

# NATURAL COURSE: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO IMPROVING NORTH WEST RIVERS



## THE CHALLENGE:

Within Cumbria and Lancashire, only 34% of rivers are reaching a good status under the EU Water Framework Directive. This figure drops to 3% for Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside.

The historical and diverse landscape of the North West River Basin District brings with it many challenges that impact status.

- Physical modifications (affecting 50% of water bodies)
- Pollution from waste water (affecting 24% of water bodies)
- Pollution from rural areas (affecting 18% of water bodies)
- Pollution from towns, cities and transport (affecting 13% of water bodies)
- Changes to flow or levels (affecting 2% of water bodies)

Unless we start to do things differently, we will fail to meet the target of all rivers reaching a good ecological status by 2027.

## OUR PLAN:

We need to understand what is stopping us from meeting targets for good ecological status, and what we can do to resolve it.

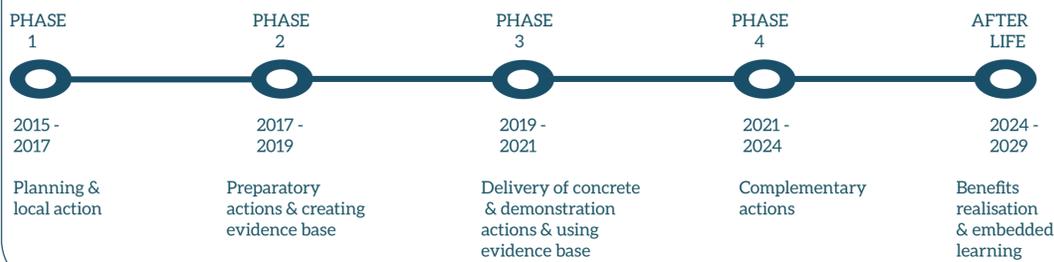
Natural Course aims to:

- find ways of reaching our ecological targets sooner by trialling new ways of working together
- establish more joined-up ways of making decisions that impact our waters in the future
- line up investments in the water environment so more money can be made available for improvement works at one time, meaning the bigger, more expensive issues can be tackled

We are addressing this through:

- more integrated water environment decision making
- employing a natural capital approach
- working together to produce local evidence
- aligning with investment directed by river basin planning cycles
- addressing affordability and technically infeasible measures
- describing wider costs and benefit
- the integrated project area: North West River Basin District

We have committed to a 10-year EU LIFE Integrated Project. This is our plan for delivery.



**13**  
Strategic issues addressed

**18**  
Full-time equivalent jobs created

**€21m**  
Committed or mobilised

**€13m**  
Cost savings

Natural Capital Accounts created for Greater Manchester

**6,000**  
People engaged

Catchment Based Approach promoted

**112** Direct interventions at  
**110** sites across  
**67** water bodies

### FEATURE PROJECT: CHESHIRE HUB

**Themes:** Catchment based approach, Water governance, Natural capital

**Approaches:** Working in collaboration, Building capacity, Influencing policy

The Hub brings together operational resources from key statutory organisations involved in water and land management, along with third sector organisations active in the catchment. It has undertaken a sampling programme to really understand what is happening. Data is assessed, operational priorities identified and plans for catchment management are discussed and agreed collaboratively.

### FEATURE PROJECT: ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

**Themes:** Catchment based approach, Natural capital

**Approaches:** Building capacity

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and its partners aim to be the first city-region in the UK to develop a Natural Capital Investment Plan and to encourage and generate investment in the natural environment.

As commissioned a study of ecosystem services opportunities across the River Irwell catchment to improve the level of understanding of the scale and value of the ecosystem services within the catchment and to identify opportunities to improve and develop these services in waterbodies across the catchment.

A Natural Capital account was produced for the Irwell catchment, Natural Capital values were estimated and the accounts show that the waterbodies of the Irwell catchment contribute £23M per annum of value through abstraction, to industry and in amenity value.

This approach has now been expanded to cover all of Greater Manchester in partnership with the DEFRA Urban Pioneer. This will help to underpin the production of a Greater Manchester Natural Capital Investment Plan and guide the development of a Greater Manchester Environment Fund. A broader range of investment will enable the GMCA and its partners to achieve the natural environment, and broader climate change, objectives of the Greater Manchester 5-Year Environment Plan.

### FEATURE PROJECT: ENNERDALE MILL WEIR REMOVAL

**Themes:** Natural capital

**Approaches:** Working in collaboration, Complementary funding

Ennerdale Mill Weir dates back over 250 years. It was not in use, and a barrier to migratory fish.

River bank re-profiling, berm lowering, re-grading of the existing riverbed & installation of toe protection (boulders that reinforce the river bank to provide protection against erosion) took place in specific order to minimise sediment disturbance. Once the weir was removed the riverbed was re-profiled and rapids introduced up and downstream.

The Rivers Trust and the Environment Agency, supported by other partners worked with the Marine Management Organisation and Defra to develop a coordinated and funded programme of projects with the aim of freeing migration routes of barriers to fish. This project was part of that, funded by European Maritime and Fisheries Funds, which is matched by Environment Agency/Defra funding other funds.

### FEATURE PROJECT: IRK VISION

**Themes:** Diffuse pollution, Natural flood management, Natural capital

**Approaches:** Working in collaboration, Building capacity

Historically, the River Irk was known as a fine trout fishery but the decline in water quality and the physical changes to the river that followed the Industrial Revolution paved the way for its demise. The consequence is a river that is unloved and underutilised by local communities and does not meet the standards expected of a river in the 21st century.

Bringing the River Irk to Life® (BRIL) is an ambitious project that aims to develop a collaborative vision and action plan for the whole of the River Irk, including its tributaries.

The projects above represent a sample of work delivered over Phases 1, 2 & 3

This programme has been made possible with the support of EU LIFE IP funding. Project number: LIFE14 IPE/UK/027.



For more information: [naturalcourse.co.uk](http://naturalcourse.co.uk) [info@naturalcourse.co.uk](mailto:info@naturalcourse.co.uk)  
@natural\_course [linkedin.com/in/natural-course](https://www.linkedin.com/in/natural-course)