

Partnership case study: Unilever plc

160 million times a day, someone somewhere chooses a Unilever product. From feeding your family to keeping your home clean and fresh our brands are part of everyday life.

With 400 brands spanning 14 categories of home, personal care and food products, no other company touches so many people's lives in so many ways.

We believe that the business of conducting business in a responsible way has a positive social impact. We create and share wealth, invest in local economies and develop people's skills – both inside our organisation and in the communities around us.

Why is Unilever involved with the Mersey Basin Campaign?

Unilever's brands rely on water at every stage of their lifecycle and we're working to reduce water use wherever possible and to continue to improve the efficiency of our manufacturing facilities.

Unilever has two manufacturing sites and a research laboratory in the Mersey Basin catchment area, and a tributary of the Mersey passing directly through one of the manufacturing sites. This combined with a corporate focus on sustainable waterways made the Mersey Basin Campaign an obvious choice when we were looking for opportunities to engage with local stakeholders on water issues. The Mersey Basin Campaign was able to bring us into contact with key stakeholders from local government, conservationists, community groups, water providers and other commercial organisations.

Unilever was one of the first companies to demonstrate its support of the Campaign when it first started in the mid 1980s. At the end of the last decade, Unilever developed a set of principles called SWIM (Sustainable Water and Integrated Catchment Management), in conjunction with an international panel of water management experts and environmental group, Forum for the Future, founded by Jonathan Porritt.

This culminated in Unilever hosting an international conference in Liverpool, with the aim of refining and developing the principles of SWIM and establishing best practice for current and future Unilever projects across the world. One of the pilot schemes show-cased at the conference featured a local project between Unilever and the Mersey Basin Campaign at Dibbinsdale Nature Reserve.

The early work with the Mersey Basin Campaign evolved over time into our support of the Unilever Dragonfly awards, which recognise and support the voluntary sector in the Northwest.

How is Unilever involved?

Unilever makes a financial contribution to the Campaign which has been used in recent years to support the Unilever Dragonfly awards. The awards recognise often unsung volunteers, working hard to improve their local communities and environments around the Mersey Basin Campaign catchment.

Unilever has also been in position to offer volunteers from all levels of the business to help with a range of activities in support of the Campaign. This has ranged from individuals with project management and facilitation skills helping local river valley action groups with prioritising activities and decision making to providing large groups of employee volunteers working together on practical environmental improvement projects.

What are the benefits of involvement to Unilever?

Working with the Mersey Basin Campaign has had a number of benefits for Unilever. It has given us the opportunity to meet and work with a range of local stakeholders to deliver common goals in our local environment and community.

The Unilever sites in the Northwest are tied into our local communities and this has provided a way of engaging with them, and through the Dragonfly awards of recognising local people giving up their own time to support local environmental projects day after day.

Employee volunteering activities have helped morale and team building with many different groups across Unilever sites. Those who've been involved with local Mersey Basin Campaign action groups, Mersey Basin Week events or specifically organised activities have really enjoyed being part of something that they recognise has made a real contribution to the local community in which they work, and in many cases live.