

Wear Catchment Partners Host International Conference in Durham

The Wear Catchment Partnership works to integrate land and water management across the Wear river system. The Wear Rivers Trust, Durham University and Northumbrian Water, supported by the Environment Agency and the Heritage Coast Partnership, have hosted the Autumn Topsoil conference. Delegates came from Denmark, Holland, Germany, Belgium and the UK, representing 16 individual projects. They were welcomed by the Mayor of Durham City and Chair of Durham County Council, Councillor John Lethbridge who said, *“I was intrigued to listen to the multi-faceted approach to water management. Its international dimension poses a note of optimism in this uncertain world and I look forward to this valuable work being pursued.”*

The Topsoil project aims to better understand relationships between the surface environment and groundwater within the context of a changing climate. Groundwater is a vital resource, providing water for public drinking supply, for agriculture and, where it comes to the surface, supporting habitats including wetlands, chalk streams and the wildlife which depend upon them.

A key theme running through Topsoil, and of key importance to all of the 5 countries represented, is how to protect groundwater from agricultural discharges. In many areas across the UK and Europe the soils, surface and subsurface deposits can allow the rapid transport of fertilisers and other chemicals from the surface into groundwater. A common challenge for many of the 16 Topsoil projects is how best to work with farming businesses to ensure a viable farming industry, producing good quality food, while at the same time protecting both surface and groundwater from fertiliser run-off.

A 3 year trial is underway in North East Durham, at Seaham Grange Farm, supported by Frontier Agriculture, looking at different methods of crop cultivation to see which method allows the most efficient uptake of fertiliser nutrients, leaving only a minimal amount of excess fertiliser in the soil after harvest. Remaining nutrients are at risk of being flushed out from the soil into surface or groundwater over the winter. Seaham Grange is a commercial arable enterprise, filling the role of a demonstration farm, where other farmers can observe the methods trialled, consider results, including harvest quality, yield and the levels of nutrients remaining in the soil.

Mike Slater, Fertiliser Technical Development Manager for Frontier Agriculture and presenting at the conference, said: *“We’re finding that farmers are very receptive to improving environmental performance through better soil management and efficient use of fertilisers. The Seaham project has great potential as a showcase to promote the integration of arable farming and water management to local farmers and beyond. Along with our own network of soil demonstration sites, the project will help us share best practice with farmers, focusing on efficient nutrient use and improving water quality whilst maintaining crop gross margins.”*

Building on the groundwater theme, conference delegates visited the Dawdon mine water processing plant which pumps water from the mine, removing 30 tons of iron hydroxide

“cake” per week and returning the cleaned water to the sea. This modern industrial plant was then contrasted with the Ryhope Engines Museum, with its 150 year old fully working twin beam engines, which pumped drinking water to Sunderland until 1967 when the Derwent and Kielder reservoirs came on line. The Ryhope site continues to supply the city from its balancing reservoirs to this day.

Our visitors had the chance to visit Durham City, including the Cathedral, Market square, Townhall and local pubs, as well as the surrounding countryside. Topsoil project leaders Jes Pedersen and Flemming Jorgensen, representing the Central Denmark Region, commented *“It has been a huge pleasure and very interesting to visit the Durham area. We are dealing with the same issues in our countries; but the issues are often tackled in different ways. This is why a project like the Interreg TopSoil project is so important. It enables a lot of knowledge exchange and we make use of each others' experiences to develop new methods and guidelines. The hosting town of Durham and it's magnificent Cathedral provided a perfect setting for the conference”*.



Credit: Leo de Vree Provincie Drenthe, Netherlands

The Topsoil group were enthused and impressed by the living history at the Ryhope Engines Museum



Credit: Leo de Vree Provincie Drenthe, Netherlands

Annette Specht from Denmark is shown how to bool a hoop at Ryhope Engines Museum by Les Jordan from Sunderland

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Notes to editor

The Wear Rivers Trust is a registered charity and was formed on 4th December 2008 to improve, enhance and protect the various habitats along the River Wear through practical conservation and education.

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About Frontier Agriculture: Frontier Agriculture is the UK's leading crop production and grain marketing business, recognised for its close customer relationships with farmers and grain consumers and its successful management of the arable supply chain. Frontier was formed in 2005 as a joint venture between Associated British Foods and Cargill plc and now turns over around £1.5 billion per annum. Frontier has 44 sites across the UK and employs 1,100 colleagues. Frontier's main offices are in Perth, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Cranswick, Witham St Hughs, Diss, Sandy, Andover and Ross-on-Wye. Operating across all aspects of arable crop production and grain marketing, Frontier supplies seed, crop protection products and fertiliser to farmers, as well as providing specialist agronomy advice through our team of 140 agronomists. Frontier's grain marketing business has well-established contracts with the UK's key grain consumers, giving our farmer customers unrivalled access to end markets. Frontier has a number of divisions providing additional specialist advice to growers. These include SOYL precision crop production and Kings who are experts on game cover, conservation crops, green cover and forage crops. Frontier's mission is to be the first choice partner for crop production and crop marketing for UK farmers, and the first choice employer in UK agriculture.
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