

Our passion for preserving our planet's future

NEXT week the world will be celebrating St Valentine's Day, where we express love towards our nearest and dearest, and Cupid takes aim with his bow and arrows to unite people, making them feel happy and valued.

I thought it would be a good idea to chat about a few things close to our hearts, look at why we love the environment so much, and how this passion motivates me and my colleagues in the Environment Agency on a daily basis.

I want people to stop and think about how our environment impacts on our daily lives, and how actions we take have an important role in ensuring the planet we all share prospers for years to come.

I'm not going to delve in to the policies and politics behind the schemes but use examples of situations that impact us all from the moment we brush our teeth in the morning to the moment we put our head back on to the pillow in the evening. With your reaction hopefully being: "...well I didn't know the Environment Agency did that!"

How many of us take for granted turning on the tap and having clean water trickle out? Lifting the bin and knowing your rubbish will be stored appropriately in landfills? Putting your fishing rods in the back of the car for a weekend of angling knowing that when you get to the riverbank the environment is well-kept and the fish are prospering in their habitat?

When you happily walk the dog in your favourite spot oblivious to the amount of work that goes in to keeping that area well-kept. Or listening to the weather report when bad weather is forecast knowing that flood measures are in place to ensure our towns, villages and cities are safe from the elements.

Our work helps to protect air quality in a number of ways, from routinely checking the businesses we regulate are meeting the set limits, through to responding to pollution incidents such as major fires.

For example, in Blaydon to help us deal with the community's concerns about odours from the landfill site, we've recently installed a temporary monitor to check air quality. And during major incidents we can place specialist monitoring equipment that is used to check air

Catherine Saxon



quality and provide information that our experts can assess and share with partner organisations to help protect public health.

Did you know we have something called the "Northumbria Regional Flood and Coastal Committee" (RFCC) that meets several times a year? Its role is to help protect communities from flooding and coastal erosion.

It assists the Environment Agency and its partners to better understand local issues, and to balance local and national priorities. The board is made up of representatives from local authorities and key partner organisations.

The Northumbria RFCC will be investing £17m in 2019/20 to better protect 1,400 homes from flooding and coastal erosion and, next year, £21m of investment is planned - to better protect a further 1,450 homes in our local communities.

Did you know... that over the past two and a half years the Environment Agency's community engagement team has engaged with over 17,000 young people under the age of 21, with 580 local businesses and has secured the voluntary services of 163 community flood wardens across Durham and Darlington, Cleveland and Northumberland?

Did you know... last year, 33 out of the North East's 34 designated bathing waters achieved either "excellent" or "good" ratings for

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water quality? Our specialist field monitoring team take regular samples during the bathing water season between 15 May to 30 September, and their findings are used to generate the ratings between excellent, good, sufficient and poor.

Also, did you know that we are cleaning up our rivers polluted by abandoned metal mines?

Metal mining played an important part in Britain's history, but although most of these mines closed 100 years ago, they still pollute about 330km of North East rivers, starting in the North Pennines headwaters and extending down the rivers Tyne, Wear and Tees.

We (at the Environment Agency) are working in partnership with the Coal Authority and Defra to tackle the sources of this pollution.

Did you know... that in 2015 illegal waste activity was estimated to have cost the economy over £600m in England?

Waste crime activities can have massive impacts on local communities, as waste criminals often engage in large-scale fraud, threaten legitimate competitors, disregard environmental and safety regulations, and feed an illegal economy.

And in January this year, a new, national Joint Unit for Waste Crime was established through which we are working with partners including the National Crime Agency, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and the police to target serious and organised waste crime.

We always appreciate people who are vocal and wish to make their voice heard.

Whether it's somebody volunteering to become a flood warden or somebody calling our incident hotline to report a waste crime in their local community, the number being 0800 807060.

It's beautiful to see so many of us are passionate about the future of our environment.

■ Catherine Saxon is Environment Agency, North East - Area Director: @Catherine_Saxon

Slogan captures everything our region holds dear

Paul Benneworth



I WAS visiting my old school this week to look in the archives. It was fun to see a photo from 30-odd years ago and try remembering the names, but what struck me the most was the fact the school now had a slogan.

"Your journey begins here". It's not a bad slogan really, and it definitely chimes with my regular journey to work in Norway.

A good slogan must be plausible and capture a product's essence. Ronseal is famous for "Does what it says on the tin!" - a no-nonsense slogan for a no-nonsense wood treatment product!

Cities are famously horrendously difficult to capture with a marketing slogan. "I (heart) New York" captures perfectly the feeling of falling in love with a manically energetic city that never sleeps. I AMsterdam might look similar on paper, but it encapsulates feeling welcome in a relaxed, spacious city.

Those slogans are memorable because they've worked, making their cities more visible and attractive. But for every "I AMsterdam" there's a thousand that might as well be sent straight from the PR's laptop to the rubbish bin without troubling a billboard.

One of my favourite campaigns was One NorthEast's (ONE) regional marketing around "Passionate people, passionate places". It was designed to be used across the region, attracting tourists to our dramatic landscapes and beautiful cities.

It was brilliant because it didn't just showcase regional attractions such as Gateshead's Baltic Gallery or Bamburgh Castle. The phrase's other half was also true - we are a region of passionate people with a pervasive energy and enthusiasm.

Like everything good ONE did, it was incinerated in Eric Pickles' deranged "bonfire of the regions". No matter that it was credited with leading to a jump in regional tourism to our main cities as well as our more rural attractions.

The Regional Development Agency and all its good works had to go in a crude act of political revenge. So I am delighted that this week the Jour-

nal decided to relaunch the slogan in the spirit it was created, for us all.

The power of the phrase lies in its positivity. Passion once meant suffering of biblical proportions, but today it has more positive connotations, an intense attachment to the things that matter to us.

It's an emotion based on a sense of belonging, a sense of collectivity and a sense of love. It's the passion that leads to a six-hour journey back from Oxford on a Tuesday night or to run round the world to raise money for the Sir Bobby Robson Foundation.

Passion enriches life, and lets us achieve things others could not ever envisage doing. The love is our warmth and hospitality for visitors and all residents. The passion sustains us on that difficult journey.

Our regional journey will only be getting harder. The government announced one month after the election that £300m funding is being shifted from northern councils to their core voters down south.

They're intent on tanking the economy and destroying manufacturing industries on which we still rely. Arbitrary strictness around immigration only hinders universities and hi-tech businesses filling that gap.

We need to pull together to fill the cracks left in the region by the Tories' reckless populism. Remaining welcoming, hospitable and friendly, despite London's antipathetic neglect, catching each other when we fall.

Our passion can sustain us as we enter this latest stage of our difficult journey.

And most of all we need the positive collective energy we derive from our attachment to this great region.

The Journal has done us a service by reviving the symbol of our regional strength. So when you see the logo, bask in a satisfaction of the North East being a place of passionate people.

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