

Irwell Catchment Pilot

Working together to improve the Irwell Catchment

January 2012

Over the past thirty years, millions of pounds have been invested in improving the quality of our water environment. Significant progress has been made in tackling issues such as sewage, but the problems that remain are difficult to tackle including diffuse pollution and poor habitat. The solutions will require many people and organisations working together to bring about lasting change.

The Irwell is one of ten catchment pilots in England being hosted by the Environment Agency. The pilots are exploring ways to achieve more for the water environment through better partnership working.

Improving our rivers, lakes, canals, ground and coastal waters will only be achieved if we work more closely with our stakeholders to tackle the problems together.

What we know

The Environment Agency's data tells us that diffuse urban pollution (dirty water coming from roads, wrongly connected sewers and old landfills) and physical modifications to rivers (e.g. weirs, culverts, artificial river banks) are causing our water environments in the Irwell Pilot area to fail to achieve legally required standards.

It will be difficult to solve these problems but working collaboratively with others, we believe the solutions can deliver not only environmental benefits but social and economic ones too.

Progress so far

Understanding the current state of the environment is crucial to help us understand what actions are needed. It will also allow us to see if we have been successful once the pilot is over.

A workshop was held earlier in the summer with a range of interested groups who have knowledge and experience of working in the Irwell Pilot area. Information was gathered on the range of environmental work being carried out.



Diffuse pollution on the River Irwell

The workshop provided an opportunity for people to tell us what their environmental concerns and priorities were and what they would like to see delivered.

It was recognised that, given the size of the pilot area and the complexity of issues, we would need to take a strategic and coordinated approach to improving the environment. However, participation from communities and local interest groups was seen as essential and it is hoped that they will play a significant role in helping to improve their water environments.

With the feedback from the first workshop in mind, further work has focused on those stakeholders who have a strategic interest, influence and/or expertise in environmental issues affecting the Irwell Pilot area. In the past few months we have spoken to over thirty five different organisations from both the public and private sectors. In particular we have engaged those who work with local groups and communities and who have a passion to bring about environmental change.

From our conversations it was clear that a number of organisations had strong mutual interests in issues affecting the water environment and expressed an interest in working collaboratively on the Irwell Catchment Pilot.

A second workshop was held on 25 November to explore the kinds of outcomes that will help to deliver multiple benefits for the environment and local people whilst also contributing to our organisational aims.

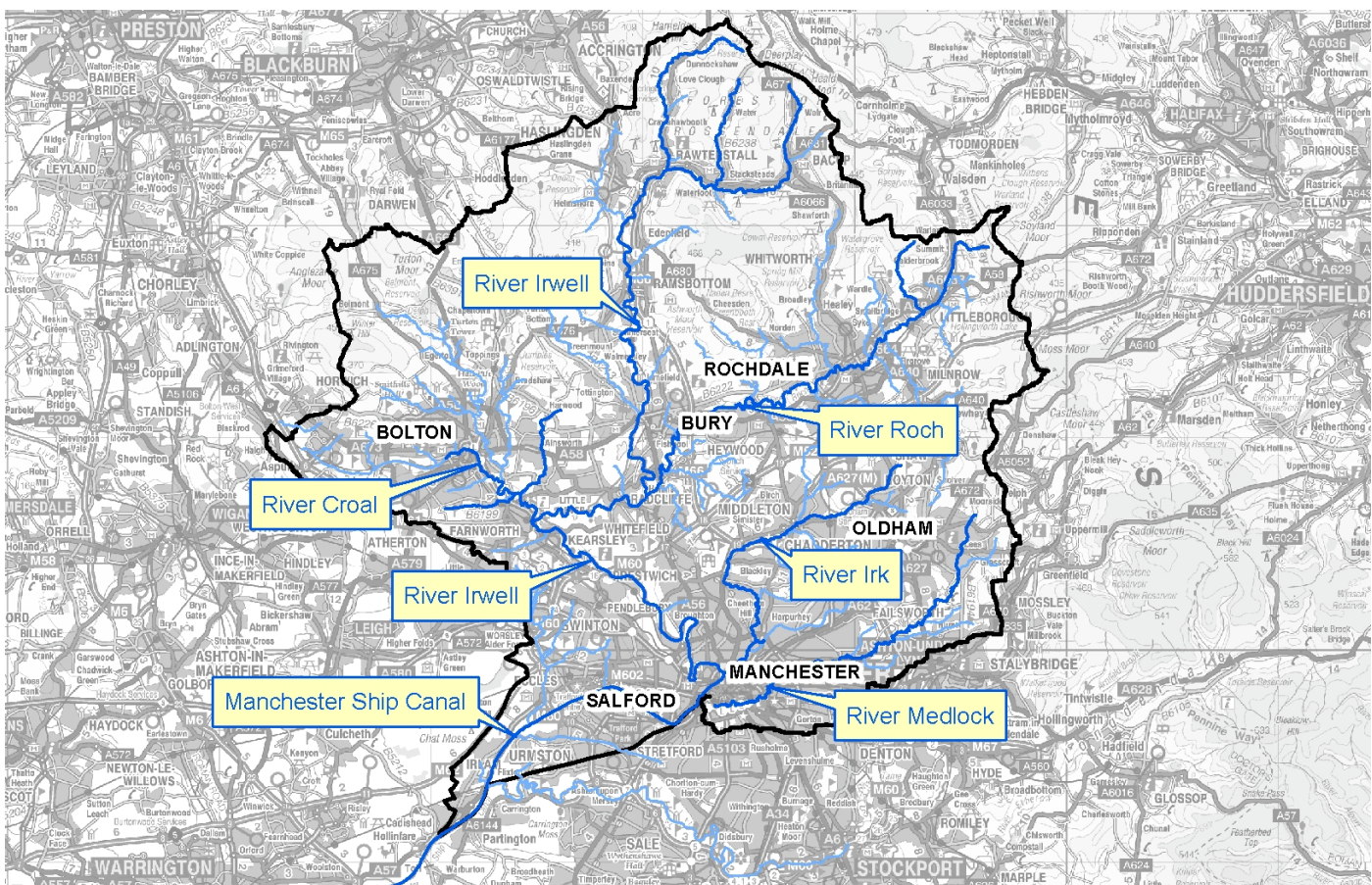
What next?

Ten outcomes have been identified, which aim to improve the quality of our water environments and associated habitats.

A collaborative group has now been formed to determine how these outcomes can be achieved and taken forward. Our first meeting will be in January.

Through the delivery of these outcomes we believe there will be the potential to improve the skills and knowledge of local young people, provide employment for those who have been out of work for some time as well as enhancing the environment.

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Irwell Catchment Pilot Area