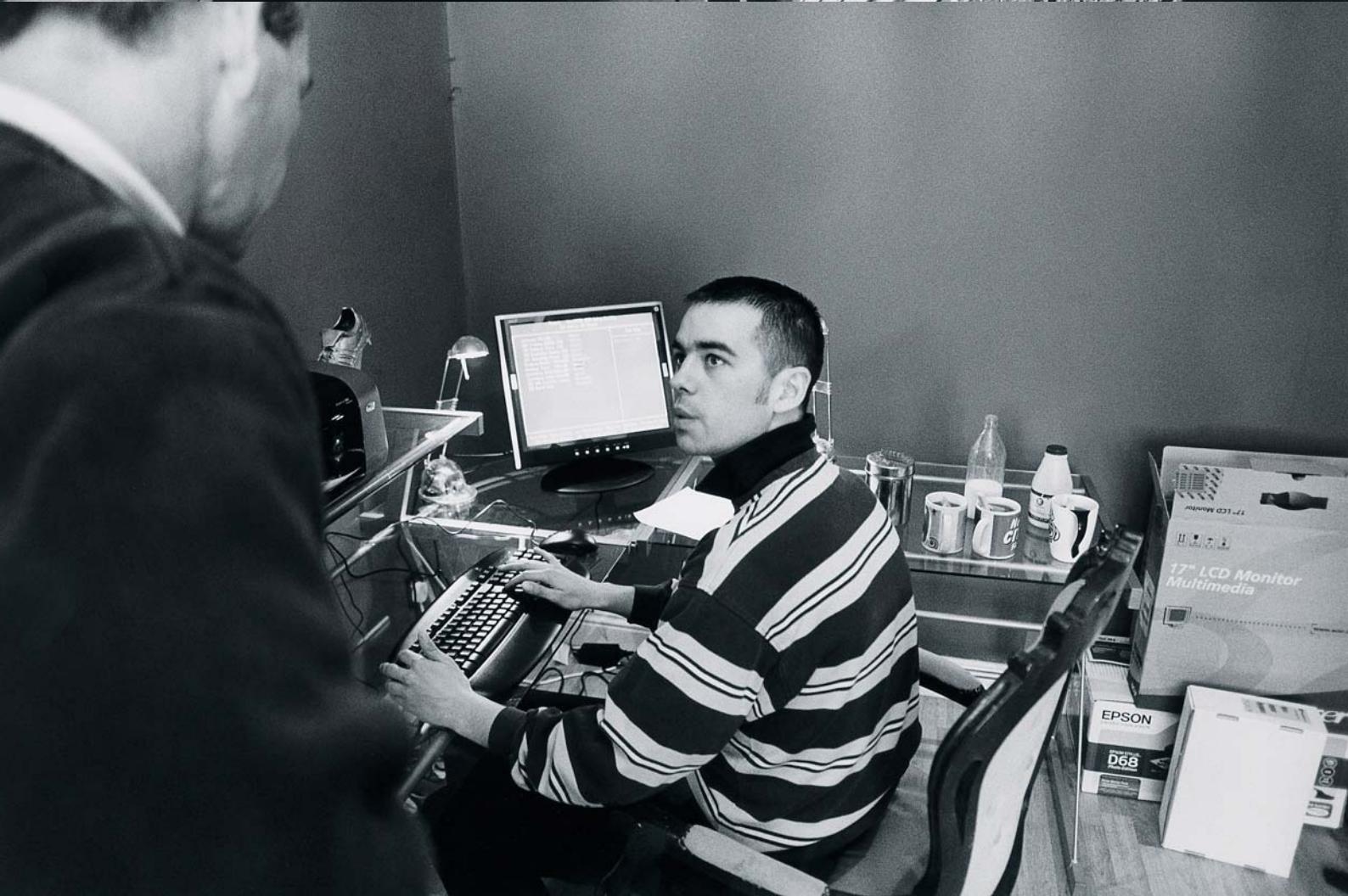
Despite so much data flying through the air between all these aerials the signals don't interfere with each other, lose their strength or slow down. Reassuringly George Dale, an Eastserve engineer and installer, says the speed you buy is the speed you get. "It's much better than broadband through your telephone line which can really slow down when lots of people are online," he says. "Here, if you pay for a two megabyte service, that's the speed you'll get."

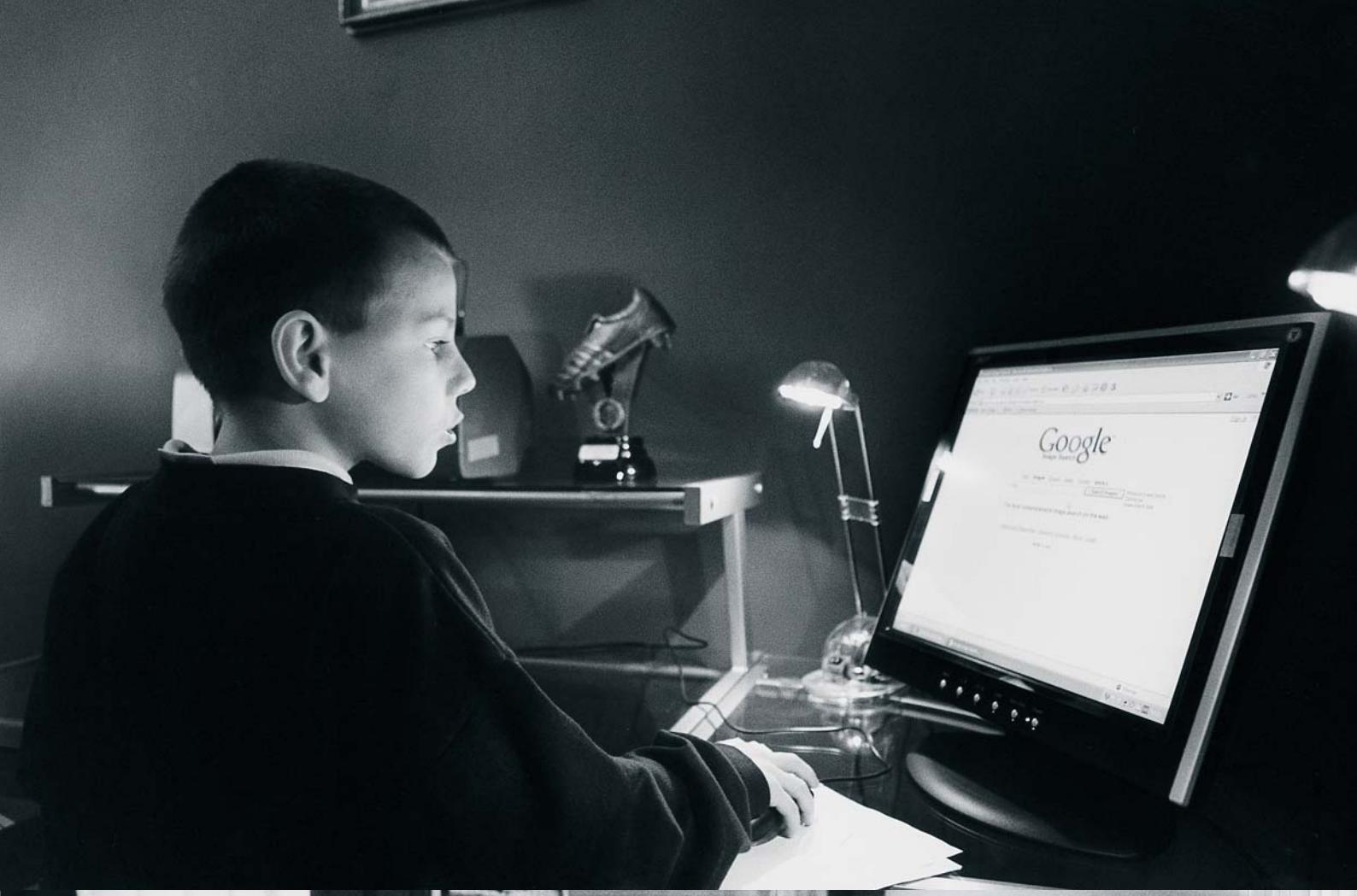
Eastserve offers a range of options. The 150kbps speed is about three times that of a dial-up connection and costs just £6 per month. The 1Mbps connection costs £20 per month, competitive with most available commercial broadband packages. Customers paying by direct debit have their speed doubled for free.

Speed is the essence of installation too. "In about half an hour or so you can be browsing the web," says George. "We arrive at the house and work out where the computer is going to be put and the best location – that's technically and cosmetically – for your aerial.



O.CS1188BA13C
1 PC
6.6 KGS
7.2 KGS
1.20





Eastserve's technical team on hand for telephone support.

The Eastserve.com portal is trying to provide something like a virtual town hall... It even provides online forms for anonymously reporting low-level crime.

When we've agreed everything, my assistant will go indoors and get the computer up and running while I fix the aerial to the wall or chimney and run the wire down into the house. We'll then spend a bit of time explaining to you how everything works, show you some websites you might be interested in, and how to do it safely, especially if there are children in the house."

But as George's mini-tutorials perfectly illustrate, wireless connectivity is only part of Eastserve's remit. After all, web browsing is impossible without a computer or the necessary skills to get online. Eastserve has also received substantial government and European grants to subsidise PC sales to east Manchester residents. Reconditioned computers come for just £50, or new systems for £200, both including a printer. "You get a flat screen and three months free Eastserve internet access," Jed enthuses. "If you look in the paper the cheapest deals you'll find are about £499." Customers also get free technical support at the cost of a local call.

Every new customer is also entitled to three hours free training that covers the basics on how to use a PC, connect to the internet, send emails and browse the web. Over 3500 residents have attended these courses and many have gone on to obtain further training or qualifications.

Athol Few, Project Manager for Eastserve, likes the way that Eastserve contributes to the community in so many different ways. "When we launched our wireless network it was certainly innovative at the time, although technology has caught up with us since. But what makes us really innovative now is that we provide a whole package: we're not just providing broadband, but also training, cheap PCs and repairs, and a community portal."

The Eastserve.com portal is trying to provide something like a virtual town hall. It links to the City Council and e-government sites, and the NHS. It even provides online forms for anonymously reporting low-level crime to help relieve pressure on emergency callouts. In the past nine months over 650 reports have been filed by local residents.

Eastserve's impact on the area is best appreciated by listening to all the stories of

local residents. There's Carol who got so excited that she got qualifications in IT and now teaches at MANCAT. There's the pensioner who used the web to find a cheap holiday abroad.

And there's Jed. "Since I got the computer I've registered the team with the FA and found an online database of local teams that you can contact for friendly matches. I've found out there are hundreds of competitions in the area – and I've even entered some of them online too. We're in four competitions before the start of our first season."

The calendar is finished, and Jed is pleased with the result. The kids will love it, he thinks, as he makes his way to the kitchen. His nine-year-old son, Gerard, immediately sits down in front of the screen and starts to type.



Miles Platting resident Emma Russell at the New Technology Institute which provides training for Eastserve customers.

Community Champions

East Manchester is full of individuals working hard for their own communities. Len Grant meets a few.

"They might not be able to change the world but they know they can get a litter bin put at the end of their road!"

They join committees, organise residents' associations and generally get 'stuck in' when others sit back and do nothing. In east Manchester there are dozens of these unpaid 'community champions' quietly doing what they do for the benefit of others. But why? What motivates them?

Tracey Annette is New Deal's Resident Liaison Officer and, after working with local people for twelve years, she has her own theories. "There are lots of reasons why people get involved," says Tracey, "but I think there are two reasons that stand out.

"First, there's those people, and I'm one of them, who just can't turn a blind eye to injustice. If they see something that's not fair they want to put it right. It's just how they are, maybe it's got something to do with how they were brought up.

"Then there are those who have lived in their area all their lives, seen it decline and are saddened by the change. They don't sit on their backsides blaming the politicians, they do something about it. They might not be able to change the world but they know they can get a litter bin put at the end of their road!"

Gwen Woollon falls into both of these categories. Born and brought up in Beswick, Gwen moved to London with her second husband, Steve in 1992.

"After three years down south I wanted to come back home," she says. We bought a house here on Hartwell Close very cheaply, not realising at the time that the place was going down, people were leaving and everyone was in negative equity.

"As more people left landlords were

buying the houses and letting them to, shall we just say, not very nice families."

Hartwell Close, off Bell Crescent, was built as a private development of 56 houses in 1989. Around its perimeter were three alleyways between the houses, a design flaw that local criminals made use of.

"They'd sit on the alley walls," recalls Steve, "and signal to each other when the coast was clear. Then it'd be a brick through a window, grab a video or a telly and then off! They'd have three ways out. Every day someone was getting robbed and it was driving good people away."

Within two years of the couple moving into the Close, half the properties were empty. Gwen had had enough.

"Something had to be done," she recalls. "I'd heard about New Deal and knew money was coming into the area so we decided to find out what was going on."

With a few neighbours Gwen and Steve started going to meetings to see what was available. "Every time we voiced our opinions, we were listened to. I thought, 'Wow!', I wasn't used to that! We were encouraged to set up a residents' association and then apply for funds. I've got to say this about them, they gave us 100% support, they really did."

Initially the residents' group received funding to get the alleyways blocked off. They needed everyone's agreement. Then came closed circuit TV and new lighting. "It's all about working together," explains Gwen. "It hasn't been just Steve and I, we've all worked hard on this. We've gone from a 96% crime level to less than 1%."







Community Champions

There are no empty properties on the Close now and all but three are owner-occupied. House prices have soared. The residents now have street parties, street clean-up days, and there's even a gardening club for the kids.

Over in Clayton too it was crime that encouraged local resident Jenny Hesford to make things better for her neighbourhood.

"We had a grass verge out the back here," she recalls, "that was just wide enough for cars to race through from Clayton Street down to Ash Street. We used to have stolen vehicles, week in and week out, racing down the back at ninety miles an hour! It didn't matter who was around, they've missed kids by that much, honestly they have."

"At night they'd park up their cars in the little slip road and you'd hear whistles going, and push bikes would come from all over to get the drugs off the dealers. They knew if someone called the police they had several different ways of getting away. It was awful.

"And then, I think it was 1999, one of the kiddies on this road was playing with his football, fell over and put his hand on a syringe. It went straight in. He was only about four and it took ages before the tests came back to see if he was HIV positive. It was horrendous. He was OK but it was then that we decided something had to be done."

Jenny first spoke to her local councillor who suggested setting up a residents' association which she did with another resident on her street.

"New Deal helped us apply for a grant. I didn't have a computer then so had reams and reams of handwritten paper, but we got it. It was a £15,000 cash grant which the Council matched, so we had £30,000!"

"With the help of Groundwork, we extended the back gardens along here, and put in five large concrete pyramids so the cars and motorbikes couldn't race down the backs... and it worked."

Jenny continues to run the association, helping others with their problems. She'll make a call or write a letter and, on the Eastserve forum, even gives advice to others who are in the same situation as she was.

"People can have as much control over their own situations as they want," says

Jenny. "They can have their say if they want to, they've just got to attend the meetings. You've got to speak up at the proper time and at the proper place."

Elsewhere in east Manchester, motivations differ for championing your own community. Serafino de Felice is a champion for the people of Ancoats, the network of narrow streets and impressive mills that was the world's first industrial suburb and home to hundreds of Italian and Irish families until the 1960s.

A short walk around the historic streets with Serafino and the place comes back to life. "That was the ice plant," he says, pointing out a four-storey brick building on Blossom Street.

"Everyone would bring their trolleys here, and load them up with great chunks of ice to keep the ice cream from melting during their rounds.

"Ancoats," he says emphatically, "is my inheritance", and as a third generation immigrant his inheritance has been to continue a deep-rooted community spirit.

Born on Jersey Street, 'in the shadow of McConnells Mill' Serafino's family already had a tradition of helping others. His grandfather, who had arrived from the village of Picinisco, southeast of Rome in the 1876, was instrumental in the formation of the Italian Mutual Aid Society when he came to Manchester. Those who had fallen on hard times or needed special help after a bereavement could turn to the society for assistance.

"My grandfather was the capo di tutti capi, 'boss of bosses' for Ancoats," recalls Serafino with pride, "a real head of the community."

Serafino has inherited the family tradition of helping others. Although he has not lived in Ancoats for many years, he regularly returns to support others of his generation, Italian or otherwise. The septuagenarian organises outings and events for the elderly as well as an annual 'bash' at Christmas.

As a child Serafino and his family moved from Jersey Street into a bigger house on George Leigh Street, next to St Michael's Church. Their home is no longer there but the church, which was built in 1858 and became

"We used to have stolen vehicles, week in week out, racing down the back at ninety miles an hour!"



"Ancoats is my inheritance," says Serafino de Felice

"It's the decent, respectable people of Gorton that get my support... Anti-social people can stay away as far as I'm concerned."

the main parish church for Italians in Ancoats, has been closed since January 2004 because of falling congregation numbers.

"I used to be an altar boy there," recalls Serafino, "but now St Michael's is under threat." With hundreds of others, he is campaigning for the church to be reopened, although its use as a community centre has also been proposed.

Last year Serafino's commitment to the people of Ancoats was recognised when New east Manchester commissioned resident artist, Dan Dubowitz to create a seat using a stone salvaged for the demolitions nearby. 'Serafino's Stone', on George Leigh Street, was unveiled last October.

"The following Sunday," says Serafino, "I took flowers to Moston cemetery and put them on my family's graves. I stood in front of my mother's grave and said, 'I've done it Mam!' That was how proud I felt."

Irene Thorpe is 76, just four feet six inches tall and calls herself the 'humanrottweiler'. For the past 25 years she's been fighting anti-social behaviour in Gorton where she's lived all her life. "It's the decent, respectable people of Gorton that get my support," she says. "Anti-social people can stay away as far as I'm concerned!"

"I've always been community conscious," continues Irene. "Even during the war I used to keep an eye out for German spies! It's always been part of me."

When her parents died and her two brothers married, Irene took over the family house and had her first experience of nuisance neighbours. "They'd come into our garden and smash things up," she says, "and I used to tell them I'd phone the police and I did. They'd call me 'grass', but they knew I meant what I said and that I wasn't frightened of them."

Twenty years later and Irene, with a small group of like-minded neighbours are standing up to the anti-social minority. They are the eyes and ears for the local police, keeping tabs on the hooligans and petty criminals.

"People will phone me up or stop me at the shops - I'm always getting stopped - and tell me what's been happening in their street. A lot of people don't like reporting things to the police themselves so they tell me instead.

"They all know me - I've been in the paper that often - they all know what I do. But I stand my ground, it doesn't frighten me."

Like all her neighbours on this seemingly quiet terraced street in West Gorton, Irene has suffered first hand. Twelve months ago new tenants moved next door and it was soon obvious that the house was being used for illegal activities.

"It was atrocious, it went on all through the night, every night: banging about, people coming and going, loud music. I was constantly in touch with the police, telling them what was going on. It was an awful time."

After some months the police eventually had a warrant to act, but it was the landlord who finally had enough and evicted the troublemakers before the police could move in.

"'They've ruined my house,' the landlord complained to me after they'd gone", says Irene, "but he got no sympathy from me... they shouldn't have been there in the first place."

Irene's community spirit has not gone unnoticed. She has been mentioned in the Houses of Parliament by her local MP Sir Gerald Kaufman and received an MBE from the Queen last December. In true-to-her-principles style, Irene threw a 'thank you' party and invited the decent, respectable people of Gorton to celebrate. "It's not just for me this award," she says, "it's for everyone around here who's done their bit."



Irene Thorpe: "People don't like reporting things to the police themselves so they tell me instead."



The Shape of Things to Come

Acclaimed by many, New Islington's first new homes are now occupied. Phil Griffin reflects on the historic significance of Islington Square.





Most architects find it hard to like Islington Square. This is a very good sign. Most architects don't really like most of what the rest of us feel comfortable with. Fat, the team that designed the first 23 houses in New Islington, are not like most architects. They try to find out what people want, and then they try to provide it. Just to make this clear; if most architects were doctors they would perform the operation before examining the patient. Charles Holland and Sean Griffiths, partners in the firm of architects called Fat (which stands for Fashion Architecture Taste) prefer to spend time in the consulting room. Fat tries to satisfy the client (Manchester Methodist Housing Association) and the end users (the people who will live in the houses). Why do architects find it hard to like Islington Square? Because these houses put the horse before the cart, resemble no other houses and all other houses, and because they are both playful and serious.

When Rita, Liam and Sandra were first to put keys into the front doors of their new homes on Monday 13th March, they moved New Islington forward. People are moving in where previously there had only been builders, plans and aspirations. At the other end of the site is a copse of scrawny looking trees that appear to be tied to the ground. They are specially imported 50-year-old Scotch pine, and they shelter a newly planted apple orchard. A small corner of Ancoats appears to be reverting to woodland and lakeside. This is part of the environment for the health centre and school, and continues the surprising development of this special place.

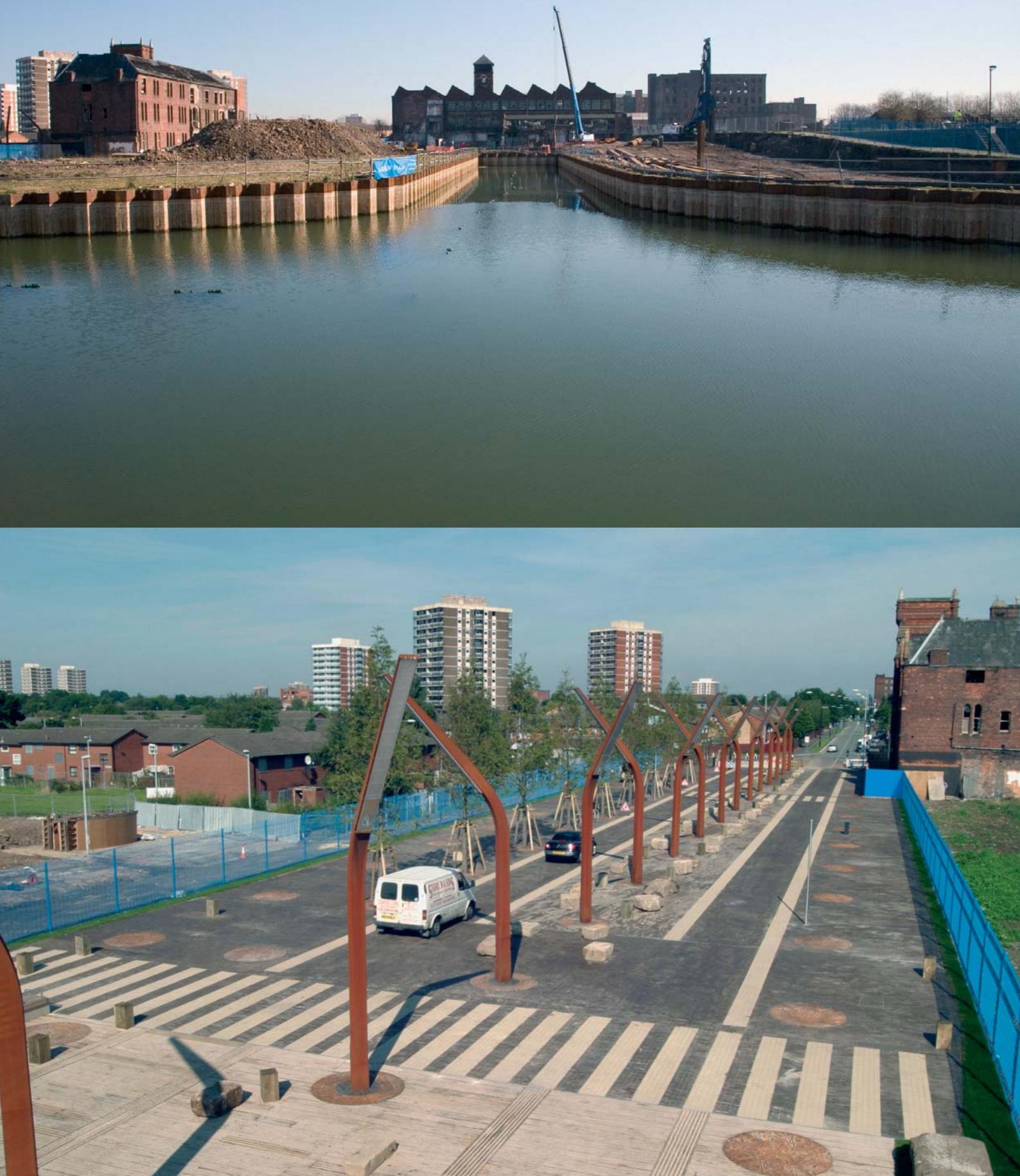
We're used to cities changing and evolving. Even so, most of us will be able to point to our primary school or to the local park where we learnt to ride a bike. Cities like Manchester move quickly, whilst staying surprisingly still. As the new canal goes in, and fingers of land begin to take the shape of New Islington to come, the historic mills of Redhill Street come out from under wraps, reinvented as apartments and offices. When these mills were built, in the middle of the nineteenth century, people travelled to Manchester to gawp at them; a discomforting

"I'm sorry to say this to more modest residents of Islington Square, but people are about to tip up and gawp at you."

vision of the future. I'm sorry to say this to more modest residents of Islington Square, but people are about to tip up and gawp at you. You are pioneers. Not only did you help to shape your homes, but in most cases, you demanded it.

New Islington is unique. Nowhere in the country invests so much care, time, money and imagination into public spaces. From the willow tree on Old Mill Street to the Scotch pine and the water park, nobody has treated this city in this way since Peel, Queens and Philips Parks opened to the public, on the same day, in 1846. There is momentum in New Islington now. Islington Square is a benchmark. Manchester Methodist Housing Association and their partners have delivered on their promise. Residents chose the architects, the architects listened to the residents. This is not the way buildings commonly get made, and these houses are not at all common. The plain fact is Islington Square is an original concept in house building. Shake hands with the future.

Walk over Rochdale Canal, towards Oldham Road and stop when you get to Victoria Square, "The Dwellings" as my great aunt Mary taught me to call them. These are the oldest council homes in the country. Built in 1894, this robust building has been through all sorts of changes; from coal fires to central heating, from courtyard to car park. Not much has fazed this building. It is a benchmark in the history of homes in Britain. When architects, designers and politicians turn up to look at Islington Square, and be sure they will, my guess is that they will leave envious of what they have seen. Manchester Methodist Housing Association has just made its mark in the history of housing. The architects' achievement is that they listened to the residents. Islington Square's achievement is that the residents trusted the architects. Make no mistake, Islington Square is the most important housing to be built in this country for years.





'The Rock', above, will be clad in stone and be a sanctuary for wildlife. Below, 90ft Scotch pines already in place.



Pipe Dreams Come True

East Manchester's latest musical phenomena are banging the drum for local talent.



Previous spread:
Quartermaster and tenor
drummer, Pat Allwood.

Right:
the band practice at the
stadium twice a week.



When lifelong drummer Bob Doyle was asked if he'd set up a new drum and pipe band in Manchester, he couldn't refuse. "I've always liked a challenge," says Bob "but I didn't quite realise what a challenge this would be!"

"Manchester was at one time vibrant with pipe bands," he explains. "Schools and churches had their own, there were bands everywhere. But in the last ten years or so, pipe bands have really taken a hiding."

Together with his partner and fellow drummer, Pat Allwood, Bob set out to recruit members and raise money for instruments and uniforms.

"We used to get up at four in the morning and go off to car boot sales, raising money for the band," says Pat. "All the neighbours would give us things to sell... it was great fun but hard work."

With support from the Lottery, Voluntary Action for Manchester and other sponsors, the Greater Manchester Celtic Pipe Band was formed at the beginning of 2004. Since then they have appeared at charity events, competitions, parades and have even entertained the half-time crowd at Manchester City first team games.

The band practice twice a week at the City of Manchester Stadium, using the boxes for rehearsals and the concourse for marching practice.

"When we first heard the Pipe Band were looking for somewhere to rehearse we didn't hesitate," says MCFC's head of operations, Sara

Billington. "We knew the stadium would be ideal for them. It's great for the Club to be able to help a local community project like this."

Two years on and Pat and Bob are still on the look out for new members. "People don't realise what's involved until they give it a try," encourages Pat. "I remember when I first went to see Bob play, I really liked what I saw and said I'd like to join. That was six years ago and it was the best thing I've ever done."

"Now we're looking for the younger ones to come through," says Bob. "It's difficult because nowadays it's hard to get them away from the video games. They often think you've got to be musically-minded but that's not true at all. We've had people come to us who can't even tap their feet in time to music but once we've shown them, they're up and away."

Pat, who plays tenor drum and is now the band's Quartermaster, hasn't been able to keep her enthusiasm for her hobby to herself. Her sister, daughter and niece all play and she's hoping her granddaughter will soon start. "It would be great to find someone who can teach Scottish dancing and then we'd have the band and a dance troupe... that'd be brilliant."

L.G.

Anyone interested in joining the band should contact Simon McCalla on 07710 833553, or email simon.mccalla@ntlworld.com. The band's web site is www.gmcpb.co.uk.

**"We've had
people come to
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Cover: Eastserve installing an aerial for broadband wireless internet.

This issue of **East** is kindly sponsored by



About East

The start of 2006 has seen further progress in the regeneration of east Manchester. In January we announced the preferred partner for the redevelopment of Miles Platting, heralding the start of the first stage in the transformation of this neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood renewal schemes in Openshaw (Toxteth Street) and Clayton (Eccleshall Street) also moved closer to fruition with the Council approval of the plans for these areas drawn up in conjunction with local people.

In this issue Len Grant again drops in on life in east Manchester, capturing on camera and in word the passion, personalities and projects that are helping breathe new life into the area.

Edwin Colyer investigates the Eastserve phenomenon where, for as little as £50, east Manchester residents can buy a home computer and get hooked up to broadband internet. It's what's made east Manchester one of the most intelligent communities in the world according to the Intelligent Community Forum based in New York.

Also in this issue, Len Grant meets some of the unsung heroes of our communities who refuse to sit by and watch their neighbourhoods decline. It's only with the commitment of people like these, and hundreds more across the area, that real change has happened in east Manchester.

New Islington continues to progress apace and Phil Griffin reviews the recent changes at Manchester's Millennium Community. The first residents have now moved into their contemporary new houses at Islington Square. As you can see, the design of the houses are quite striking and the architects, Fat, have enjoyed positive acclaim in the press. Meanwhile, a new water park is nearing completion, complementing Old Mill Street which opened last September.

Finally, Manchester's newest pipe and drum band come under the **East** spotlight. The band, which practices twice a week at the City of Manchester Stadium, are keeping the marching band tradition alive.

As summer approaches, we hope you enjoy reading this issue. We can only scratch the surface of this colourful, forward thinking and rapidly changing part of the city but, we're sure you'll agree, it makes for an interesting and thought provoking read.

Tom Russell
New East Manchester Ltd

Sean McGonigle
New Deal for Communities

Contributors in this issue

Len Grant is a freelance photographer based in Manchester. For the past decade or so he has made regeneration the subject of his personal and commissioned work. This year he has produced the book *The Reluctant Engineer and other Manchester stories* for engineer, Martin Stockley. He is also working on a second book about New Islington and is curating an exhibition about regeneration for The Lowry in September 2006. See also www.lengrant.co.uk.

Edwin Colyer has contributed to local and national publications ranging from the *Financial Times* to the Mersey Basin Campaign's *Source Northwest*. His particular areas of interest include science, technology, and the environment. Edwin also writes regularly on topical business issues, especially marketing and branding. He lives in Victoria Park in Manchester.

Phil Griffin is a writer and broadcaster with a special interest in architecture and urban issues. He worked for Piccadilly Radio from 1974 to 1978 and Granada Television throughout the 1980s. He wrote the column *Archisnap* for *City Life* for eight years. He was born in Ancoats.

Acknowledgements

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In this issue of East:

Phil Griffin files a progress report from New Islington; the local band looking for new members; Edwin Colyer on east Manchester's internet revolution and community heros.

