

News story: First tree planted in River Aire natural flood management pilot

The first of thousands of trees to be planted across the upper River Aire catchment took place today as part of a pilot natural flood management project.

Cllr Judith Blake CBE, leader of Leeds City Council, planted the first tree on site at Eshton Beck, Gargrave, witnessed by volunteers, landowners, local authorities and partners. This pilot site will have 450 trees planted, to see how natural techniques can slow the flow of water and reduce the risk of flooding downstream.

Ray Bridge Farm, Eshton Beck, Gargrave is the location of the first pilot site where trees such as Dogwood, Guelder Rose, Downy Birch, Alder, and willow will be planted along with hedgerows of hawthorn, blackthorn and hazel. Yorkshire Wildlife Trust staff and volunteers will be leading the planting of trees at the site.

The natural flood management pilot forms part of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme, led by Leeds City Council in partnership with the Environment Agency, which has a catchment wide approach to flood risk as it enters its second stage.

This £500,000 pilot programme, which has been funded by Leeds City Council, forms part of plans to plant hundreds of thousands of trees that will support second phase of the Leeds Flood Alleviation Scheme.

Working with natural processes to reduce flood risk, known as natural flood management, is an important part of managing and reducing flood risk in a sustainable way alongside more traditional engineering solutions. The interventions will also create habitat for wildlife and help regenerate rural and urban areas through tourism.

The pilot sites will allow the team to be able to do monitoring and research of the techniques used to gather evidence and increase their understanding and the benefits they give to reducing flood risk. The pilot programme will also be used by the Environment Agency and Leeds City Council to develop a co-design approach to working with landowners, tenants, local authorities and other key partners such as the Aire Rivers Trust and the White Rose Forest. This will help to then develop future plans for the catchment.

Leader of Leeds City Council Councillor Judith Blake said:

These new trees are a hugely significant part of our plans to protect Leeds from future flooding like the devastation we saw on Boxing Day 2015.

It's great to be working with partner authorities along the River Aire to get the first of the trees planted.

They are part of what will be a range of natural flood management measures in a catchment wide approach to prevent future catastrophic floods affecting communities along the river.

Adrian Gill, Area Flood Risk Manager at the Environment Agency said:

I'm really pleased to launch this pilot programme in partnership with Leeds City Council. Using natural techniques to minimise flood risk while creating new habitats and increasing woodland cover across the Aire catchment will help realise the ambitions set out in the Defra's 25 year environment plan.

While we can never truly eliminate the threat of flooding, working together across local authority boundaries to develop and deliver this programme will help us to create better, more effective solutions to a catchment-wide challenge.

Following the successful opening of the £50million first phase of the scheme serving the city centre, Holbeck and Woodlesford in October last year, phase two identifies measures further upstream including the Kirkstall corridor which was badly hit by the 2015 Christmas floods. It also looks at areas beyond the city boundary to further reduce the possibility of the river flooding in Leeds, as well as additional measures to offer protection for the South Bank area of the city centre which is a key future economic driver for Leeds.

The phase two plans have a strong focus on natural flood management, with proposals to create new woodland areas which would more than double canopy coverage in the River Aire catchment. It also proposes water storage areas to be created and developed, operated by control gates system meaning water can be held and then released back into the river when safe to do so. A third element would be the removal of existing obstructions along the river to help reduce water levels, along with lowering the riverbed in places to improve its capacity and flow.

An outline business case for phase 2 has been completed, which was submitted at the end of January 2018. Outline design for engineered options is being progressed, which will be followed by a tender process with an aim to awarding the construction contract award in autumn 2018.

Press release: Events to find out more about North East natural flood management

Weardale residents can find out more about how a £2.1million natural flood management project could reduce their risk of flooding and create a haven for wildlife in a series of events to be held next month.

The Weardale Natural Flood Management (NFM) pilot project will see the Environment Agency investigate and deliver natural features across 100km squared area to reduce the risk of flooding to 141 properties.

The project team is currently carrying out an assessment of NFM techniques that might help reduce flood risk in Weardale and takes in towns and villages including Stanhope, Westgate, Eastgate and Wolsingham.

The Environment Agency is working on the project with Natural England, Forestry Commission, Durham County Council and the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership.

They want to work with local farmers and landowners who are interested in getting involved in the project to assess the impact of different NFM features. Over the coming months, the North Pennines AONB partnership will be taking the lead in approaching farmers and landowners to discuss voluntary involvement in the scheme. They will be supported by Wear Rivers Trust.

A series of information events for communities is taking place in April to find out more about what it means for them and how they can get involved, as well as capturing their local knowledge about flooding history in the area.

First step in 'pioneering project'

Environment Agency Project Manager Kirsty Hardy said:

This is the first step in what is a pioneering project to explore and deliver natural flood management features to reduce flood risk, as well as enrich the landscape and habitat of what is a beautiful area of countryside.

Until December this year we will be assessing different techniques and our colleagues at the North Pennines AONB Partnership, supported by Wear Rivers Trust, will be speaking with local farmers and landowners before we can then identify any suitable locations for potential delivery of natural flood management features.

This project is ultimately going to increase our understanding of the impact natural flood management can have on reducing flows along tributaries on the Upper River Wear.

We're hosting a series of events where people can find out more about natural flood management and how they can get involved, as well as help us understand past flooding in the area. This really is an exciting project where the community can play a key role and I'd encourage people to come along.

Early discussions

Rebecca Barrett, Biodiversity Lead for the North Pennines AONB Partnership, added:

We have already had some early discussions with a number of farmers and landowners in Weardale. They are interested in the project and are happy to discuss ways to help reduce the impact of flooding on their community.

It is a pleasure to meet with the people whose land management activities play such an important role in the appearance and function of our landscape and we are looking forward to developing the project in partnership with them over the coming months.

All drop-in events take place between 2.30pm and 7pm on:

Date	Location
4 April	Westgate Village Hall, Front Street, Westgate, DL13 1RX
5 April	Wearhead Village Hall, Wearhead, Bishop Auckland, DL13 1DY
10 April	Cowshill Village Hall, Bishop Auckland, DL13 1DA
11 April	Eastgate Village Hall, Eastgate, DL13 2HU
12 April	Stanhope Community Association, Front Street, Stanhope, DL13 2NQ

In March 2017 the Environment Agency announced £15million of funding had been made available for NFM schemes nationally. The Weardale project will allow the Environment Agency to gather and understand evidence to support that natural flood management can play a role in reducing flood risk.

NFM features are specifically designed to work with the natural processes in the landscape to slow river flows and reduce flood risk. As with traditional flood walls and embankments they are a tool to help reduce risk but can never eliminate the risk of flooding entirely.

[Press release: Invasive species week:](#)

Floating pennywort a spreading menace

Reports of floating pennywort in our rivers and lakes have reached a record high with 50 tonnes of the invasive plant being removed from the River Thames by the Environment Agency in 2017.

Fast-growing plants like floating pennywort can spread into the wild if they are not properly disposed of when removed from garden ponds ponds. The [Be Plant Wise](#) campaign has handy tips for gardeners on how to prevent this from happening.

Lord Gardiner, the Biosecurity Minister, will see the effects of floating pennywort on Little Britain lake, Hillingdon, and hear about the work being carried out to prevent this plant from spreading further in the River Colne on Monday, 26 March 2018.

He will also see new signs being put up to encourage fishermen and boaters to [Check, Clean, Dry](#) their equipment and clothing to avoid spreading invasive species.

Biosecurity Minister, Lord Gardiner said:

Invasive species pose a real threat to our country's native plants and animals and cost the economy at least £1.8 billion a year.

The Check, Clean, Dry campaign is playing a key role in raising awareness of these threats – helping to prevent new arrivals and stopping the spread of invasive species already here. It is great to see the whole community of river users supporting this programme to protect the future of our precious native species.

As well as following the Check, Clean, Dry advice, people can help by reporting sightings of invasive plants through the [PlantTracker app](#).

Lord Gardiner's visit comes as part of a wider push by government to promote Invasive Species Week. The week is an annual awareness-raising campaign organised by the GB Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNSS) and Defra to get members of the public thinking about simple steps they can take to stop the spread of invasive species which threaten Britain's plants and animals.

Find out more on [non-native species](#).

Below are the themes for Invasive Species Week, which runs until 29 March 2018.

- Monday 26 March – Ornamental plants. [Be Plant Wise](#) and raising awareness of invasive plants.

- Tuesday 27 March – Hitchhikers. Information on the ways that recreational water users, field workers and anyone out in the countryside can help to prevent the spread of INNS, in particular promoting [Check Clean Dry](#).
 - Wednesday 28 March – Exotic pets. Owners are asked to make sure they never release pets, or allow them to escape, into the wild.
 - Thursday 29 March – #getINNSvolved – on the last day of Invasive Species Week tell us how you are getting #getINNSvolved.
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Speech: What we talk about when we talk about green cities

‘What we talk about when we talk about green cities’

Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency

Manchester Green Summit, 21 March 2018

In an article for the New Statesman in January, the editor of the Today Programme, Sarah Sands, wrote about the type of language that works in newspapers and words that work on the radio.

She shared an anecdote about working with Prince Harry, who guest edited the show over Christmas.

During an on air discussion about supermarkets and plastic, the Prince wanted the presenter to ask:

“Do we need to create a circular rather than a linear economy?”

An important question that I’m sure many people will want to discuss today.

But instead of asking that, the editor pressed the button and said to the presenter:

“Say, should there be more pressure from the government?”

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This is an important lesson for those of us who care about green issues.

If we are to persuade people of our cause we should note that even Prince Harry can’t get the “circular economy” on the radio.

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Of course – there are good reasons for using nerdy terms like “the circular economy”, “natural capital” and “climate resilience”.

But, the seemingly impossible scale of these issues is bigger than our day to day activities.

So, the words we use as shorthand, aren’t part of everyday language.

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I want to thank the Mayor for inviting me to join you today.

Manchester is the perfect place to talk about these things.

As the cradle of the industrial revolution – and a place that has reinvented itself more than once – these huge global challenges are alive in your city.

In Manchester:

- the circular economy is emptying your recycling bin;
- natural capital is flowing into the Manchester Ship Canal;
- And, climate resilience is walking through your sewers.

(I know this because I have walked in your sewers with the Environment Agency’s confined spaces team – who work to reduce flood risk from the rivers beneath Manchester’s streets.)

The challenges facing the world in the next century will be felt most by people living in cities.

The Committee on Climate Change has identified increased flooding as the biggest climate risk facing the UK.

And, in November 2017, Moody’s rating agency warned cities to address climate risk or face credit downgrades.

Climate change will bring heavier storms than the one you saw here on Boxing Day 2015.

We must ensure Manchester’s investments and ambitions are not undermined by the weather.

We need to stop force majeure from becoming run-of-the-mill.

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So, what to do?

Well, the short answer is you need to attract enough industry and development to invest in resilient infrastructure, so that you can keep your power, water, communications and transport running smoothly in all conditions – while ensuring that you don’t lose the natural environment and culture that made people want to live in Manchester in the first place.

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I said it was the short answer, not that it was an easy answer.

But, Manchester has faithfully reinvented itself before, so let's roll our sleeves up and do it again.

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There are many people who are here today to help – and as Chair of the Environment Agency, I want us to be your partner of choice in your ambition to become one of Europe's leading green cities.

As an emergency responder, our first priority is your safety in severe weather.

Our broader role is to protect and enhance the environment while ensuring sustainable growth and development.

We're working with Business in the Community to bring companies in Manchester together with local communities and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority to deliver sustainable drainage in schools and for the NHS.

For four years, we've been working in the GMCA – and its predecessors – allowing us to enhance the contribution of natural assets like clean air, water and green space while protecting major investments.

For instance, the £1 billion redevelopment of the old Royal Mail Depot near Piccadilly.

We are supporting GMCA's involvement with the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities programme, helping Manchester prepare to meet the challenges of 21st century life.

Through your selection as the Government's Urban Pioneer, we are exploring the potential for taking a natural capital approach to development decisions.

We are working to improve water quality in the city's rivers and we have restocked the River Irwell with 10,000 course fish for local anglers.

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Most of all, we are part of Manchester.

Our work, ably led by area director Lee Rawlinson, creates new jobs and local skills among colleagues and partners who are proud to call Manchester home.

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan puts natural capital at the heart of the industrial strategy.

It also says we will make sure "that all policies, programmes and investment decisions take into account the possible extent of climate change this century."

We currently have 1659 kilometres of flood assets in Greater Manchester, including the recent £10 million Salford Flood Improvements Scheme, delivered with Salford City Council, which protects nearly 2,000 properties.

As well as protecting existing development, it enables over 90 hectares of regeneration in Lower Broughton and delivered 5.5 hectares of new wetland habitat, 10 hectares of wildflower meadow and 2.5 kilometres of new footpath and cycleway.

By giving people safe lanes to cycle on, we can also reduce emissions from the roads – helping everyone breathe cleaner air.

While looking at the potential for that scheme, we discovered 344 kilometres of Greater Manchester's flood assets are within 10 metres of a cycle path.

So, I am announcing today that we will work with Chris Boardman, the walking and cycling commissioner, to make our flood assets part of the city's cycle lanes.

This is a fantastic example of how to combine natural capital, with climate resilience, wildlife protection and the creation of green spaces.

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But I realise that such projects usually require a lot of private sector investment to get off the ground.

We're working on it.

I've got 25 years' experience in the financial services industry and I'm a member of the government's Green Finance Taskforce, which reports in to Claire Perry, who we just heard from, and the Treasury.

We're pushing for the development of natural capital thinking in the UK to create more opportunities to generate revenue from projects that improve the natural environment.

Measuring the benefits of these will sharpen the business case for investment and help to unlock private finance for environmental projects, thereby supporting the resilience of UK infrastructure.

An understanding of natural capital will certainly help climate resilience, but how does the circular economy fit in?

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At the end of 2017, Blue Planet 2 focussed minds on the impacts of plastic pollution.

That television programme – called “public service broadcasting at its finest” by the Prime Minister, has already made a difference to our lives, with the extension of the plastic bag charge.

But it seems tackling plastic pollution is a bit like spring cleaning: as soon as you start, you find more dirt.

Just last week, researchers from The University of Manchester told us they had found the highest levels of microplastics anywhere in the world in the River Tame, in Denton.

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We're working with the water industry and leading academics to investigate microplastics entering the environment.

This work will inform plans to tackle the pollution at the source, before it reaches local rivers.

In January, I was in Cornwall announcing £750,000 for a scheme to fight plastic washing up on beaches – a pilot scheme that we hope will inform further action around the country.

I am hopeful, but I don't underestimate the challenge.

Councils are already feeling the Chinese government's decision to ban imports of plastic waste, as this adds millions of tonnes of waste to our current systems.

Waste management businesses are the unsung heroes of the environmental movement.

Their work to ensure that the Right Waste goes to the Right Place, is an essential service.

Unfortunately, good waste businesses are too often undermined.

The economic impact of waste crime in England in 2015 was estimated to be at least £604 million – not to mention the incalculable misery and ill health it brings to people all over the country.

The Environment Agency stands with Greater Manchester police and authorities all over the country in our commitment to stamp out environmental crime.

In January, new powers were introduced for my colleagues to lock gates and block access to problem waste sites.

Last year, we were closing over 2 illegal waste sites every day and we will always push for prosecution.

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For example, last year:

- Barry Kilroe was sentenced in Manchester Crown Court to 15 months after breaching permit conditions at two waste sites that caught fire – closing the M60 motorway and the Manchester to Liverpool railway line.

- David Shrigley (not the artist) was sentenced to 40 days for refusing to remove waste from a site in Cornwall that posed a serious fire risk and environmental harm.
- Martin McDonagh ran away to Ireland to avoid 20 months for removing household waste in Plymouth and dumping it randomly out the back of a blue transit van. We're pursuing him with a European arrest warrant.
- Lee Hazel in Wiltshire was given a confiscation order of £1.97million, with an 8 year custodial sentence should he fail to pay, following the disposal of waste on a farm and the illegal importation and treatment of unpermitted waste.
- And, on October 30, 6 former corporate officers of waste companies in Nottinghamshire got a mixture of immediate prison sentences, suspended prison sentences and community orders following illegal waste operations in the Midlands.

These are just a few examples of our action.

I am proud of my colleagues in the Environment Agency for their bravery in bringing these criminals to justice and I am pleased that following sentencing guidelines in 2014, courts began imposing higher fines for environmental offences.

However, for the damage these crimes do to the environment and to communities' health and wellbeing; for their flagrant disregard for public safety; for the money taken out of pockets of responsible local businesses, and – in some cases – into the pockets of organised crime: I still don't think the deterrent is strong enough.

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Today, I am calling for higher fines and custodial sentences for waste criminals.

How we deal with the rising tide of waste is a global challenge, but no one should have to live next door to this disgusting criminality:

Not by the sea; not in the countryside; and not in Manchester.

Of course, I realise we won't solve all of our waste problems with jail time.

Waste criminals are exploiting the weaknesses of a linear economy.

In this role, I've visited illegal waste sites, and I can tell you that packaging from even the most responsible businesses ends up there.

All companies need to consider their duty of care in fully understanding where their waste products go.

I look forward to hearing from Marks & Spencer's Mike Barry – speaking next – about this area of their business.

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Everyone should be challenging themselves to do more.

A circular economy is a useful target to aim for.

Ultimately, the circular economy, natural capital and climate resilience are simply useful pointers to a better way of organising ourselves.

And they apply in Manchester as much as anywhere else in the world.

If they sound complicated – that's because life is pretty complicated.

Maybe we should take the advice of the American writer Nora Ephron who said:

"It will be a little messy, but embrace the mess. It will be complicated, but rejoice in the complications."

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As we try to understand these vast, complicated challenges today at the Green Summit, I want to leave you with one very simple thought:

The Environment Agency is here to help.

Thank you.

Press release: North East man fined for running illegal scrapyard

A man has been fined for running an illegal scrapyard in Teesside.

Anthony Hanley, 34, of Marton Burn Road in Middlesbrough, appeared at Teesside Magistrates' Court on Tuesday 20 March where he pleaded guilty to two charges of operating a scrapyard without a permit.

He was fined £800, ordered to pay costs of £4,000 and a victim surcharge of £80.

Prosecuting on behalf of the Environment Agency, Simon Crowder told the court that Hanley is the owner of Cliffs Autos which deals with end of life vehicles.

To take end of life scrap vehicles on to a site, the operators need an

environmental permit for disposal of vehicle waste to ensure no risk to the environment by preventing fluids from going into the ground or into drainage systems.

Illegal site

On 25 August 2016 Environment Agency officers attended the illegal site at King George Terrace in Middlesbrough where they saw a sign offering to buy vehicles 'dead or alive', leading them to believe Hanley wanted to buy scrap vehicles.

Officers noticed there was in excess of 30 end of life vehicles stored at the premises. The defendant was co-operative with officers and was told to clear the site within 28 days.

On 12 September the same year, officers returned to the site and saw the number of vehicles had now reduced, and a further visit in December saw the site had been cleared.

But on 7 April 2017, the two Environment Agency officers returned to the site to see it had resumed operation again, with in excess of 30 end of life vehicles present, with some leaking fluids on to the ground.



Illegal sites 'impact on the environment'

Rachael Caldwell, Enforcement Team Leader at the Environment Agency said:

Hanley was given the opportunity to clear the vehicles of waste but when we returned to check the site it was full again.

Environmental permits are needed for a reason – they ensure operators have the correct procedures and equipment in place to protect the environment.

Not only do illegal sites impact on the environment but they undermine legitimate businesses. Every day our officers are out on the ground identifying illegal waste sites and taking the necessary action.

To report an illegal waste site contact Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.