

LOCAL ENVIRONMENT Focus

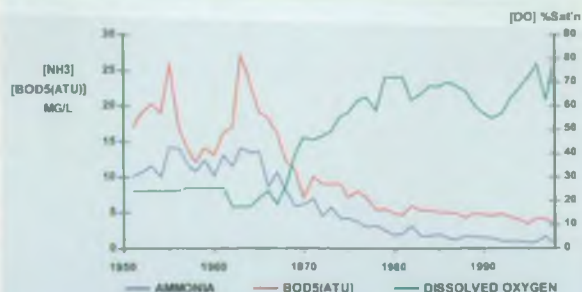
LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN WOLVERHAMPTON, BILSTON, TIPTON, WILLENHALL, WALSALL, OLDBURY, WEST BROMWICH, SANDWELL, SMETHWICK, NORTHFIELD, BIRMINGHAM, SOLIHULL AND LEA MARSTON.





from the West Midlands Tame LEAP as a result of some actions becoming part of the Agency's routine activities and other actions being incorporated in other issues within the LEAP.

For further information contact: Dave Martin in Water Quality, Environment Agency Solihull office.



Black Country consortium

The Black Country Consortium, a public, private and voluntary sector partnership, was established in January 1999 to facilitate a regional approach to future regeneration processes and to demonstrate capacity for partnership working. The Black Country Environmental Working Group (BCEWG) comprises representatives from key organisations operating in the environmental field, including the Environment Agency, and reports to the Black Country Consortium.

In 1999 the BCEWG identified an action plan for the environment with the following key objectives:

- improving and maintaining the image and identity of the Black Country to improve quality of life and biodiversity and to attract investment into the area
- build on existing transport and development infrastructure to focus sustainable development on strategic corridors
- bringing brownfield land into productive use
- engaging business support for the environment.

In March 2001 a Symposium was held, the focus of which was to agree a set of key headline indicators against which sustainable improvement to the Black Country environment could be monitored. Six key themes formed the basis for discussion in workshops at the Symposium:

- air quality/water quality/land contamination
- sustainable business
- transport
- image enhancement
- biodiversity
- education and awareness raising.

The morning session concentrated on identifying 10-12 key indicators for each theme, including 2 headline indicators, plus potential cross-cutting indicators. These were fed back to a plenary session which agreed on 12 headline indicators for the Black Country. The afternoon session focused on agreeing a plan of action for each theme which could be measured using the key indicators identified in the morning session.

Many of the indicators and actions identified have direct relevance to the study on indicators for Health and Social Inclusion commissioned by the Black Country Health and Regeneration Steering Group. The findings of this study, to be completed in Spring 2001, will be considered together with the work of the Symposium when formulating a future Action Plan.

The indicators identified will enable the monitoring of the progress of these actions. In some cases the action identified consists of collecting information which at present does not exist and which will enable future measurement of indicators. This will require the co-operation and commitment of all partners involved.

For further information contact: Antony Lancaster in the Partnerships Team, Environment Agency Fradley office.

Making good use of groundwater

The Agency has, for a number of years, been promoting the sustainable use of Birmingham groundwater however, until recently there has little tangible interest from developers. The situation is now changing and developers are actively seeking ways of utilising the surplus water resource beneath the city.

Severn Trent Water has plans to abstract Birmingham groundwater from a number of boreholes and discharge the water to provide flow support for their abstraction from the River Trent at Shardlow in the East Midlands - thus helping to reduce the existing shortfall in resources in that part of the region.

The newly formed Birmingham Water Company also wishes to start operations in the city by pumping water supplies to industry and commerce using abandoned boreholes.

The Agency is working with both these companies, and a number of other interested developers, to identify opportunities to exploit Birmingham's groundwater whilst maintaining our public impartiality.

For further information contact: Anne Dacey in Water Resources, Environment Agency Fradley office.

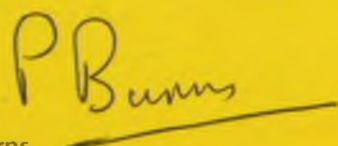
Foreword

The Environment Agency has responsibility for protecting and enhancing the whole environment through the promotion of sustainable development. One way of achieving this aim is through the production of Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPs), which provide a framework for protecting and improving our local environment in an integrated manner.

Some good progress has been made over the last two years and this is attributable to the commitment made by both the Agency staff involved and by our partners. Partnerships will become increasingly important as demands on limited resources continue to increase. To facilitate increased collaborative working, new partnerships staff have been recruited and an increased emphasis will be placed on achieving environmental improvements in the context of urban regeneration initiatives.

I look forward to building on the progress made so far with our partners as we continue to safeguard and enhance the environment of the West Midlands Tame area in the coming year.

Finally, the format of the review has changed. The Agency has decided to publish a newsletter to report on the progress made in the West Midlands Tame area in the last year. I hope you enjoy reading it. If you have any comments or views, or you wish to become involved in addressing local environmental issues, we would be delighted to hear from you.



Philip Burns
Upper Trent Area Manager, Environment Agency

About the West Midlands Tame area



The West Midlands Tame LEAP area covers the majority of the county of the West Midlands including Birmingham, Solihull and much of the Black Country. Walsall and Sandwell lie within the area, as do the eastern parts of Wolverhampton and Dudley. The population of the area is approximately 1.8 million, the vast majority of whom live in the main conurbation.

The area has a history of industrial usage. In the 1800's large quantities of mineral resources in the Black Country enabled the development of heavy industries such as steel, iron, and glasswork, which in turn enabled the establishment of final assemblers, often based in Birmingham and Solihull.

After 1960 the Black Country began to decline in prosperity as the natural mineral resources were exhausted and light engineering with new technology gradually relocated the heavier industries. Since the early 1980's a lot of effort has gone into revitalising older industrial areas.

Today the economy is more diverse with the growth of services, shops, offices and the expanding leisure industry. The principal industries in the area are engineering, metal finishing and vehicle manufacture and Birmingham is a major administrative and financial centre and England's second city.

Despite the largely urban nature of the area there are 18 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and two national Nature Reserves, Sutton Park in Sutton Coldfield and Wrens Nest in Dudley. The urban area is an important stronghold for water voles.



The Environment Agency, who are we?

We are the Environment Agency and we were formed on 1 April 1996, bringing together the expertise of the National Rivers Authority, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution, Waste Regulation Authorities and a number of smaller units from the Department of the Environment. The Formation of the Agency provided for a more holistic, comprehensive approach to the protection and management of the environment.

The Agency is an independent public body with statutory powers and duties to control and monitor the environment and activities that may be harmful to it. The Agency's principal aim is to protect and enhance the environment in England and Wales and to work towards achieving sustainable development.

'Regulation alone cannot change people's attitudes or behaviour. The Agency will continue with its immediate work - enforcing regulations to protect the environment and health, water management and flood protection and combating environmental crime. The Agency also needs to be a trusted partner in achieving sustainable development. We are committed to working with business, public bodies and community organisations to encourage people to change'.
(Taken from 'An Environmental Vision, The Environment Agency's Contribution to Sustainable development').

Progress

The Agency has made some good progress over the past year in this area. In total 17% of the actions identified in previous LEAP documents have been completed. Examples include:

- the completion of the Agency's national Otter Survey
- the monitoring of AMP2 improvement schemes at various points to improve the sewerage system to reduce pollution on the Tame.

Overall 72% of actions are complete or on schedule.

Unfortunately there are some actions that are struggling to stay on schedule, such as biodiversity surveys where funding is needed. Funding offers would be most welcome in order to undertake these actions. Overall some 28% of actions within this LEAP are behind schedule, mainly due to lack of resources.

Should anyone wish to support the work within the Tame LEAP area or require a full report with progress made on LEAP actions this year, then please contact: Will Groves in the Partnerships Team, Environment Agency Fradley office.

What is a LEAP?

A LEAP is a Local Environment Agency Plan. It is the Agency's integrated local management plan process which is used to identify, assess, prioritise and hopefully solve local environmental issues or problems. These issues are related to the Agency's functions, but aim to take account of our local customers and may be tackled in partnership with them. These actions will aim to bring about environmental improvements to optimise benefits for the local environment.

floodplains (SIVORF) using the River Tame and its tributaries to demonstrate the approach.

The main objectives of the project are to:

- produce an innovative and integrated whole catchment model as a tool for managing urban runoff. This in turn will assist the design of future flood defence schemes and enable the use of Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS)
- improve the chemical and physical state of the River Tame catchment
- enhance the quality of the riverine environment throughout the urban conurbation
- demonstrate new and transferable technologies and techniques.

This project is seeking to bring together a number of public and private sector organisations within the UK and Europe. It is hoped that the principal UK participants will include the Environment Agency, Birmingham City Council, Sandwell MBC, Walsall MBC, Wolverhampton MBC, Severn Trent Water and Wolverhampton University. Discussions are taking place with a number of other UK and European organisations including H R Wallingford, University of Birmingham and the cities of Leipzig and Herten in Germany.

The total cost of the project is estimated at £3M. Half of this can be funded by the LIFE programme, which means that £1.5M needs to be raised by the partners. It is currently proposed that the Environment Agency should fund approximately half of this.

For further information contact: Colin Berghouse in Regional Planning and Corporate Affairs, Environment Agency Solihull office.

Flood warning network enhanced

The Agency has continued to pursue the programme of extending the network of river level gauges throughout the whole of the local area. This has been undertaken to extend and enhance the Agency's flood warning service, providing early warning of potential flooding so that effective preparatory action can be taken.

The main development area within the Tame area has been the installation of a river gauge within the MG Rover plant at Longbridge. This will provide early warning to the residents of Northfield who have suffered flooding four times in the past two years. The River Rea reacts quickly to rainfall which is of short duration and high intensity.



River Rea, Northfield

Once the gauge has been calibrated, residents within the risk area will be invited to join the flood warning service, nominating telephone numbers for contacting them when a flood is anticipated.

The extension of the gauge network is continuing with an identification of areas where the river level information could enable the Agency to provide warnings with even higher reliability and accuracy. This programme will continue for the next few years.

For Further information contact: Barry Russell in Flood Defence, Environment Agency Fradley office.



Flooding of Middlemore Road, Northfield

Contaminated land

Since the implementation of the Contaminated Land Regulations 2000, local authorities in the Tame LEAP area have been drafting their contaminated land inspection strategies as required under the statutory guidance. The Agency has proactively provided the local authorities with environmental information relating to controlled waters, process industries and waste management, to aid them in this task. These strategies are being published in July of this year, after which time the local authorities will commence the work detailed within their strategies.

Successful implementation of the regime depends very much on close working relationships between local authorities and the Agency.

Whilst for most local authority sites, human health is their prime concern, many sites may also impact upon controlled waters. The Agency is committed to assisting local authorities on general and site specific issues in accordance with the EA/Local Government Association memorandum of understanding.

For further information contact: Neil Foster in Contaminated Land, Environment Agency, Olton office.



Catchment surveys

A specialised Agency two-man Catchment Survey Team was set up last year to look at the rivers in the Tame catchment and the most significant failures of their river quality objectives. Just over a year into the five-year programme, the team has now produced reports on the Griffins Brook and the Bourne Brook; both located in the south west of Birmingham.

By focusing in on a single brook catchment, the team has been able to look at the broader issues affecting the watercourses as well as looking at a catchment in detail.

Both the Griffins Brook and Bourne Brook suffer the pressures of the heavily urbanised area through which they flow. Work on the Griffins Brook indicates that the quality problems are attributed to numerous wrong connections from domestic properties including sink, washing machine and toilet waste as well as intermittent discharges from industry, the majority of which have now been resolved. The final factor affecting the river was poor quality water being flushed out of the pools in the catchment, some of which are heavily populated with wild fowl. This summer, the University of Birmingham, on behalf of the Agency, is carrying out an intensive study on the pools to further increase our understanding of the effect of the pools on the river water quality.



Bourne Brook, Birmingham

The Bourne Brook however tells a different story. By sampling before, during and after a heavy rainfall event, the Team has shown that the quality problems on the brook are likely to be caused by sewage. Problems may be compounded by water being held back in lakes, so, long after the rainfall event has passed and river levels have dropped, polluted water is still flowing from the lakes.

The work of the Catchment Survey Team continues. The Plants Brook is currently under scrutiny and soon to be followed by the River Cole and River Blythe.

For further information contact: Sarah Thomas in Environmental Protection, Environment Agency, Sutton Coldfield office.



Managing urban rivers sustainably

The Agency is currently leading a multi-organisation bid for European Community LIFE-Environment funds to part finance a project on 'Sustainable Management of Urban Rivers and

Sustainable urban Drainage Systems

With major flooding experienced in many places across the area during recent months the need for sustainable urban drainage systems has never been more evident.

Surface water drainage methods that take account of quantity, quality and amenity issues are collectively referred to as Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS). This urban drainage 'triangle' of quality, quantity and amenity, balances the adverse impact of urban surface water runoff on the environment.

Newhall Valley, Sutton Coldfield

During 2000 the Newhall Valley Water Management Strategy was developed and implemented to provide sustainable solutions for the disposal of surface water from a 600 unit residential development near Sutton Coldfield. This site won a CIWEM Millennium Project award.

The site uses a combination of swales (pervious grassland) and plastic modular underground storage/infiltration systems. These solutions were required to meet planning conditions agreed by the stakeholders to mitigate the environmental effects of the development. A water management strategy was developed which has allowed enhancement of the ecological and environmental features of Newhall Valley thus benefiting the local community. The project has demonstrated how, with the commitment of all parties, the public and private sectors can work together to the benefit of the environment.

Blythe Valley Park, Solihull

This is a major office and leisure development in Solihull that discharges its surface water ultimately to the River Blythe, which is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). In its lower reaches there is also a major abstraction for public water supply which means there are restrictions on both the quantities of surface water allowed to be discharged to the river and requirements on the quality of that discharge. This means that a comprehensive drainage strategy had to be developed, involving balancing ponds and reedbeds connected by a series of swales.



Blythe Valley Park, Solihull

The Future

Good progress has been made with the implementation of SuDS at various sites across the catchment. The Newhall Valley site is now used as a flagship for others. The main issues for SuDS to overcome are those of adoption (who's going to look after them), maintenance (how is long-term maintenance insured), ground conditions and awareness. The Agency will be focusing on forming strong partnerships with those that will be potentially involved with SuDS schemes and providing information to those who require it.

For further information contact: Vic Brown in Development Control, Environment Agency Fradley office.

Improving water quality

The River Tame continues to improve in quality as the graph below shows. The introduction of EU legislation and the implementation of the AMP3 programme, which runs from 2000 to 2005, have shown more improvements within the River Tame. EU legislation now requires the review of all relevant consents to ensure compliance with EC Directives. The AMP3 programme has already produced an improvement in quality due to the Minworth and Coleshill sewage treatment works consent reviews, that were completed in March 2000.

Several catchment surveys have been carried out on the Tame catchment in the last few years resulting in a lot of wrong connections both domestic and industrial being removed, reducing the amount of effluent being incorrectly piped to surface water sewers. There has also been a lot of pollution prevention site visits carried out by Agency Environment Protection Officers which have reduced the pollution arising from yards and buildings due to urban run-off.

The General Quality Assessment (GQA) grade increased on all the stretches of the River Tame for the year 2000, with all but one of the stretches now classed as being of fair quality. Work on the effect of urea run-off from the M6 motorway is still ongoing. This



Enhancing wildlife

The Environment Agency looks for opportunities to enhance rivers and wetlands as part of all its regulatory activities. This includes all types of consents from abstractions, land drainage and discharges.

The Birmingham Northern Relief Road crosses several different river catchments within the West Midlands Tame area. As part of each river crossing, habitat enhancement will be created, such as backwaters, ponds and otter holts by the contractors, acting on Agency advice.

The Agency has assisted the RSPB in creating a scrape (shallow hollow), a pond and restoring an old pond at their nature reserve in Sandwell.

The Agency has been assisting Birmingham City Council with the 'Kingfisher Project' on the River Cole. This project carries out habitat enhancement work on the river by changing the river bank profile and bed structure using the help of the local community and volunteers. The work has resulted in a significant increase in the habitat diversity along this stretch of river.

The Agency is part supporting a Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) advisor post in Warwickshire to promote environmentally sensitive farming practices on the banks of the Rivers Tame and Blythe. The River Blythe SSSI currently suffers from high levels of agricultural run-off, containing silt, fertilisers and pesticides. By creating buffer strips along the riverbanks the vegetation will filter out many of the pollutants and result in a better water quality and plant life in the river.



For further information contact: Ruth Hering in Fisheries, Recreation and Conservation, Environment Agency Fradley office.



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We would be delighted to receive your comments or to give us your views.

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West Coast Main Line Modernisation

The modernisation of the West Coast Main Line is a £6B+ project aimed at reducing rail journey times between London and Glasgow by over an hour. As the project begins to gather speed, the Agency is playing its part by acting as a key consultee, and has helped to provide important information to the Environmental Statements which accompany the project.

The Agency's continued national response to the project will be co-ordinated from the Fradley office, as much of the route and modernisation works are within this area. The area will work closely with staff from other regions along the West Coast Main Line route between London and Carlisle. A close working relationship has been established with Railtrack so that issues can be addressed as effectively as possible.

For further information contact: Will Groves in the Partnerships Team, Environment Agency Fradley office.



Birmingham New Street Station

For details on any of the articles in this newsletter or for annual Review reporting, please contact:

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Environment Agency - Floodline
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