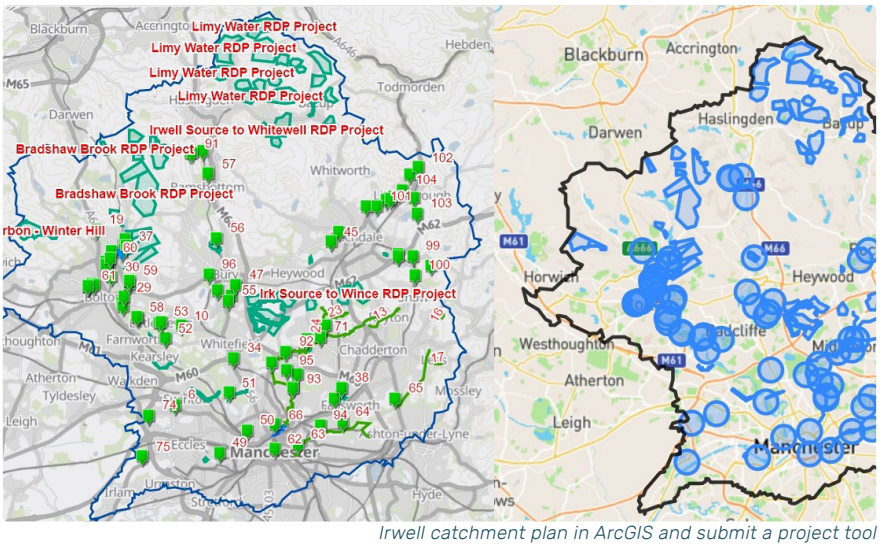
Developing a costed programme of projects within the River Irwell catchment

Groundwork Greater Manchester



Irwell catchment plan in ArcGIS and submit a project tool

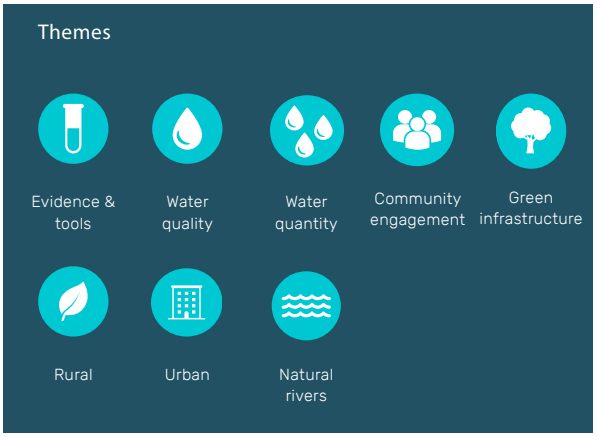
Partners
GMCA, United Utilities, Local Authorities, Environment Agency, Mersey Rivers Trust, Lancashire Wildlife Trust, Community Forest Trust, The Conservation Volunteers, Moors for the Future Partnership, Canal and Rivers Trust, NFU, farmers and local people

Date carried out
April 2017 to September 2021

Location
Irwell Management Catchment

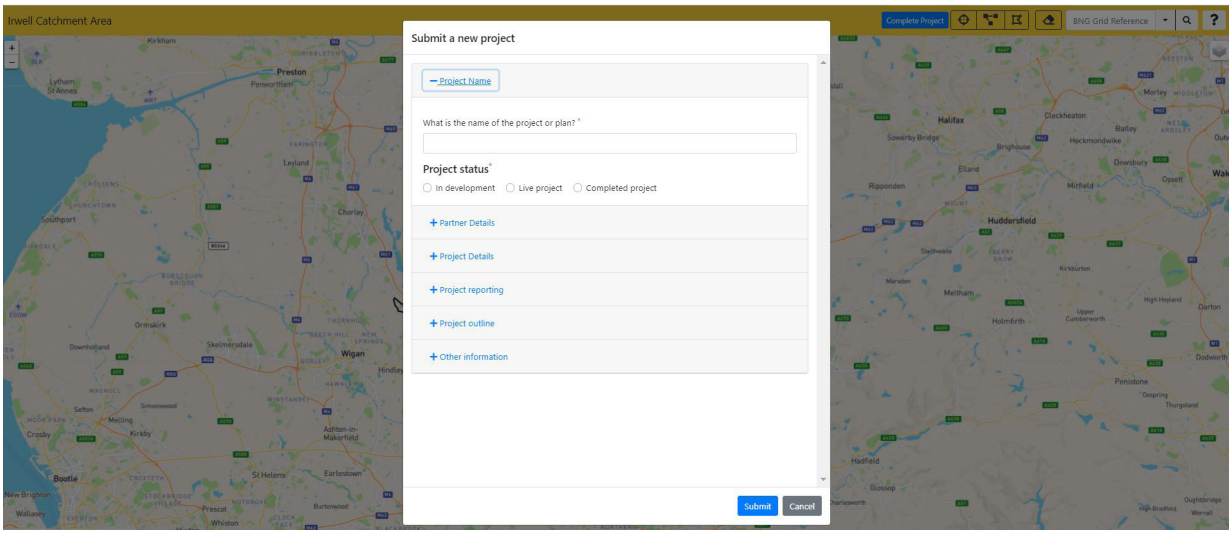
Background
The Irwell Catchment Partnership was established in 2013 and has successfully delivered a wide range of projects across the management catchment. However, the partners recognised that to be most effective, an investable project pipeline needed to be developed, which was evidence based, collaborative, and provided opportunity for developing bigger, better and more joined up activity which would be able to attract larger and more varied funding streams.

Through developing its processes, tools and collaborative mechanisms, the catchment partnership sought to address the issues identified and to improve the sustainability of the partnership and increase the impact the partnership could collectively achieve against the catchment's issues and identified aims and objectives.



Project
Groundwork GM, as the catchment host, facilitated the development of a project submission template which would enable partners to articulate evidence-based projects in sufficient detail to attract funding. Once approved, this template was developed into a web-based tool through which project outlines can be submitted, and associated project sites detailed spatially through the drawing of points, lines or polygons.

The database produced through the submission of projects is managed through Groundwork's ArcGIS account and can be reviewed, edited and analysed with partners, in order to inform decision making and project development. For example, identifying the 'clean water' projects which would take a similar timescale in a particular area, to inform a programme of delivery.



The 'Submit a Project' Tool showing project submission template

Project (continued)

Regular liaison with partners took place throughout the project, via established or evolving working groups and catchment meetings, in order to review available evidence and activity, and better understand partners' ambitions within the catchment.

Opportunities for collaborative delivery at scale were identified. A structure of working groups was developed to facilitate these discussions, enabling partners with more local interests to engage at a meaningful scale. The structure includes thematic groups (such as Non-Native Invasive Species, barriers and fisheries) and geographic groups (such as the Croal, Manchester Ship Canal, Irk and other groups).

In recognition of partners' capacity, current priorities and activities, not all working groups are currently live. Involvement in working groups is self-selecting and each group decides on its own meeting structure. Live Action Plans have been developed for several working groups, which reflect and will deliver against the aims and objectives of the catchment partnership plan; the Action Plans will enable working groups to report back to the catchment partnership on progress within the current year to September 2022.

Through this project, the catchment partnership has been able to identify over 100 costed actions which will continue to be developed and added to via the partnership's collaborative work, and as funding becomes available for development, feasibility or options appraisal work.

Additional activity is developing further evidence-based projects within the Irwell, some of which have been or will be adopted by the catchment partnership and taken forward to delivery.

This includes:

- The River Roch Environmental Enhancements study (funded by the Environment Agency) and Our Rivers Our City (supported by the EU's Horizon 2020 Research & Innovation Programme through the Grow Green project) which articulate programmes of multi-benefit projects in the Roch, Irk and Medlock valleys.

- The Natural Course Project 'Bringing the River Irk to Life' delivered a costed programme of delivery focused on Water Framework Directive improvements, which will complement more locally driven projects derived through liaison with local stakeholders within the Irwell catchment plan, and Natural Course actions focused on Bradshaw Brook within the Croal have also helped to develop potential projects for delivery.

- Pipeline development activity spring boarding from the partnership members' current projects and activities, for example: Catchment Phosphorous Management, DEFRA Tests and Trials, Catchment Monitoring and Third Party Data, Peatland Restoration, Trees for Climate.

Outcomes

- Project submission template and web-based submission tool - https://irwell.groundworkgis.org.uk/
- Structure of geographic or thematic working groups with Action Plans, to further develop project pipeline and seek funding
- Articulation of over 100 costed projects, in various stages of development or delivery readiness
- Greater capacity for collaboration and delivery within the catchment partnership

Learning

Conditions which support the development of ambitious collaborative catchment plans include;

- Developing a culture of trust and mutual support
- Establishing governance mechanisms which facilitate effective decision making
- Having an interrogatable evidence base which helps partners understand issues and opportunities spatially
- Significant resource for stakeholder engagement
- Strong levels of commitment from stakeholders, including landowners, if projects are to be delivery ready
- Technical input, often with an associated development budget, is required for options appraisals and feasibility studies, before costed project proposals can be presented in a format which is acceptable to funders, regulators and landowners.
- Ongoing resource for management of spatial data and tools
- A long-term commitment from catchment partners to move from developing an evidence base to detailed project design and collaborative delivery.

Natural Course has built capacity within the catchment-scale co-ordinating body to develop a catchment management plan which aims to deliver the objectives of the River Basin District Management Plan at a local level. This has enabled the Irwell Catchment Partnership to liaise with partners, establish thematic and spatial working groups and to develop a web-based tool for recording project ideas.

Next Steps

The next steps are to secure funds for the projects identified, undertake further options appraisal and feasibility activity and to identify further projects, adding these to the Irwell Story Map.

The Irwell Catchment Partnership will continue to use the collaborative mechanisms and tools established to:

- Review and update the Irwell Story Map structure in a new ESRI template
- Publish the project pipeline on the Irwell Story Map alongside live and completed projects
- Launch a web-based consultation / reporting tool to complement the project submission tool, enabling consideration of local knowledge about issues and opportunities as part of project pipeline development
- Identify thematic or geographic delivery programmes
- Seek funding for development and engagement activity and on the ground delivery at scale

Mark Sewell, United Utilities Waste Water Catchment Manager said...

"United Utilities is pleased to be a member of the Irwell Catchment Partnership and strongly supports activities to co-develop and co-deliver catchment action plans through the collaborative catchment-based approach (CaBA). This aligns with themes of United Utilities Catchment Systems Thinking (CaST) approach including driving multiple benefits by considering what is best for the environment and local communities, integrating catchment risks and opportunities, and developing better ways of working through collaboration and partnerships".

United Utilities Water for the North West
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