Press release: Waste criminal pays up after Proceeds of Crime confiscation order

A man who ran an illegal waste site for 15 months has been forced to sell his home to pay towards the clean-up of land off the A38 at Eggington near Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire.

The Environment Agency took confiscation proceedings under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 against Robert Murphy, 49, of Carver Road, Burton-on-Trent.

This follows a hearing in May 2015 at Stafford Crown Court when he was sentenced to 7 months imprisonment for operating a site he did not own or have an environmental permit for.

As part of his sentence, a Confiscation Order was made, requiring him to pay compensation of £20,793 to the landowner. The Environment Agency were also awarded prosecution costs of £10,000. Murphy failed to make any payments.

He has since served an additional 12 month default sentence for his failure to comply with the Confiscation Order.

It was necessary for the Environment Agency to enforce compliance with the Order to recover compensation for the landowner who is faced with the costs of site clearance.

This required attendance at further enforcement hearings at Birmingham Magistrates Court. The Confiscation Order and order for costs has now been settled in full.

Between 3 January 2013 and 28 June 2014, Murphy used the land which belonged to a vulnerable and elderly couple to deposit, store and burn large quantities of mixed waste including metal, wood, electrical items and construction and demolition waste.

An Environment Agency officer involved in the case said:

> This has been a long and involved case but it demonstrates that the Environment Agency is determined to tackle waste crime.
>
> We hope this case serves as a message to those involved that we won’t stop the fight against this blight, and that it acts as a deterrent against those who undermine legitimate businesses within the industry.
>
> This is a serious issue diverting as much as £1 billion per annum from legitimate business and treasury. Since April 2011 the Environment Agency has invested £65.2 million in tackling it.

> We urge any landowners, farmers, members of the public who find these sites to call us immediately on our 24-hour free incident hotline number 0800 80 70 60 or make an anonymous report to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Press release: Improvements breathe new life into north east park

A partnership project has breathed new life into a local north east park.

The Wear Rivers Trust and Environment Agency have worked together to make improvements to Memorial Park near Stanley.

In the 1950s, Stanley Burn, which flows through South Moor Memorial Park, was diverted into a culvert to make way for a communal paddling pool, which was used for around 15 years and then buried and forgotten.

This new project has now removed the paddling pool and returned the river to its natural channel, creating new high quality habitat for fish and invertebrates while also slowing the flow of the watercourse and increasing flood storage.

Nearby residents of Stanley are also enjoying improved year-round access with a new 300m footpath and two new footbridges. And work is planned in early 2018 to further improve the instream habitat for fish and to naturalise the bankside habitat.

Steve Hudson of Wear Rivers Trust said:

> It’s great to be involved in a project which offers so many benefits to the local community. By working alongside multiple partners through the Greening the Twizell Partnership, we have managed to improve instream habitat, reduce flood risk and provide new all ability access routes for everyone to enjoy this previously difficult to reach woodland park area.

The project has cost more than £90,000 and is made up of funding from the Environment Agency, Stanley Town Council, Durham County Council and Stanley Area Action Partnership. It’s one part of a four-part project in the area which has also included wetland and pond creation and natural flood management measures.

Karen Fisher, Biodiversity Technical Officer with the Environment Agency in the North East, added:

> The project has been delivered with Wear Rivers Trust and is an excellent example of partnership working that has delivered multiple benefits.
>
> This includes habitat creation, lengthening the watercourse, new bridges and a seating area, creating a green area for the local community to use.

Press release: Check your oil tanks for winter

The Environment Agency is urging people to check their storage tanks for leaks to protect the environment and reduce the risk of potentially large financial losses.

With winter approaching, many households – particularly in rural areas – will soon be getting oil delivered.

Leaked oil can end up in drains, many of which lead directly to rivers, streams, lakes and even garden ponds, having the same effect as pouring it directly into the watercourse.

Oil is poisonous to fish and other wildlife and smothers plants – just two litres of oil could seriously pollute the volume of fresh water needed to fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool.

Neil Paisley, from the Environment Agency's Environmental Management team, said:

> Heating oil can cause serious problems if it gets into the environment. But it's not just the cost of losing the oil that can be expensive, clean-up costs can be large and are not always covered by household insurance policies.
>
> This is why it is vital that oil is only ever stored in tanks that are in good condition. Both the tank and pipe work should be regularly inspected and people should never buy more oil than they can safely store.

Householders with domestic oil tanks should take the following action to ensure they are safe for use:

- Site tanks as far away as possible from drains, streams and ponds.

- Inspect tanks, pipes and other equipment for leaks, damage and interference once a week. Any problems should be fixed as soon as possible by an Oil Firing Technical Association (OFTEC) technician www.oftec.org.uk.

- Arrange for the boiler and tank to be serviced at least once a year by an OFTEC technician. This should include any underground pipe work.

- Monitor how much oil you use. If the volume of oil being used suddenly increases, there could be a leak.

- Supervise oil deliveries. Never allow your tank to be overfilled and don't order more oil than you can safely store.

- Check your home insurance covers clean-up costs on both your property and neighbouring land. Always notify insurers immediately in the event of a spill or suspected spill.

- If a tank starts leaking, you should try to stop the oil soaking into the ground or going down drains. Contact your insurance company to arrange for an OFTEC technician or UKSpill accredited clean-up company http://www.ukspill.org to attend.

- Secondary containment, such as a bund, will prevent oil from escaping into the environment if a leak occurs. This is a legal requirement for domestic tanks which store more than 3,500 litres.

To report an oil spill or leak, contact the Environment Agency's 24-hour emergency hotline on 0800 807060.

News story: Brown trout return to Newcastle-under-Lyme

This follows successful work to improve the ecology and habitat of the brook.

The Lyme Brook runs through the heart of the town, and has suffered from poor water quality from as far back as the industrial revolution when new industry

and development had an impact on the brook.

Since the 1980s water quality in the Lyme Brook, one of a number of brooks that form the headwaters of the iconic River Trent, has dramatically improved. In recent years, using the Environment Agency's Environment Improvement Fund, a partnership called the Staffordshire Trent Valley Catchment Partnership has been working to improve the habitat of the brook, mainly through Lyme Valley Parkway.

This volunteer-led programme that brings together Groundwork West Midlands, the Wild Trout Trust, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and the National Citizen Service has been making all sorts of improvements to encourage brown trout to return to their ancient spawning grounds. And the partnership is excited to say, brown trout have been found.

Stephen Cook from Groundwork West Midlands said:

> It's great to see that the years of hard work by local people have paid off.
>
> The fact trout are in the brook means that other species will be thriving too and the quality of the habitat must be improving which is so important. It was also great fun creating the new berms, shifting the gravel and teaching children about their waterways so this news is just the icing on the cake.

Councillor Ann Beech, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council cabinet member for operational services, added:

> The Borough Council is proud to be involved in a partnership project which is already reaping the rewards of work to improve the water environment at the Lyme Brook.
>
> It's great news that brown trout have returned – it's a clear indicator of the brook's renewed health as high quality water and a good habitat are vital requirements for them to spawn. Where they thrive, other wildlife will too.

Although the Environment Agency has found brown trout, the work doesn't stop. The partnership is continuing to work on further habitat improvements so the brook can sustain trout breeding populations.

It is currently looking to recruit members for a 'Friends of the Lyme Brook' group to safeguard this work and lead on future improvements. If you are interested, please call Groundwork on 01782 829914 or email Stephen.cook@groundwork.org.uk.

Mel Westlake, Catchment Coordinator from Staffordshire Trent Valley Catchment said:

> This is fantastic news as brown trout are an indicator that the work being carried out by the Staffordshire Trent Valley Catchment partners is having a real and lasting effect on the water quality and habitats for fish.
>
> The brown trout is synonymous with Newcastle-under-Lyme for a number of reasons including appearing on the borough's coat of arms as well as featuring on the statue on the roundabout in the centre of the town.
>
> We hope to be able to continue with more of this restoration work throughout the whole of the Trent Catchment ensuring that brown trout are once again a common site in our local rivers and brooks.
>
> Hopefully in the near future, brown trout will again be a common sight in Newcastle.

Background

The trout were found on an Environment Agency fish survey of the brook. The trout were measured and returned unharmed to the water.

Improvements led by Groundwork West Midlands were carried out through a series of volunteer-centred events using volunteers from the local community, Friends of Lyme Valley Parkway, Environment Agency and National Citizen Service.

These improvements have involved the creation of shallow sloping 'berms' along the bank side using brushwood from the pollarding and coppicing of suitable trees nearby. Opposite each 'berm', sections of the bank side have been removed with a mini-digger allowing the brook to 'wiggle'.

In addition, gravel spawning areas (riffles) have been created by placing gravel at locations in the brook, together with pinned woody debris, which has been fixed into the banks. Woody material becomes home to invertebrates and is a good hiding place for young fish.

Yellow flag iris and sedge have been planted along this section of the bank and in the muddy pockets within the berms. These plants will provide shelter and shade for developing fish and for adult fish. Further details of the project are online and there are films showing the making of the Lyme Brook wiggle.

Lyme brook: road to recovery

Second phase and fish survey

Press release: Opportunity for residents and business to find out more about plans to reduce flood risk in Otley

Otley residents and businesses are being invited to come along and meet the team at a drop-in event on Tuesday 17 October.

Visitors to the drop in will have an opportunity to meet representatives from Leeds City Council, Environment Agency, Yorkshire Water and WSP (consultants undertaking survey and investigation work). It will also be a chance to find out more about plans to reduce the risk of flooding in the historic market town and provide feedback, which the team hopes to use in the early stages of the programme to develop the Otley Flood Alleviation Scheme.

The drop in will be held at The Core Otley, Unit 11 Orchard Gate, Otley LS21 3NX, on Tuesday 17 October between 4pm and 7pm.

The town suffered flooding on three occasions between November and December 2015, which saw 74 properties affected. In the Autumn Statement 2016, Government announced £2 million to invest in a scheme to reduce the risk of flooding to homes and businesses.

The scheme is being led by Leeds City Council working closely with the Environment Agency.
Leader of Leeds City Council Councillor Judith Blake said:

> We are firmly committed to taking a whole catchment and citywide approach to flood prevention in Leeds, which is why the plans for the Otley Flood Alleviation Scheme are so important to help provide confidence and reassurance to our communities who currently live in areas of flood risk. We would encourage as many people as possible to attend the drop-in session to find out more and give us their views, as local people have a key role to play in helping us to get this right.

John Woods, flood risk management advisor at the Environment Agency said:

> We’re committed to keeping the people of Otley updated on progress around the development of a flood alleviation scheme for Otley. The drop-in event not only serves as a way for residents to meet the team, but also as a means for us to gather their feedback to help us develop the best possible scheme for the town.

Work to pull together data to better understand the potential paths of flood water as well as collating historic and recent flood information began earlier this year. The information from these investigations, carried out by consultants, WSP, will be used to update an existing digital model of the River Wharfe which can then help form potential options for a scheme.

The Otley Flood Alleviation Scheme is one of several schemes that is adopting a catchment-wide approach. This means the entire River Wharfe catchment area will be considered to help reduce flood risk. This approach looks at a combination of natural processes and engineered options to help slow the flow and catch water further up the catchment so that flood peaks are reduced further downstream.