

## **Message from Lee Wood**

Vice Chair, *The Ver Valley Society*

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Good evening everyone. It's good to see some friendly faces in here tonight.

For those who aren't familiar, my name is Lee, I wear many eco hats but tonight I'm talking to you as vice chair of the Ver Valley Society.

I've been invited to say a few words about the importance of collaboration and action. I've seen this film three times now and on each occasion, I leave with a different overriding emotion. Anger, sadness but also of hope. One thing is for sure, science fact is just as scary as science fiction.

Our precious river has been through the mill of late. It's the ecological heartbeat of our city and yet exactly 7 years ago today, it ran dry as a result of weather patterns - along with over abstraction, under appreciation and poor management from the water companies.

There are more active volcanoes on this planet than there are chalk streams, and ours was in danger. Habitat depletion and the millions of invertebrates, animals, fauna and flora that rely on the Ver were experiencing the devastating impact of those who put greed before growth. Sewage before Sustainability.

Those who ignored the science and the evidence.

We came up with an idea to show the water companies, the public and the country that action was needed. We felt on this occasion, that talk was cheap. We needed something more. To hold to account those that who believed it appropriate to take more than was needed and to those who replaced it with effluent.

We created a protest in Verulamium Park. Nearly 400 people all dressed in blue, took their place on the riverbed where the water once stood. Councillors from both district and county levels, land owners, businesses, schools, charities, faith groups and even a passionate, outspoken Irish music star joined concerned members of the public to lend their voice to our rallying call.

From an idea on paper to the event itself - all of this unfolded in just 1 week.

It created national headlines. It also caused a major headache for those who took our precious water source for granted. The fallout on social media was huge. It altered mindsets and affected legislation. Whilst the gravelly ranting undertones of Feargal Sharkey may have obtained column inches and airtime, it was the scrutiny and embarrassment at boardroom level - caused by the voters and bill payers of this country that really established the catalyst for change.

Fast forward to today and after countless meetings, emails, discussions, meetings about meetings, networking, events like this, social media campaigns and lots of

choice language, Affinity Water has agreed to reduce environmental abstraction in the River Ver catchment by 9.01 million litres per day.

When you find the courage to use your voice, it has the power to positively inspire and change the lives of others. We keep getting told that those on this planet have a job to ensure a greener earth for future generations - but wouldn't it be nice if we were able to enjoy the benefits ourselves.

Speaking of those future generations. My daughter is a keen environmentalist. She and her friends are planet protectors, climate champions. They have started conversations with other schools to help establish a network of young, inquisitive green minds. The hope is to build a proactive community of progressive campaigners, question askers and problem solvers who aren't afraid to challenge and defend those to continue to promote the importance of using your voice. "But what if people don't listen Daddy?" she says.

My message to you here tonight is the same as I told her - well, then maybe we just shout a little louder.

They will listen. Then they'll have to act.

By you just being here, it shows investment to change already. I've seen first hand the amazing efforts that go into the countless eco projects around the district.

If there's one takeaway from this evening it should be the value in collaboration and communication. The issues we face are many and they are real. I hope you've taken the opportunity to talk to someone you've never met, had those unspoken discussions, share those untapped ideas, so now let's put all the passion into action. What was achieved in that empty riverbed back in 2019 was a result of conversations like that.

In reality, the only way change comes is when you lead by example. Please, do not underestimate the value of your actions.

Let **THIS** film fuel **YOUR** fire for action and change.