

## United Utilities secures funding from the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund

United Utilities has secured £66,500.00 funding from the Environment Agency's Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund (NEIRF) and is the first water company to benefit from the fund. The funding will be used to work in partnership with organisations including Finance Earth and Stormwater Shepherds to develop an environmental impact bond model and investment case to deliver up to ten sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and nature based solutions across an industrial estate in Bolton.

The NEIRF is a £10m fund, spread over 3 years, available to organisations across England to bid into to deliver project that provide a return on investment by capturing the value of carbon, water quality, biodiversity and other benefits provided by natural assets such as woodlands, peatlands, catchments and landscapes. United Utilities' project is one of 27 successful projects to received funding from the first round of the NEIRF.

The project has been developed by applying principles from our pioneering Catchment Systems Thinking (CaST) approach. Funding will be used to develop an environmental impact bond, and through the development of the bond the project is looking to raise a further £350k of investment to finance delivery of the ten SuDS solutions. The proposed SuDS would be located at the Britannia Way Industrial Park industrial estate in Bolton, although if successful the principles behind the bond could be replicated across the country. The site has been identified as an area that would benefit from SuDS solutions due its proximity to the River Tongue and opportunities to improve water quality within the wider Irwell catchment. The SuDS solutions will provide two main benefits: reducing water quantity in the wastewater network and improving water quality into the river.

As the proposed SuDS include features such as reeds, they will act as a filtering system and support in reducing the phosphorous in water on the site; it is estimated that approximately 2.5kg of phosphorous will be removed by these solutions, leading to better quality water entering the river. Secondly, as these solutions will store and purify water before releasing directly back to the river system, it will reduce surface water entering the wastewater network. In addition, utilising nature based solutions will provide habitat areas and enhance the biodiversity of the site. After completion of the initial investment project we will also be looking to roll this out on a wider basis across the Irwell catchment to identify and deliver other opportunities to deliver environmental improvements.

This project will enhance our understanding of the ways in which nature based solutions can be funded to deliver water quality improvements and learnings from this project could potentially be scaled up not just across the North West but at a national scale. The project will commence in August 2021 and is anticipated to run until August 2022.