

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

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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 scrapyards](#)

A man has been fined for running an illegal scrapyards 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 scrapyards 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.

[Press release: New charges announced for regulatory services](#)

The Environment Agency has today published its new charging scheme for regulatory permits and services, which will be effective from 1 April 2018.

The [new charges](#) have been introduced so that businesses and organisations cover the full cost of the services they receive rather than the public – this represents a more financially-sustainable model which is simpler, fairer and more effective and that will lead to long-term environmental improvements. Charges for permits and other regulatory services have remained static for the last 7 years.

The charges were drafted with feedback from industry and were subject to a public consultation. The [consultation response document](#) is also being published today, which includes the changes we have made as a result of comments we have received from customers, trades associations and the public.

The charges reflect the amount of regulatory effort needed at a site and will allow the Environment Agency to invest further in our permitting service. Businesses that are well-managed and low-hazard present a low environmental risk and will be charged less. Higher-risk or poor-performing businesses will be charged more.

Neil Davies, Environment Agency Director of Regulatory Charges, said:

Our work to regulate industry protects and enhances the environment. The changes that have been announced following the recent consultation will mean that businesses and not the public pay for the full services they use. This is more financially-sustainable, will lead to a better service to businesses and long-term improvements to the environment.

We have been engaging with trade associations over the last year while we were developing these proposals. Their input into this process has been really valuable and the feedback has helped shape the new fee structure.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

The Environment Agency carries out a valuable role in regulating the impact of businesses and industry on the environment and it is right that those that benefit from this service should cover the full cost.

The new charging structure will create a simpler, fairer and more sustainable system which will enable better regulation and protection for the environment.

The new charges will come into effect on the 1st April 2018 – the start of the new financial year.

Press release: New river forecasts for North East communities

A new service which allows people to get forecasts for river levels to help them plan for flooding is available for two locations in the North East.

It is being provided by the Environment Agency on the gov.uk website for the River Tyne at Hexham, Northumberland, and Lustrum Beck at Stockton-on-Tees.

All communities can see observed data for river levels for the past five days. Now people living in these two areas can also see their future flood risk in a 36-hour river level forecast.

The aim is to help communities be more aware of their flood risk and be able to plan for potential flooding incidents. The new river forecasts are calculated by computer models that take into account data like current flows and expected rainfall.

Forecast information can change quickly so people are still advised to sign up for the Environment Agency's free flood warning service to ensure they are notified if a warning is issued for their community.

And residents and businesses can still get the most up-to-date and accurate situation from the [live online map](#) which updates every 15 minutes and details the current Severe Flood Warnings, Flood Warnings and Alerts in place.

Help residents manage flood risk

Phil Taylor, from the Environment Agency's Flood Resilience Team in the North East, said:

We are always looking at ways to use technology to better share information with people, and residents have told us that they would find it really useful to see these forecasts to help them manage their flood risk.

We want people to know if they are at risk of flooding, be prepared, and take action to protect themselves and their families.

A wealth of information is available on our website for people to find out if they are at risk and understand how to prepare.

Everything residents and businesses need to know about how to check their risk and prepare for flooding is online on the [Floods Destroy website](#).

The new 36-hour river forecasting for Hexham and Stockton can be found online at:

[Lustrum Beck, Stockton-On-Tees](#)

and

[River Tyne at Hexham](#)

The plan is to continue to refine the service based on feedback from users before rolling it out to other areas in the future.

People who live in areas where the 36-hour forecast is not available can still view data on river levels from the previous five days.

[Press release: New funding scheme to improve lakes and rivers in England](#)

A new £27 million scheme to improve the water environment across England has been jointly launched today by Defra, Natural England and the Environment Agency.

The [Water Environment Grant scheme](#) will provide £9 million each year over the next three years to applicants applying for funding to restore local ecosystems and deliver substantial benefits to people and the environment.

Potential projects could include river restoration activities, removal of obstacles to help fish moving along rivers and streams or actions to improve the water quality.

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

The Water Environment Grant scheme offers a fantastic opportunity for applicants from across the country to secure funding for projects to enhance the environment, boost wildlife and benefit their rural community.

This project will help us to deliver a balanced programme of environmental improvements across England and I am looking forward

to seeing the creative and innovative projects of the applicants.

The scheme, funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, will award grants to non-profit ventures with greater support for projects which enhance water eco-systems.

WEG is now open to eligible applicants until 11 May 2018. Grants will be determined by the Environment Agency and Natural England and funding will be awarded in August 2018.

Successful applicants will be expected to start their projects before March 2019, with completion dates of March 2021.

[Apply for the Water Environment Grant now](#)