



# Sewer Overflows

Qualitative findings  
September/October 2021

# Agenda

## What we'll cover today...

1

Why we researched this topic, what we researched and who we spoke to

2

A quick summary of our findings

3

A closer look at our participants and their world

4

The learning Journey... how do hearts and minds change when presented with the facts

5

Decision Making... what are the desired outcomes after reading the information

6

Final considerations and a look at what our participants thought of taking part in this research

# Background

# Background and objectives...

## Project Background

- Factors such as heavy rain and sewer misuse can cause sewers to be overwhelmed. Sewer overflows help by releasing excess water into rivers or the seas: without them, there is a greater risk of flooding, and of sewage spills affecting streets and homes. Effects of climate change and population growth increase the risk of number of overflows in the future
- Although the use of sewer overflows is legally permitted there has been much reported in the media on the topic and there are concerns that customers may have strong views on the subject and will want to see action from United Utilities to resolve this in the future
- United Utilities hasn't researched sewer overflows with customers in depth before and therefore little is known about what customers really think about the topic. Research was commissioned to understand this better

## Research Objectives

- Explore level of engagement and understanding of sewer overflows before and after they are informed
- Explore how much of an issue the topic of sewer overflows and environmental impacts really is in the day to day experience of customers
- Understand customer opinions on what actions should be undertaken to reduce the impact of sewer overflows and where the responsibility lies
- Explore customers' expectations regarding investments, time and potential disruption when addressing the problem

# Recap of the options...

## Reduce the number of spills

Currently sewer overflows spill around 5 times on average a month in the North West.



Reduce number of spills to 40 a year

Reduce number of spills to 20 a year

Reduce number of spills to 10 a year

Reduce number of spills to zero

## Reduce aesthetic impact of overflows (litter and odour)

Sometimes overflows will spill because the sewers have become blocked due to wipes or other expected materials being flushed down the drain or during heavy rainfall. When storm water contains such 'unflushable' items this can result in sewer litter spilling to the water environment, spoiling the natural amenities and beauty spots as the litter is visible in the water and on riverbanks. UU tries to encourage customers to only flush the 3 P's (pee, poo and paper) to help prevent litter entering the sewers and causing blockages.



## Reduce impact on water quality and the environment

Research shows 47 river stretches in the North West (out of 499) where storm overflows are believed to be having an impact on water quality and therefore may negatively affect wildlife that depend on these rivers. Run-off from farmland and urban areas can also result in poor water quality.



## Reduce risk of users of recreational waters becoming unwell due to overflows

In the North West there are 29 designated Bathing Waters these are mostly on the coast like Blackpool, Morecambe and Southport but we also have 4 inland bathing waters on Windermere. These bathing waters are safe for people to swim and bathe in. United Utilities has invested millions of pounds to improve the water quality at these designated bathing waters, in addition, on our website we have an interactive map where you find information about water quality at designated bathing waters and potential risks to water quality from overflows.



Rain water runoff from farmland used for livestock grazing, spills from overflows and other sources can contain bacteria which could make bathers unwell. At designated bathing waters bacteria samples are taken to inform bathers of the water quality so that they can make an informed choice whether to use the facilities or not.

# What we did...

## Stage 1



A four day online pop up community with representatives of the target groups (see sample p4)



Conducted between Monday 6th and Friday 10th September 2021



69 free found participants took part. They completed a screening questionnaire to determine their attitudes to the environment, their community as well as their experience of flooding

### Discussion flow

Participants were given bite sized pieces of information about Sewer Overflows over three days before being shown four possible options that would tackle this issue

- Day 1 – Existing knowledge and understanding of UU and sewer overflows
- Day 2 – Understanding the reasons for spills
- Day 3 – Impact of sewer overflows
- Day 4 – Options to address

## Stage 2



7 digital focus groups to further debate in person the topic of sewer overflows



Conducted between Thursday 16th and Wednesday 22nd September 2021



48 participants who previously completed the pop up community took part in the focus groups .

### Discussion flow

Participants were given one of the four options to discuss in the session. They were asked to argue that their option was the one that provided the most benefit

The exercise was designed to encourage debate about the pros and cons of each of the options and to stress test what the group truly believes is the best outcome and what option would best deliver this.

# Sample – the basics

Participants were extensively screened to ensure they fitted into the relevant group



## Environmental

- 10 participants aged between 27 – 69 years old
- Mix of life stage and employment status
  - 50/50 gender split
- Spread of social demographics and incomes
- Mix of locations across the North West with people living in both urban and rural settings



## Flooding

- 10 participants aged between 28 – 69 years old
- Mix of life stage and employment status
  - 50/50 gender split
- Spread of social demographics and incomes
- Mix of locations across the North West with people living in both urban and rural settings



## Business

- 10 participants aged between 28 – 54 years old
- Mix of life stage and employment status
  - 50/50 gender split
- 7 small business owners, 3 medium business
- Mix of locations across the North West with people living in both urban and rural settings



## Future Bill Payers

- 10 participants aged between 20 – 28 years old
- Mix of life students and full time employed
  - 80/20 female male split
  - C1 social grade
- Mix of locations across the North West with people living in both urban and rural settings



## Conventional ABC1

- 10 participants aged between 25 – 38 years old
- Mix of life stage and employment status
  - 70/30 gender Female/Male split
- B and C1 social grade and incomes
- Full time employees with less financial worries
- Mix of locations across the North West living in urban areas



## Conventional C2DE

- 19 participants aged between 23 – 60 years old
- Mix of life stage and employment status
  - 60/40 female/male gender split
  - Majority have money concerns
- Mix of locations across the North West with people living in both urban and rural settings

# Exec summary



# Executive overview: Customers want investment for the North West...

## 1 Being from the North West impacts on their view of the topic

They feel that the region has been historically under-invested in. When infrastructure projects are undertaken, they are often disrupted by developers who are not considered to have their community's best interests at heart

Having a strong connection to their community makes them more engaged in the topic

## 2 There is little understanding of what United Utilities do and little understanding of the water cycle.

As such, most have never considered how they get their water and what happens to their waste

This means that many people start from a very low level of knowledge which makes learning about sewer overflows difficult to understand

## 3 Knowing that sewer overflows prevent flooding means that customers are largely accepting of their use, although ideally there would be an alternative

Learning that a combined sewer system means that sewer overflows are more likely to occur, angers those who generally believe that the North West does not get the same investment as the rest of the country

# Executive overview: ...But are reluctant to accept higher household bills

**4** The causes of sewer overflows is alarming and motivates many to want to take action

Blockages in particular are thought to be something that everyone can tackle and more should be done to educate the public

Urbanisation angers some as they believe the North West is being over-developed without any thought of the impact on supporting infrastructure

Climate change is considered to be a huge problem and that the average person is pretty powerless to help

**5** The impact on the environment is a key consideration and motivates many to be in favour of investment

Thinking about wildlife in particular, led many to feel that investment should take place

They also felt strongly about reducing the aesthetic impact of overflows on rivers, although very few are concerned about the impact on recreational users (as they themselves did not use the waters in this way)

**6** Morally, they believe that zero spills is the best option and should be implemented – but the cost and implications are very high

They therefore consider alternatives (e.g. reduce spills to 40 a year, improve aesthetics) that better fit with what they believe they could afford or what they consider fair to pay and how long they would be prepared to be disrupted for

This means that they will opt for options that give some benefit but at a lower personal/ financial cost

# Whom did we speak to?

A snapshot of our participants and their world

# People's opinions and decision making are tied to their experiences of where they live and who they interact with

Being from the North West gives residents a distinct identity, which colours their views and how they interpret the information from this study





# Environmental :

Actively protecting their natural world by participating in green initiatives

People in this group:

- Take active role in protecting their environment
- Have taken part in campaigns on environmental issues
- Are motivated by stories about the environment and how it can be protected
- Are community minded and are typically involved in local causes

## Main priority for Sewer Overfills

To have a short term solution to prevent litter entering waterways, and a long term solution to stop spills altogether

### Learning journey snapshot

	Low	Med	High
Level of awareness at the beginning of the project	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #2e7d72;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #a6a6a6;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #a6a6a6;"></div>
Level of engagement at the end of the project	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #2e7d72;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #2e7d72;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #2e7d72;"></div>
Willingness to invest financially	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #2e7d72;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #2e7d72;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #a6a6a6;"></div>
Willingness to experience disruption	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #2e7d72;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #2e7d72;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #2e7d72;"></div>

#### Reason for an environment group

To understand if people who actively look after the environment are more likely to be aware of sewer overflows and have strong views on the topic

#### Community



- Volunteering and raising money for local causes
- Reporting problems to the council such as broken street lamps or fly tipping

#### Environmental

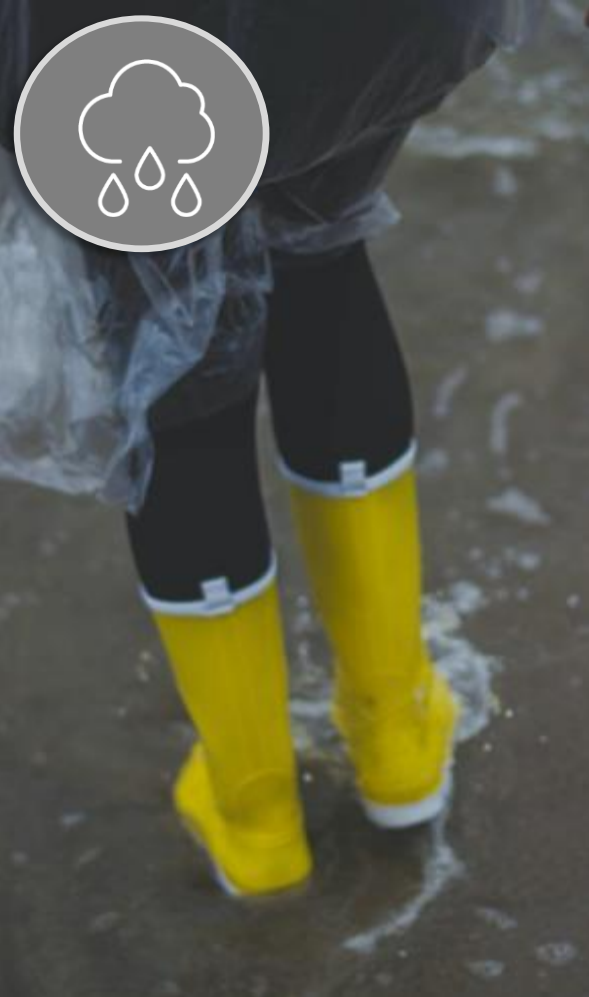


- Actively research businesses and their ethics and sustainability practices
- Live sustainably – plant-based diets, reducing what they use and recycling
- Being part of greener initiatives such as green gyms and cleaner street initiatives

#### Informed



- Are likely to educate themselves on environmental issues by watching documentaries and actively searching for information online
- Despite this, awareness of sewer overflows was low



# Flooding:

Have experienced sewer flooding on their property

People in this group:

- Have experienced flooding and understand how devastating it can be
- Are strongly in favour of investment where they live for the benefit of the community
- Feel that not enough is being done to prevent flooding in the North West

## Main priority for Sewer Overspills

Zero spills in the future, but would prioritise improving aesthetics by preventing litter getting into the waterways

## Learning journey snapshot

	Low	Med	High
Level of awareness at the beginning of the project	████████	████████	████████
Level of engagement at the end of the project	████████	████████	████████
Willingness to invest financially	████████	████████	████████
Willingness to experience disruption	████████	████████	████████

**Reason for flooding groups**  
As sewer overflows help protect against flooding, we wanted to understand how this affected this groups views

### Community



- Many volunteer for local causes such as helping in schools or running local sports clubs
- They are likely to have previously campaigned for local improvements or have complained to the local council

### Environmental



- There is some interest in living sustainably through reducing household waste or eating a plant based diet
- They have taken part in cleaner street campaigns

### Informed



- They have looked into flooding information online – often through United Utilities’ website
- Some have read more into the causes of flooding but the term ‘sewer overflow’ was new to all



## Business:

Have average/low engagement in environmental issues but run a business in the North West

People in this group:

- Own a business and/or have responsibility for utilities including water
- They feel strongly about the communities they operate in and take part in activities that support local initiatives
- They have strong views on how much investment the North West receive and are critical of government
- They're likely to consider the economic value of investment over the social benefits

### Main priority for Sewer Over spills

Zero spills – although this is the most costly, once it is done the sewers will be fit for purpose

### Learning journey snapshot

	Low	Med	High
Level of awareness at the beginning of the project	████████	████████	████████
Level of engagement at the end of the project	████████	████████	████████
Willingness to invest financially	████████	████████	████████
Willingness to experience disruption	████████	████████	████████

#### Reason for business group

To understand the perspective business owners who are likely to be impacted by some of the proposed options. Would owning a business affect their decision making process?



### Community

- Active members of their community are likely to be involved in local initiatives such as running sports clubs or raising money for charity
- They are interesting in local politics and are likely communicate directly with the local council on community issues



### Environmental

- They take part in fewer environmental initiatives, but some are interested in investing in renewable energy for their homes and businesses



### Informed

- They have searched the potential impact of flooding on their homes and businesses to ensure they are not at risk



## Future Bill Payers:

Currently live with parents, student accommodation or rented accommodation where bills are included

People in this group:

- Are the least engaged with United Utilities and the topic of sewer overflows
- They do not want their future bills to be inflated by investment that is needed at the moment
- More people in this group used the waterways recreationally and so there was more interest in water quality than in other groups

### Main priority for Sewer Overflows

Zero spills – although they are reluctant to pay for this. This options ensures that the sewers will be fit for purpose in the future

### Learning journey snapshot

	Low	Med	High
Level of awareness at the beginning of the project	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #f4a460;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #a9a9a9;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #a9a9a9;"></div>
Level of engagement at the end of the project	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #f4a460;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #f4a460;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #a9a9a9;"></div>
Willingness to invest financially	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #f4a460;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #a9a9a9;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #a9a9a9;"></div>
Willingness to experience disruption	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #f4a460;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #a9a9a9;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; background-color: #a9a9a9;"></div>

#### Reason for FBP Group

Although this group are not themselves paying customers it was important to understand the views of the future generation to better understand what they expect from their water company on this long-term issue



Community

- Many volunteer on a regular basis with local charities or organisations
- Some are involved with the local council to encourage positive change to their immediate community



Environmental

- Are likely to make sustainable/ethical choices when shopping
- Many are vegan/vegetarians for environmental reasons



Informed

- Many take part in recreational activities in the water (more so than other groups) but none have done research into water quality or flooding





# Conventional ABC1

Higher income earners with low/average engagement in environmental issues

People in this group:

- Have weaker ties to their community (not living near family or plan to move in the future)
- Have demanding jobs and are often time poor
- Were more likely to think of cost benefit to themselves rather than considering the wider community
- They were the only group to reject major work on the grounds of not wanting to experience disruption from building work

## Main priority for Sewer Overspills

Ideally reduce the number of spills but dislike the idea of being disrupted or paying higher bills – therefore creating more awareness when spills occur (through signage and an app) would be sufficient

## Learning journey snapshot

	Low	Med	High
Level of awareness at the beginning of the project	████████	████████	████████
Level of engagement at the end of the project	████████	████████	████████
Willingness to invest financially	████████	████████	████████
Willingness to experience disruption	████████	████████	████████

### Reason for Conventional ABC1

This group represents the views of people who are higher income earners with no strong opinions on the environment. To qualify, this group could only take part in a few environmental initiatives and no specialist knowledge or UU



Community

- Some have volunteered for charities or have taking part in local community groups
- Most too time poor to do this



Environmental

- Some have taken part in cleaner streets campaigns but active engagement with environmental issues is low
- Very little engagement with sustainability initiatives beyond basic recycling



Informed

- Most have not previously looked up information on flooding or water quality and those who have, did so in relation to their own property



# Conventional C2DE

Lower income earners with low/average engagement in environmental issues

People in this group:

- Have strong ties to their community often with family living close by
- Likely to have lived in their area for most/all of their lives
- Strong knowledge of local geography and culture
- Passionate about investment in where they live for future generations (despite lower incomes)

## Main priority for Sewer Overspills

They want a long term solution to solve the issues completely and to prevent little from entering waterways. They have limited income but feel it is important to solve this problem before it's too late

## Learning journey snapshot

	Low	Med	High
Level of awareness at the beginning of the project	<div style="width: 100%; height: 15px; background-color: #808080;"></div>	<div style="width: 50%; height: 15px; background-color: #808080;"></div>	<div style="width: 25%; height: 15px; background-color: #808080;"></div>
Level of engagement at the end of the project	<div style="width: 100%; height: 15px; background-color: #808080;"></div>	<div style="width: 100%; height: 15px; background-color: #808080;"></div>	<div style="width: 100%; height: 15px; background-color: #808080;"></div>
Willingness to invest financially	<div style="width: 100%; height: 15px; background-color: #808080;"></div>	<div style="width: 100%; height: 15px; background-color: #808080;"></div>	<div style="width: 100%; height: 15px; background-color: #808080;"></div>
Willingness to experience disruption	<div style="width: 100%; height: 15px; background-color: #808080;"></div>	<div style="width: 100%; height: 15px; background-color: #808080;"></div>	<div style="width: 100%; height: 15px; background-color: #808080;"></div>

### Reason for Conventional C2DE

This group represents the views of average people who are mid to low income earners. To qualify, this group could only take part in a few environmental initiatives and no specialist knowledge or UU

Community



- Very community focused and want to help improve where they live.
- Will get involved in local initiative and will help out other people in their area

Environmental



- They are not actively engaged in environmental issues but are alarmed by climate change and what it means for where they live

Informed



- They are aware that flooding is a major problem in the North West with some taking part in the clean up in previous events
- But none have researched flooding and water quality

# Their learning journey

How do hearts and minds change when presented with the facts...

# Recap of the learning journey...

## Participants were educated about sewer overflows, why they are used and their impact on the environment...

**At United Utilities, we manage the water and wastewater network in the North West of England, providing services to around 7 million people and 200,000 businesses.**



### Here's what we do...

- Provide safe drinking water
- Reduce leakage to water supply
- Encourage customers to use water wisely around the home
- Ensure there's enough water for now and in the future
- Provide quality wastewater services
- Protect sewer flooding affecting homes or businesses from pipes
- Improve surface water treatment and drainage for now and in the future
- Return cleaned wastewater safely back to rivers, lakes and the sea



### The Water Cycle - Where do we come in?

That starts by our wastewater sewer

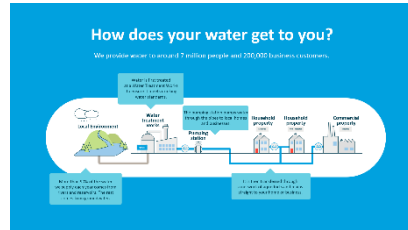
- Waste water goes to Wastewater Treatment Works to be cleaned with sludge and treated for reuse
- Waste water is treated to meet water quality standards
- Waste water is returned to the water cycle
- Waste water is returned to the water cycle
- Waste water is returned to the water cycle



### How does your water get to you?

We provide water to around 7 million people and 200,000 business customers.

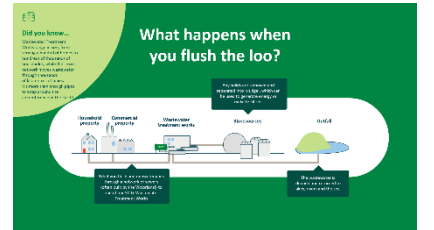
- Water is taken from the natural environment
- Water is treated at a Water Treatment Works
- Water is pumped to a reservoir
- Water is pumped to a water tower
- Water is pumped to a water tower
- Water is pumped to a water tower



### What happens when you flush the loo?

When you flush the loo, you send a message to the sewer system that it's time to go to work.

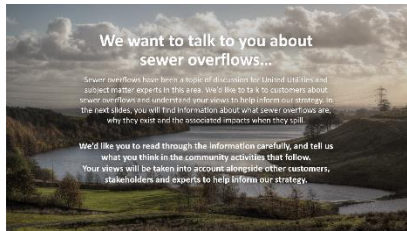
- Water is pumped to a water tower
- Water is pumped to a water tower
- Water is pumped to a water tower
- Water is pumped to a water tower
- Water is pumped to a water tower



### We want to talk to you about sewer overflows...

Sewer overflows have been a topic of discussion for United Utilities and subject matter experts in the area. We like to talk to customers about sewer overflows and understand your views to help inform our strategy. In the next slides, you will find out more about what sewer overflows are, why they exist and the associated impacts when they spill.

We'd like you to read through the information carefully, and tell us what you think in the community activities that follow. Your views will be taken into account alongside other customers, stakeholders and experts to help inform our strategy.



### What is a sewer overflow?

Many of the sewers in England were built to carry both sewage and rainfall which means that in heavy or prolonged rainfall sewers can overflow.

**Sewer overflow**

In heavy rainfall events, an sewer overflow occurs when the capacity of the sewer is exceeded. This can be caused by heavy rainfall, heavy rain, or a combination of both. Sewer overflows can occur in a number of places, including on roads, in gardens, and in streets.

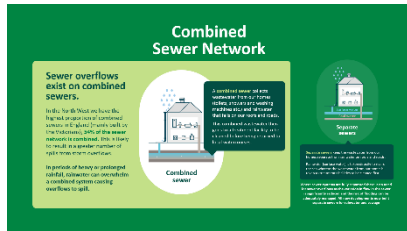


### Combined Sewer Network

Many of the sewers in England were built to carry both sewage and rainfall which means that in heavy or prolonged rainfall sewers can overflow.

**Sewer overflows exist on combined sewers.**

When it rains heavily, the rain water can flow into the sewer system. If the sewer system is full, the rain water will overflow onto the ground. This is a sewer overflow.

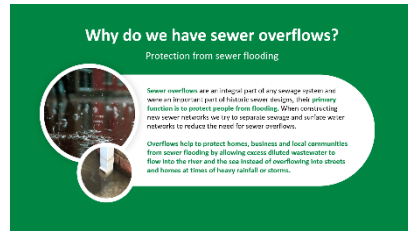


### Why do we have sewer overflows?

Protection from sewer flooding

Sewer overflows are an integral part of any sewerage system and we are a leader in part of historic sewer design. The primary function is to protect people from flooding. When constructing new sewer networks we try to separate sewage and surface water networks to reduce the need for sewer overflows.

Overflows help to protect homes, businesses and local communities from sewer flooding by allowing excess diluted wastewater to flow into the street and the sea instead of overflowing into streets and homes at times of heavy rainfall or storms.

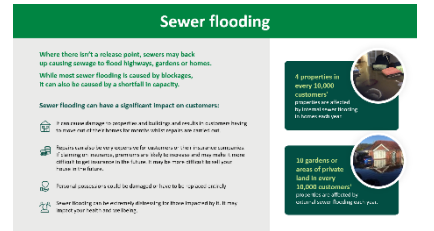


### Sewer flooding

Where there isn't a release point, sewers may back up causing sewage to flood highways, gardens or homes. While most sewer flooding is caused by blockages, it can also be caused by a shortfall in capacity.

Sewer flooding can have a significant impact on customers:

- It can cause damage to property and buildings and the risk of someone being injured or killed.
- It can cause damage to property and buildings and the risk of someone being injured or killed.
- It can cause damage to property and buildings and the risk of someone being injured or killed.



### Why do sewer overflows spill?

Sewer overflows are legally permitted to discharge when sewers are full because of heavy rainfall. If overflows go due to other causes e.g. blockages or sewer collapses, these are not permitted. The Environment Agency sets strict performance limits to limit the impact of sewer overflows on the environment. If permits are breached, then we will still be held responsible.

The primary cause of sewer overflowing spilling is sewer blockages. However, other factors do influence when sewer overflows spill.

- Blockages
- Urbanisation and development
- Climate change and population growth



### Blockages

Unfortunately, sewers can become blocked with products that shouldn't be flushed such as nappies, wipes and period products or poured down the drain such as fats, oils, grease and food waste.

Although most overflow spills are caused by excessive rainfall, some spills are caused by blockages. 70% of blockages are caused by items that shouldn't be flushed or poured down the drain.

These blockages occur because it is not possible to access for all of the pipes or sewers, meaning the likelihood of spills.



### Urbanisation and development

Gardens and other green spaces are often built on or surfaced over, this increases the amount of rain water running off into sewers, which therefore increases the frequency and volume of spills from sewer overflows.

More green spaces and other green spaces are often built on or surfaced over, this increases the amount of rain water running off into sewers, which therefore increases the frequency and volume of spills from sewer overflows.



### Climate change and population growth

Climate change and population growth also have a role to play in the increasing number of spills from overflows. Climate change is predicted to cause more frequent and intense weather events, which will result in more frequent and intense rainfall events, but the frequency of heavy rainfall and storms is also predicted to increase, which could result in more frequent and intense rainfall events.

We forecast that further action is needed to reduce the number of spills from overflows - **will increase by 33% over the next 25 years** as a result of climate change and population growth.



### What is the impact of sewer overflows?

There are three main potential impacts of sewer overflows on the environment and local communities, these are:

- The environment and water quality
- Spill and aesthetic in of the natural environment
- Recreational water use



### What have United Utilities done already to address this?

The North West is home to some of the most beautiful natural landscapes and we take very seriously our role in protecting them so they can be enjoyed by all. United Utilities have invested millions of pounds over many years to monitor the operation of sewer overflows and to improve sewer overflows by reducing the number or impact of spills and to protect the natural environment from the spillage of these overflows.

In the next years we will be undertaking 150 investigation of overflows that spill frequently. These investigations will assess the impact of the overflows on the natural environment and try to identify cost beneficial solutions to reducing the number of spills. In addition we are also carrying several improvement schemes at treatment works to reduce the impact of sewer overflows.

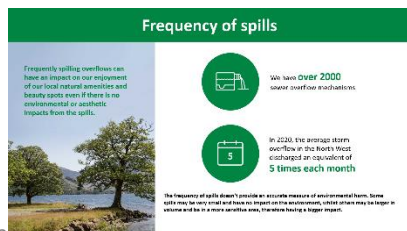


### Frequency of spills

Frequently spilling overflows can have an impact on our enjoyment of our local natural amenities and beauty more often if there is an environmental or aesthetic impact from the spill.

We have **OVER 2000** sewer overflow incidents.

In 2020, the average storm overflow in the North West discharged an equivalent of **5 times each month**.



### The environment and water quality

Our rivers are essential habitats for many animals and are vital in supporting our North West's wildlife.

The water in our rivers, water courses or ponds is not only used for drinking water but also for recreation. It is important that the water is clean and safe to drink and that the water is clean and safe to drink.

We work with the Environment Agency to identify where overflows are the biggest problem in the North West and to take action to reduce the number of overflows.



### Smell and aesthetics of the natural environment

Sometimes overflows will spill because the sewers have become blocked due to debris or other materials being flushed down the drain during heavy rainfall.

When a sewer overflows, it can cause a strong smell and can be a nuisance to people who live nearby. It can also cause a strong smell and can be a nuisance to people who live nearby.

We work with the Environment Agency to identify where overflows are the biggest problem in the North West and to take action to reduce the number of overflows.



### Recreational water use

Along with rain runoff from farmland used for livestock grazing, spills from overflows can contain bacteria which could make bathers unwell.

It is important that the water is clean and safe to drink and that the water is clean and safe to drink.

We work with the Environment Agency to identify where overflows are the biggest problem in the North West and to take action to reduce the number of overflows.



# Many start with little knowledge of the water cycle or UU but are more positive about the brand when educated

I think/say

## United Utilities

I thought they were bigger than that – I thought they did water for the whole of the UK so I'm surprised it's just the North West



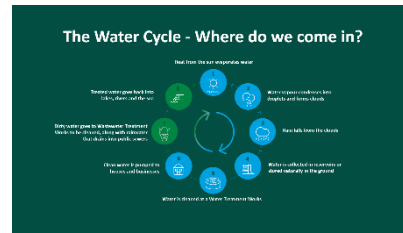
## Here's what we do...

They do a lot behind the scenes, I don't really think about how I get my water or what happens to the waste



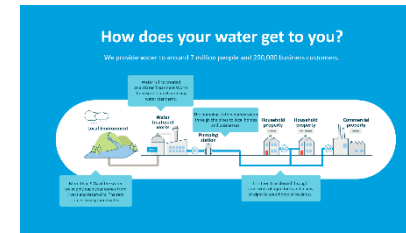
## The water cycle

I had no idea how the water cycle works. I think this visual is a good way of breaking it all down



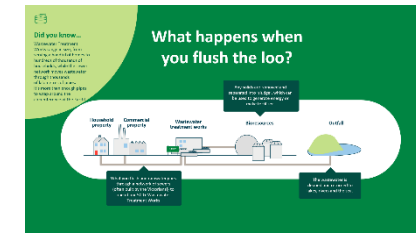
## How does water get to you?

I hadn't really thought about it before



## What happens when you flush?

I hadn't thought about this before because it's probably a pretty unpleasant process



I feel

I learn

A rough scope as to the size of their operation, when previously I had no reference point at all. I know they are responsible for my region

That UU clean the water and pursuing all these great initiatives to sustain our community and planet. I feel a bit warmer towards them now

I learned that treated water goes back into our waterways. I had always thought it stayed in some internal system. I'll probably quickly forget the ins and outs of the process though

A lot goes on in the background to get us our water. Its not a simple pipe

That rainwater mixes with our waste, I knew it rained but had never made that connection before

# There was little to no prior knowledge about the water cycle and almost zero awareness of sewer overflows across all groups

## Environmental

Aware of climate change, the dangers of plastic in the waterways and the need to live sustainably  
**Some knowledge of the water cycle**  
**No knowledge of sewer overflows or spills**



## Flooding

Some knowledge about waterways and how this can lead to flooding. Some had seen documentaries on sewers  
Climate change and heavy rainfall is a concern  
**Some knowledge of the water cycle**  
**No knowledge of sewer overflows or spills**



## Business

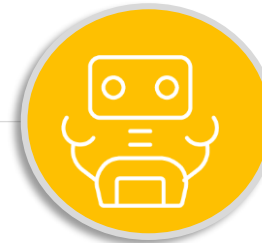
Aware of plastics in the water and general issue of litter  
**Some knowledge of the water cycle**  
**No knowledge of sewer overflows or spills**



## Prior knowledge

## Future Bill Payers

Knowledge about climate change and most likely of the groups to conserve water, but little knowledge of UU  
**Little knowledge of the water cycle**  
**No knowledge of sewer overflows or spills**



## Conventional ABC1

Aware of climate change and general need to be sustainable – but do not relate it to their situation  
**Some knowledge of the water cycle**  
**No knowledge of sewer overflows or spills**



## Conventional C2DE

Most likely to be misinformed on all aspects of the water cycle and UU  
**No knowledge of the water cycle**  
**No knowledge of sewer overflows or spills**



# It is challenging to understand sewer overflows without a basic understanding of the water cycle and United Utilities

Explaining sewer overflows to the wider population will need to include the basics...

## How do I get my water?



- Knowledge of the water cycle was very low across all groups
- Without this knowledge, there was limited appreciation for the work that United Utilities do
- This makes it difficult for the average person to understand how big a task it is to prevent sewer overflows

## Who are United Utilities?



- Some believed that United Utilities were a national brand
- This made them feel that United Utilities may not be fully focused on the North West
- Knowing that United Utilities only operated in the North West made some feel more positive about them and the work they do to supply the region

## How do sewers work?



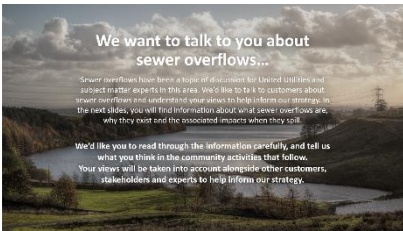
- There was almost zero knowledge across the groups about how sewers work – although some had seen the 'Super Sewers' documentary
- Without understanding the basics they would have struggled to understand how sewer overflows worked

# Low awareness of sewer overflows in general, but learning about their use and combined sewers was received negatively

I think/say

## Sewer Overflows

Its good they are getting our views on this and I'm looking forward to seeing what I can do to help



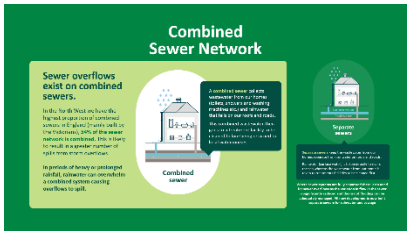
## What is it?

Ok, so everything is fine when its dry but when there's lots of rain, it causes problems



## Combined sewer network

You know, that doesn't massively surprise me that we have so many combined sewers, there isn't as much funding for the North West so it makes sense our sewers haven't been upgraded



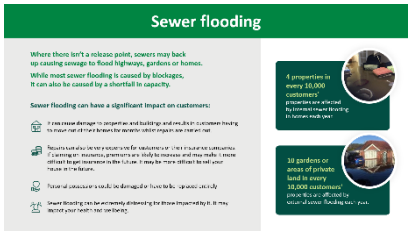
## Why sewer overflows

I get why they do it. It either has to go into the river or into our homes. Its just a shame it has to this way



## Sewer flooding

I expected flooding to be worse than this though that picture shows you that if its you, it really does destroy your home



I feel



I learn

I'm about to learn about sewer overflows and will help out as best I can

Its inevitable when it rains that sometimes there is going to overflows. The system can't handle it

Most of our sewer system is dated and needs overhauled. At the moment rain water goes into the same sewer as waste but it would be better if it could be separated and taken back to the river rather than overwhelming the sewers

Sewer overflows are a necessary evil. You cant have it going up peoples homes

Sewer flooding isn't as big as a deal as the media makes it out to be. Its effecting a tiny proportion of people/ its unlikely to effect me



# Knowledge of sewer overflows was low across the groups but reactions to this information varied depending on outlook

People's reactions to sewer overflows corresponded to their initial views on the environment, their community or their own interests

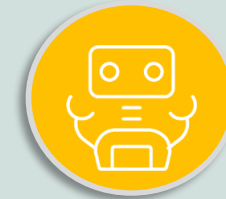
Environment  
Focused

## Is there an alternative to this?

Concern for what this means for wildlife and water quality as well as the likelihood that this will happen more frequently due to climate change that will most likely result in more extreme weather events



Environmental



Future Bill Payer

Community  
Focused

## Unfortunate but necessary to protect my community

It is important to protect homes and the community from flooding and it is better to use



Business



Flooding



Conventional C2DE

Focused  
on Self

## Interesting but this doesn't concern me

It is not something they feel affected by and that if it permitted then it is most likely a satisfactory solution



Conventional ABC1



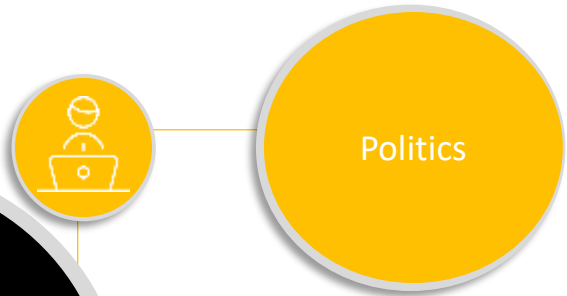
Business

# Many felt angry about combined sewers as it is an example of underinvestment in the North West



The combined sewer system fits with their existing narrative that the North West does not receive proper investment

**The North West – how it defines itself**



Poor infrastructure



- Why has investment not already been carried out to rectify this?
- Is this another example of better investment in the south?
- How has our government allowed the sewers to be so out of date?

- A sewer built by the Victorians will not be fit for purpose
- It is going to rain more in the future with climate change
- The population is going to grow with all the development that is happening

*“This is typical of the North West, investment stops at Birmingham”  
(Flooding)*

# There is a balanced view about the use of sewer overflows and how they prevent flooding

When presented with the reasons for sewer overflows and the impact of not having them (i.e. flooding), most agreed that they were not ideal but necessary to keep people's homes safe

## The devastating impact of flood

- Across the groups there is high awareness of the impact of flooding through images they have seen in the media of places in the North West that have been affected
- Therefore they accept that the use of overflows is preferable to the alternative of sewer flooding

4 in every 10,000

- The statistic of sewer flooding was lower than expected
- Therefore concluding that overflows must be preventing sewer flooding events from happening more often

## The financial cost of floods

- Those in the business group and conventional ABC1s attempted to calculate the cost saving of using sewer overflows to prevent damage to people's properties
- With the cost of insurance and repairing any damage to public areas they believe that the economic value of using overflows is high

# What are spills and why do they happen?

# Although only part of the problem, most gravitate towards preventing blockages as a viable solution

I think/say

## Why do they spill?

I think we need education on blockages. I hadn't thought of the other two

## Blockages

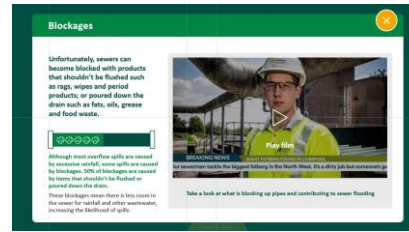
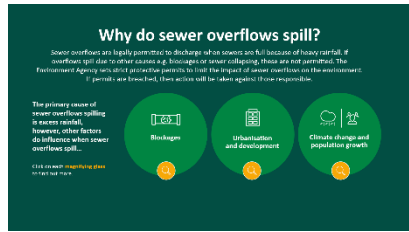
This is obviously a big problem. If we can solve this then maybe we won't need to do any work

## Urbanisation and development

There is a lot of development at the moment and I bet those greedy developers don't think about what they're doing to the local area

## Climate change

Climate change still feels foreign to me, I don't know what to do about it but it sounds like we need a new sewer system if the storms are going to get more extreme



I feel



I learn

Most of the problem is still related to blockages. I can do my part here. Developers and the government also have a part to play and need to sort out the other two issues which aren't going away

As I thought, blockages are a major problem. UU need to educate the public here so we can band together and get this fixed

Greedy developers need to be curtailed by UU and the government so that proper systems are put in place as our population inevitably grows


I understand that climate change is a problem but it feels too big to think about. I dismiss this and concentrate on the other two causes

# The causes of overflows are considered unacceptable and many would like to see action taken to prevent blockages and the impact of urbanisation

However, climate change and population growth are largely thought to be too big a problem for any individual to tackle

**Blockages**

Unfortunately, sewers can become blocked with products that shouldn't be flushed such as nappies, wipes and period products, or poured down the drain such as fats, oils, grease and food waste.



Although most sewer overflows are caused by excessive rainfall, some spills are caused by blockages. 50% of blockages are caused by items that shouldn't be flushed or poured down the drain.

It's not always possible to prevent blockages, but you can help to reduce the risk of spills by taking the following steps:

Take a look at what's blocking up pipes and consider how to avoid sewer flooding

**Urbanisation and development**


Gardens and other green spaces are often built on or surfaced over, this increases the amount of rain water running off into sewers, which therefore increases the frequency and volume of spills from sewer overflows.



More green spaces within the catchment area can help reduce the amount of rain water running off into the sewers, which helps to reduce the frequency and volume of spills from sewer overflows.

**Climate change and population growth**

Climate change and population growth also have a role to play in tackling overflow spills. Climate change is predicted to cause drier summers, which will affect our water supplies, but the frequency of heavy rainfall and storms is also predicted to increase, which could result in overflows spilling more often.



The more people there are, the more demand there is for water. As the population grows, the demand for water increases. This means that the amount of water that is used in homes and businesses increases. This can lead to a higher risk of sewer overflows, especially in densely populated areas such as our towns and cities.

As the climate changes, the amount of rain that falls will also change. This means that there will be more frequent and heavier rain, which can lead to more sewer overflows.

We forecast that if further action is not taken, the number of spills from overflows will increase by 13% over the next 25 years.

**Blockages**

Feels like the easiest win with some believing that preventing blockages would solve the problem

**Urbanisation and development**

A cause for anger as feels like 'greedy' developers are causing the problem leaving the ordinary customer to 'pick up the bill'

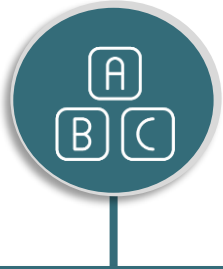
They do not feel that anything they can do on their own property will make a difference

**Climate change and population growth**

This feels like too big a problem to tackle and difficult to understand so many ignore this (including the environmentalist)

# Preventing **blockages** feels like the easiest way to prevent spills

After watching a video and reading the information, many believe that spills would no longer happen if more was done to prevent blockages



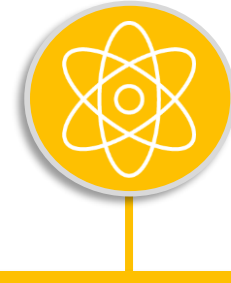
## Preventing blockages feels like an easy problem to tackle

- There is a clear cause and effect with fatbergs being a very visible consequence of improper disposal of waste
- There are simplistic solutions that feel attainable such as education around how to dispose of FOG and Rags and fines for those who do not comply



## It's a highly visible problem

- Many have seen their local waterways covered in litter but had not previously been aware that it may have come from the sewers
- Nearly all considered the danger of plastic in natural waterways and the damage that can do to wildlife



## Could solving blockages be the answer?

- Some believe that stopping blockages will solve the whole issue of overflows
- This view is particularly strong in conventional ABC1/C2DE and the Environmental groups

# Urbanisation is a cause for anger as local government and 'greedy' developers are blamed

This issue feels less easy to tackle but many feel that developers are given too much freedom to build without considering their impact on the existing communities

**The North West – how it defines itself**

Sense of Community

Distinct cultural identity

- Increasing development has been a cause of anger as it has changed the feel of community in a number of areas particularly in urban settings
- Learning that urbanisation is a cause of over spills angers many as they believe that developers are allowed to do what they want

- The loss of UNESCO World Heritage Status in Liverpool is an example of how development is not done sympathetically
- Many question what United Utilities can do to influence local government planning decisions and prevent 'reckless' developing

!

Their own contributions (natural drainage on their properties and collecting rain water) feel tiny when faced with large scale developments in their cities and towns

# Climate change and population growth are too big a problem to consider

There are concerns in general about what will happen in the North West with the increase in frequency of flooding events, but all feel helpless to act

Many choose to ignore and not engage with the challenge as it feels unsolvable with no clear solutions



Climate change is a complicated topic to understand with many across the groups only having a basic knowledge of what it means for the region



Those who do understand climate change and what it means for the weather are more likely to accept that development of the sewers is necessary due to no other tangible solution available

*“The climate change factor is something I haven't considered before, as it's a bit scientific and not something I've thought about, though of course more people creating waste makes sense”*  
(Conventional C2DE)

*“Climate change is serious cause for concern and I think we have to be accountable but as a lay person I have absolutely no idea how it can be altered or reversed”*  
(Conventional C2DE)

*“More needs to be done to increase capacity (for climate change weather events and the relentless population rise) I do not feel it is a sensible option to simply ignore these changes and allow additional pollution into our environment”*  
(Environmental)



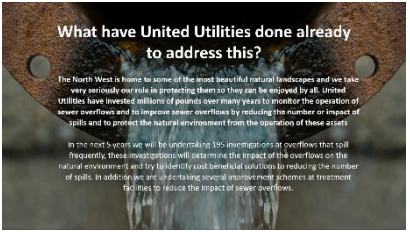
# What is being done to prevent spills

# Customers are pleased that UU are already investing in ways to prevent spills

## What is UU doing?

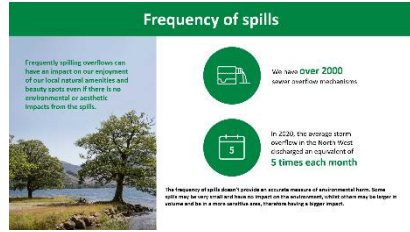
I think/say

It sounds like UU are doing what they can here. This is good



## Frequency of spills

This went a bit over my head but it sounds like they are discharging too often. How many of these overflows are being triggered?



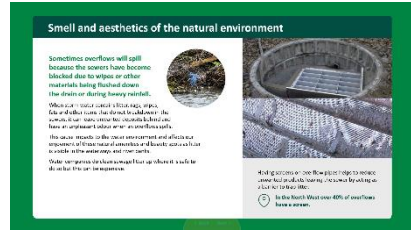
## Quality of water

That's a shame about the fish but its also important to keep the quality up because this water eventually gets given back to us



## Aesthetics

This is disgusting and needs fixed. This area is really important for peoples' mental health



## Recreational use

That's not great but I think if you are into that kind of thing, you have to be aware of the risks. I wouldn't partake in it myself anyway to be honest



I feel



I learn

I didn't know about all the good UU are doing in the background. I hope they keep this up and get other bodies like the government to help in these efforts

I may not have interpreted this correctly but it sounds like the overflows are going off too much. We need to stop this to help the environment

These overflows are killing the fish and damaging our natural habitats. We need to stop the blockages to protect the water quality

I now have a tangible idea of what 'polluting the waterways' will mean for me. It shows that we need to educate the public to stop flushing things they shouldn't

It's becoming riskier to be taking part in recreational swimming as a result of the overflows

# Many are pleased to learn that UU are investing in solutions but are surprised by the scale of the problem

It is reassuring that work is currently happening to improve the number of overflows, however many feel that the burden of cost should not fall on the consumer



## Great the UU are investing in solutions

Customers feel more positive towards United Utilities about the current investment but would like more done in the future to upgrade and future proof the network

*"I think this is great, I'd have expected United Utilities to tackle the issue in a manner of this sort. They have to protect our natural heritage which means so much to millions of people. The amount of overflow mechanisms is far too much for my liking"*  
(Conventional ABC1)



## Current spill frequency is too high

Sizing the problem made many across all groups want to see further solutions to reduce this in the future

*"I'm astounded there are 2000 overflow mechanisms and shocked that 5 on average discharged. I strongly believe if this information was widely known there would be a reduction. People would be more wary about what they flush and put down the sink"*  
(Rural)



## Reluctance to fund improvements

Willingness to pay for works is varied with many across the groups feeling that this should be funded by United Utilities, property developers and central government

*"This should be funded by Water Companies in conjunction with Government funding. I appreciate that some of the current sewer networks date back to the Victorian age, but this is not the fault of the consumer"*  
(Business)

# All of the impacts are considered to be unacceptable and most feel it is very important to find solutions



## Environment and water quality

Learning about the impact on local wildlife was emotive for many across the groups

They are particularly concerned about plastic entering the waterways (although fewer concerns about bacteria)

Those in urban locations already believe that their local waterways are likely polluted and would like to see improvements



## Smell and aesthetics

Many did not see this as a 'smell and aesthetics' issue (although some have noticed litter in their local waterways) but believe that by reducing how much litter ends up in the water would improve the quality

It is hard for them to consider that bacteria would still be an issue and that this is potentially more harmful for wildlife and humans



## Recreational water use

There is limited empathy for recreational users (unless they themselves use the water in this way)

However, some considered how children are not able to freely use natural waterways due to potential pollution

### **MOST COMPELLING:**

Explaining the impact on wildlife is very emotive and encouraged support for investment

### **SIMPLEST SOLUTION:**

Stopping litter from getting into the sewers feels like an easy win for many

### **LEAST IMPACTFUL:**

Many struggled to care about recreational users – impact on wildlife is a more compelling story

# Key information that customers require to understand the need for investment

Customers were exposed to a lot of content that isn't practical for the wider population – but a number of key points helped their understanding most

## Untied Utilities and what they do

- UU and the water cycle are not that well known even in groups that care about the environment
- Learning the basics is key to understanding overflows

## Introduction to sewer overflows

- Discovering that the North West has the most combined sewers is a cause of anger
- Overflows prevent flooding and keep their homes safe so are necessary

## What are spills and why do they happen?

- Preventing blockages feels like a tangible way to improve the situation
- However urbanisation and climate are out of the general public's hands

## What is being done to prevent spills

- Being made aware of work that is being carried out makes people feel more positive about UU
- The size of the problem is alarming

## What is the impact?

- The impact on wildlife

# Decision making

What are the desired outcomes after reading the information

# Recap of the options...

## Reduce the number of spills

Currently sewer overflows spill around 5 times on average a month in the North West.



Reduce number of spills to 40 a year

Reduce number of spills to 20 a year

Reduce number of spills to 10 a year

Reduce number of spills to zero

## Reduce aesthetic impact of overflows (litter and odour)

Sometimes overflows will spill because the sewers have become blocked due to wipes or other expected materials being flushed down the drain or during heavy rainfall. When storm water contains such 'unflushable' items this can result in sewer litter spilling to the water environment, spoiling the natural amenities and beauty spots as the litter is visible in the water and on riverbanks. UU tries to encourage customers to only flush the 3 P's (pee, poo and paper) to help prevent litter entering the sewers and causing blockages.



## Reduce impact on water quality and the environment

Research shows 47 river stretches in the North West (out of 499) where storm overflows are believed to be having an impact on water quality and therefore may negatively affect wildlife that depend on these rivers. Run-off from farmland and urban areas can also result in poor water quality.



## Reduce risk of users of recreational waters becoming unwell due to overflows

In the North West there are 29 designated Bathing Waters these are mostly on the coast like Blackpool, Morecambe and Southport but we also have 4 inland bathing waters on Windermere. These bathing waters are safe for people to swim and bathe in. United Utilities has invested millions of pounds to improve the water quality at these designated bathing waters, in addition, on our website we have an interactive map where you find information about water quality at designated bathing waters and potential risks to water quality from overflows.



Rain water runoff from farmland used for livestock grazing, spills from overflows and other sources can contain bacteria which could make bathers unwell. At designated bathing waters bacteria samples are taken to inform bathers of the water quality so that they can make an informed choice whether to use the facilities or not.

# After learning about sewer overflows and spills, each group expressed their priorities for investment and development

## Environmental

To have a short term solution to prevent litter entering water ways, and a long term solution to stop spills altogether.

**Willing to pay for screens but not willing to pay the full amount for zero spills**



## Flooding

Zero spills in the future but would prioritise improving aesthetics by preventing litter getting into the waterways

**Willing to contribute financially but believe that the government should be funding most of it**



## Business

Zero spills – although this is the most costly, once it is done the sewers will be fit for purpose

**Willing to contribute financially but would want most of the funding to come from United Utilities and/or government**

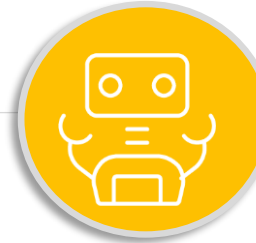


## Prior knowledge

## Future Bill Payers

Zero spills – although they are reluctant to pay for this. This options ensures that the sewers will be fit for purpose in the future

**Unwilling to contribute financially**



## Conventional ABC1

Ideally they would like zero spills and to reduce aesthetic impact however they are the most reluctant to pay, with some feeling that signage is the best approach

**The least likely to contribute – would accept the lower cost options of £5-£15 a year**



## Conventional C2DE

Zero spills is the main priority as it is the only option that provides a robust solution. They are reluctant to have their money spent on less effective approaches

**Most willing to contribute financially despite low incomes although they feel it is unfair**

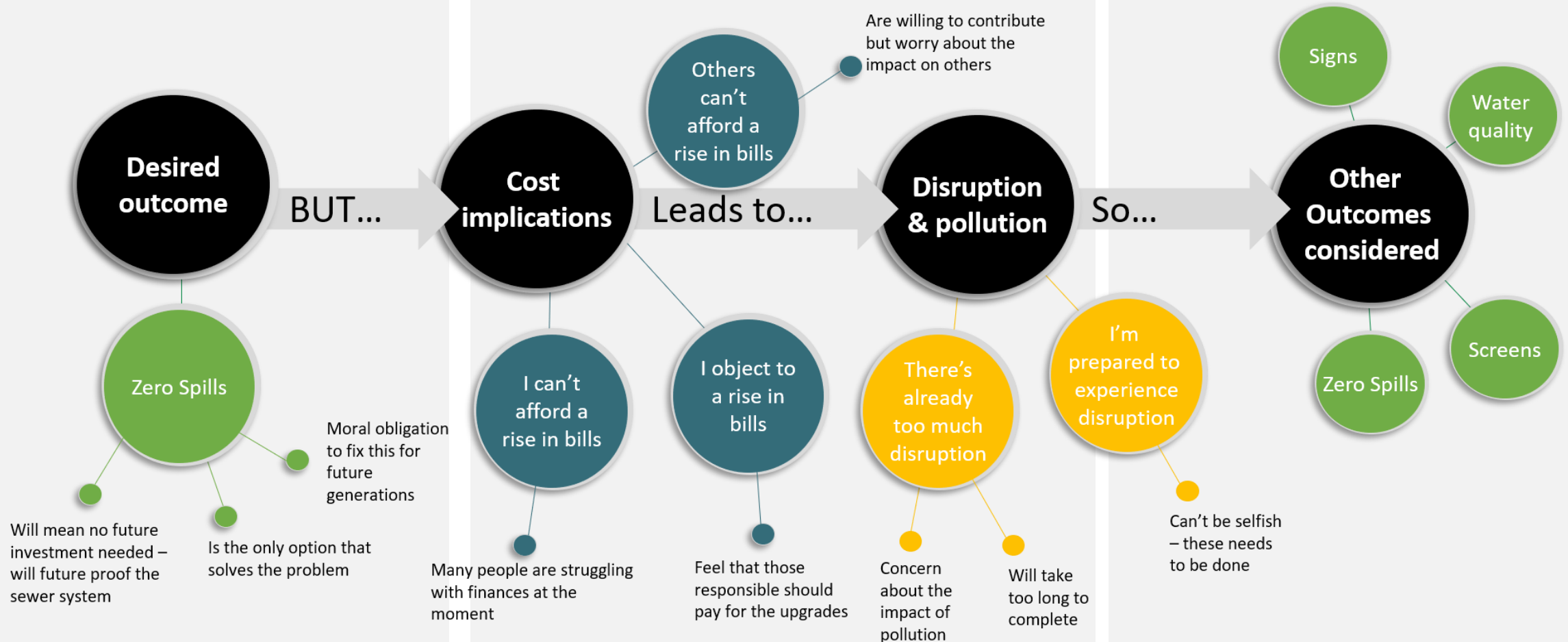


# Universally across all groups, participants know what the morally right decision is but the price to achieve this is too high for some

1. All feel that the best option and the morally right thing to do would be to ensure there are zero spills in the future

2. But not all are prepared for significant rises in their bills or for lots of disruption

3. This leads some to change their view on which outcome would be best





## Reduce the number of spills

Currently sewer overflows spill around 5 times on average a month in the North West.



Reduce number of spills to 40 a year	Reduce number of spills to 20 a year	Reduce number of spills to 10 a year	Reduce number of spills to zero
--------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	---------------------------------

## Appeal by segment

	Low	Med	High
Environmental	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green
Flooded	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green
Business	Dark Green	Dark Green	Light Grey
Future Bill Payer	Dark Green	Light Grey	Light Grey
Conventional ABC1	Dark Green	Light Grey	Light Grey
Conventional C2DE	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green

# The only option that solves the problem but the one that comes with the highest cost

## What is the thought process for those in favour?

- This is the only option guaranteed to work for the next generation and would future proof the sewer system for future weather events
- It would be one single project that when complete will solve all the issues associated with overflows
- Sustainable drainage appeals particularly to the environmental groups
- The cost is high, but when broken down into 12 months and considering the amount of work involved it is affordable for most working people

## What is their thought process for those against?

- The cost of the build is the main barrier – it is a significant amount of money on people's household bills when money is already tight
- The time the build will take will mean that some of the participants may not live to see the benefits – therefore it would take a more altruistic perspective for them
- There is already significant disruption in the North West region (particularly in the cities). Disruption on this scale would be huge and impact daily quality of life

## Reduce aesthetic impact of overflows (litter and odour)

Sometimes overflows will spill because the sewers have become blocked due to wipes or other expected materials being flushed down the drain or during heavy rainfall. When storm water contains such 'unflushable' items this can result in sewer litter spilling to the water environment, spoiling the natural amenities and beauty spots as the litter is visible in the water and on riverbanks. UU tries to encourage customers to only flush the 3 P's (pee, poo and paper) to help prevent litter entering the sewers and causing blockages.



## Appeal by segment

	Low	Med	High
Environmental	█	█	█
Flooded	█	█	█
Business	█	█	█
Future Bill Payer	█	█	█
Conventional ABC1	█	█	█
Conventional C2DE	█	█	█

## Is expected to improve water quality for wildlife by preventing plastics getting into the water

### What is the thought process for those in favour?

- Will visually look better, less litter in the natural waterways has to be beneficial to all
- Reduction in smells would mean that people who visit these areas can enjoy natural beauty spots more
- Will involve less disruption of most and requires less financial investment – there is also more willingness for consumers to pay for this as it is essentially a problem caused by the consumers

### What is their thought process for those against?

- It will not solve the root cause of spills and therefore can not be the only solution (although could be part of the overall solution)
- It doesn't future proof the sewer system and so is not sustainable in the long term
- There will still be bacteria in the water that can be harmful to wildlife and people – however this view was only considered by a couple of participants

## Reduce impact on water quality and the environment

Research shows 47 river stretches in the North West (out of 499) where storm overflows are believed to be having an impact on water quality and therefore may negatively affect wildlife that depend on these rivers. Run-off from farmland and urban areas can also result in poor water quality.



## Appeal by segment

	Low	Med	High
<b>Environmental</b>	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green
<b>Flooded</b>	Dark Green	Dark Green	Light Grey
<b>Business</b>	Dark Green	Dark Green	Light Grey
<b>Future Bill Payer</b>	Dark Green	Light Grey	Light Grey
<b>Conventional ABC1</b>	Dark Green	Light Grey	Light Grey
<b>Conventional C2DE</b>	Dark Green	Dark Green	Light Grey

# Would improve the environment but only in specific locations

## What is the thought process for those in favour?

- Has strong environmental benefits while leveraging peoples disgust for dirty water
- Promotes more natural ways to solve the issues which appeals to many, particularly those who are more interested in the environment
- Is relatively low cost and takes less time to implement than other options
- Would provide a targeted approach to areas that need investment the most

## What is their thought process for those against?

- It will not solve the route cause of spills and therefore can not be the only solution (although could be part of the overall solution)
- Only targeting some areas means that potentially everyone in the North West will experience higher bills without getting the benefits
- Would need transparency on which waterways would benefit – how would these get reported and what would it take for a waterway to qualify for treatment?

## Reduce risk of users of recreational waters becoming unwell due to overflows

In the North West there are 29 designated Bathing Waters these are mostly on the coast like Blackpool, Morecambe and Southport but we also have 4 inland bathing waters on Windermere. These bathing waters are safe for people to swim and bathe in. United Utilities has invested millions of pounds to improve the water quality at these designated bathing waters, in addition, on our website we have an interactive map where you find information about water quality at designated bathing waters and potential risks to water quality from overflows.

Rain water runoff from farmland used for livestock grazing, spills from overflows and other sources can contain bacteria which could make bathers unwell. At designated bathing waters bacteria samples are taken to inform bathers of the water quality so that they can make an informed choice whether to use the facilities or not.



# Would benefit water quality but benefits a specific group of people

## What is the thought process for those in favour?

- Improving the water quality would be beneficial for both recreational users and the natural world
- Being able to enjoy the natural waters would be beneficial for mental health
- Was considered important for children to be able to experience the natural waters without worry of illness

## Appeal by segment

	Low	Med	High
<b>Environmental</b>	Dark Green	Dark Green	Dark Green
<b>Flooded</b>	Dark Green	Dark Green	Light Grey
<b>Business</b>	Dark Green	Dark Green	Light Grey
<b>Future Bill Payer</b>	Dark Green	Light Grey	Light Grey
<b>Conventional ABC1</b>	Dark Green	Light Grey	Light Grey
<b>Conventional C2DE</b>	Dark Green	Dark Green	Light Grey

## What is their thought process for those against?

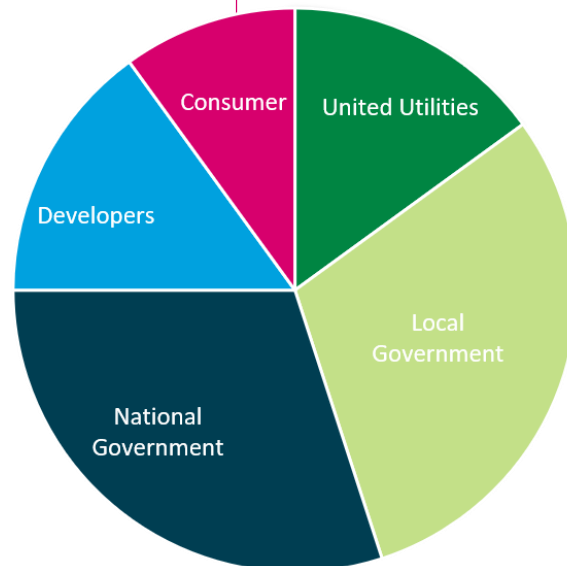
- It will not solve the route cause of spills and therefore can not be the only solution
- Positioning it as something that benefits recreational users makes it sound like not many people would benefit from this
- Unwillingness to pay for something that they may not see the benefit from (i.e. don't want to pay for someone else to go wild swimming)

# There is little appetite for increases to household costs therefore all costs to the customer need to be clear on who pays and why

## Who is to blame and who should pay?

Across all groups, the idea of higher household bills is not popular. They believe that this issue has been caused by government, made worse by developers and largely ignored by United Utilities – therefore the consumer should pay the least amount towards improvements

Proportion of who should fund the improvements  
*(qualitative assessment)*



**Consumers are prepared to see some of their household costs go towards this issue, particularly the cost of screens as litter is seen as an issue created by the general public**

**Other investments are thought to be something that is funded from government, United Utilities and developers who are seen as responsible for the current state of the sewers**

# By the end of the research, more were thinking about the environmental benefits as well as how the community benefits from improvements

## Environmental benefit

After learning about sewer overflows, more considered the environmental benefits and how that would benefit wildlife

Having good water quality and healthy ecosystems would lead to a thriving environment that can be enjoyed at a social level but also help to improve the appeal of the North West

## Community benefit

The community and social benefits of investing in the sewer network is still a powerful motivator

Many considered their responsibility to ensure future generations had better water quality and a healthier natural world

They would also like to ensure that with increasingly extreme weather, that the sewer system will be able to cope

## Personal benefit

The groups who were less engaged (Conventional ABC1, Some Business and FBP) considered the financial implications of investment to be too high

They would need full transparency of what funds are needed, who is contributed and what the personal benefits to them would be

They are less likely to be motivated by long term projects that they feel they may not benefit from (e.g. if they left the area) and that the impact on their day to day lives through disruption would be unbearable

# Final consideration

Creating a discussion about sewer overflows

# Whatever option is chosen, the public will need to be carefully consulted on this complex issue

Customers will need the following in order to understand and support any future development and/or rise in costs



## Awareness

Many had little or no awareness of how United Utilities operates or how sewer overflows are used

Being made aware of the basics increases appreciation for UU and improves perceptions of how they benefit the North West



## Education/information

The subject matter is complex and requires time to understand however they are key messages that help to encourage support for investment:

- Combined sewers
- The impact of climate change
- Impact on wildlife where spills occur



## Engagement

It is important feel that the cost for improvements will be shared and not just for the consumers to fund

The majority feel more engaged with the topic when they can see the benefits to the community so ensuring that messages of shared benefits are dialled up to gain support for investment programmes

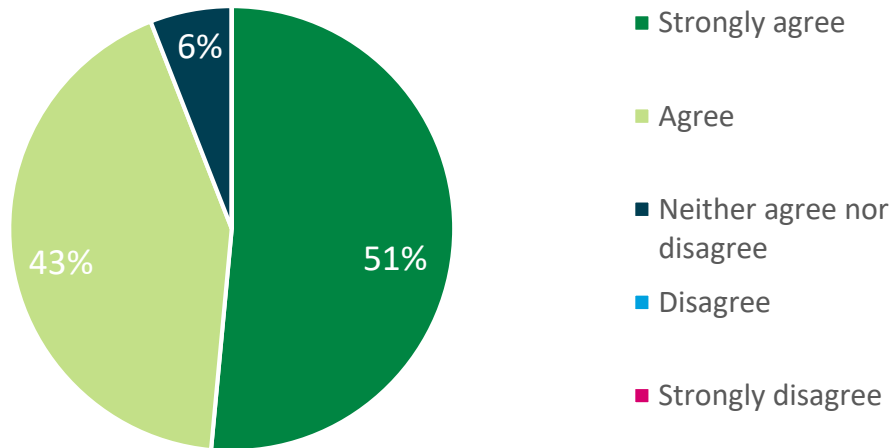


# Appendix

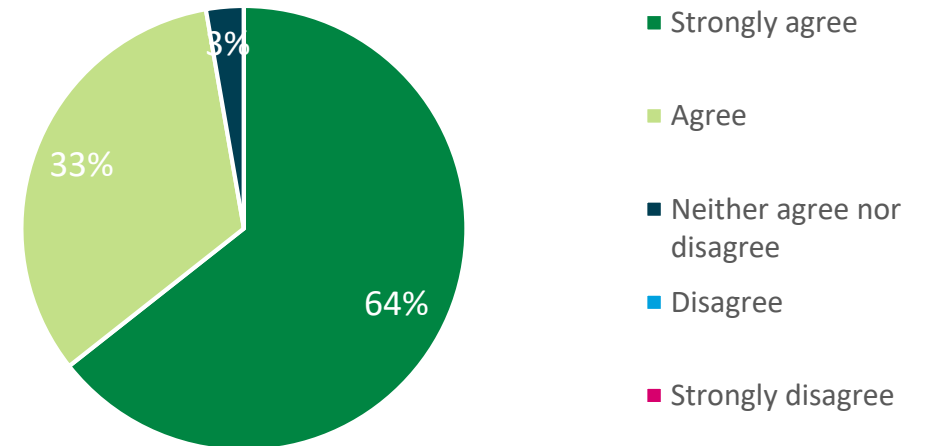
Participants' experience of taking part in this research

# All of our participants had a positive experience taking part in this research and believe it is important to ask their views on this topic

It has been good taking part in this research and sharing my views on this topic



It is important that United Utilities ask customers' views on these issues

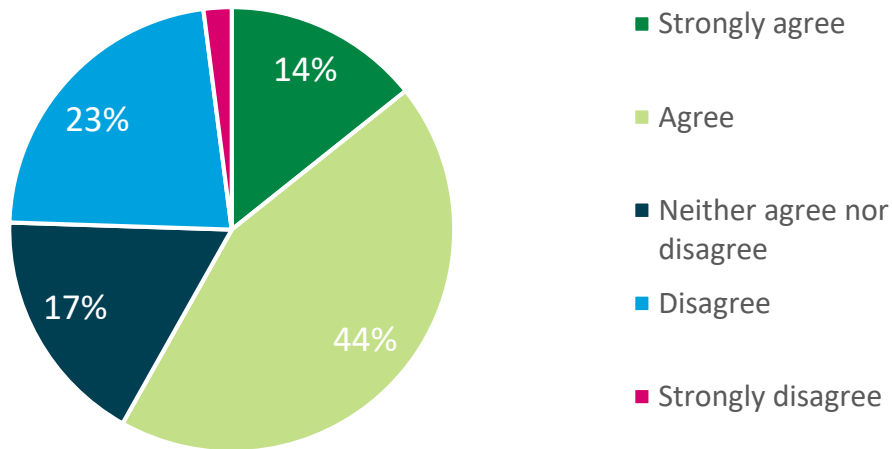


*How much do you agree with the statement 'it has been good taking part in this research and sharing my views on this topic?' N=69*

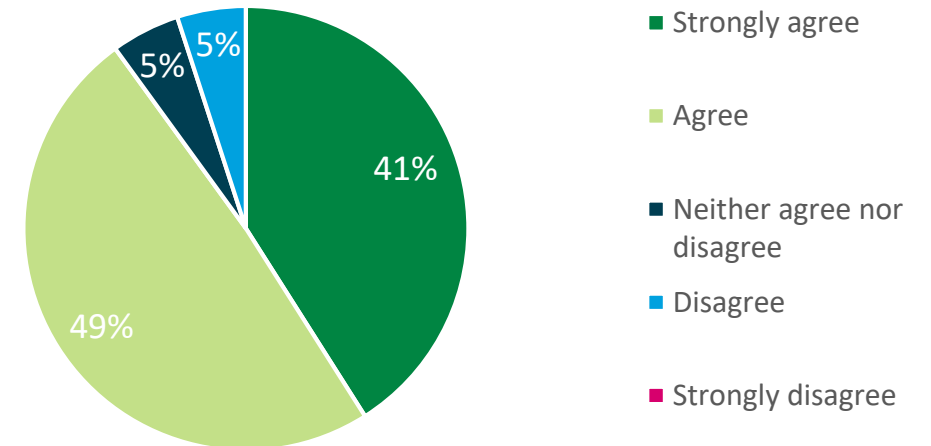
*How much do you agree with the statement 'It is important that United Utilities ask customer's views on these issues' N=69*

# Most agree that the topic is difficult but that they understood the information that was presented to them

It is difficult for customers to give informed opinions on these issues



I feel I understood the issue and the information presented to me



How much do you agree with the statement 'It is difficult for customers to give informed opinions on these issues?' N=69

How much do you agree with the statement 'I feel I understood the issue and the information presented to me' N=69

# Thank you

To find out more about this research,  
please contact **Shy Sharma**:



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