

Irwell catchment pilot

Working together to improve the Irwell catchment

Defra have appointed the Environment Agency to lead on ten catchment pilots across the country – aimed at exploring better ways to engage with people and organisations to help improve the water environment. The Irwell is one of these pilots.

We will use the pilot to bring together different organisations to develop a shared understanding and agreement of what the problems are, how they should be tackled and how we can work together to get the best out of the Irwell Catchment.

The Irwell pilot area includes the rivers Croal, Irwell, Roch, Irk and Medlock and their tributaries. Most of the waterbodies (rivers, reservoirs, canals and groundwater) in the catchment are currently failing to meet Water Framework Directive (WFD) standards for a variety of reasons. WFD is European legislation which sets strict targets for improving the water environment.

Although the Environment Agency is lead on the pilot, making the Irwell better can only be achieved if many people and organisations come together to tackle the problems collectively.

We've looked at what we think are the main problems for the Irwell and identified two major themes to kick-start conversations amongst stakeholders. These themes are intended to be a starting point to bring together the right people to come up with the best solutions that will benefit as many people as possible. What we learn from the different ways of working will shape how rivers are looked after in the future.

Theme one – Pollution running off roads and land into water

Pollution running off roads and land into water (diffuse urban pollution) is a significant reason for water bodies failing to meet the WFD standards in most parts of the Irwell Catchment. However solving this problem won't be easy. We need to work closely with those organisations whose work can directly help to tackle this problem; primarily the Highways Agency, Local Authorities, United Utilities and developers.

Theme two – Returning rivers to a more natural state

Much of the Irwell Catchment has been significantly altered (physically modified) by human activity over the centuries. Under WFD these are called artificial or heavily modified waterbodies. This is a complicated issue to put right and will involve many organisations working together to get the maximum benefit from any action taken. Stakeholders will include the Local Authorities, developers and landowners.

Whilst diffuse urban pollution and physical modification will need to be tackled at a strategic level, local groups and communities can also play a significant role in helping to improve their water environments. The pilot will aim to ensure that all relevant stakeholders work together to achieve more for the Irwell.

Want to get involved?

Any person or organisation with an interest in their local environment can make a difference. If you would like to be involved in any way please contact Katherine Causer on 01925 543315 or katherine.causer@environment-agency.gov.uk