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NEW WHITE SHIRTS

WELCOME TO THE NEW FACE OF BUSINESS. IN NEW WHITE SHIRTS, **MICHAEL TAYLOR** LOOKS AT THE BUSINESSES THAT ARE FUNDAMENTALLY CHANGING THE WAY IN WHICH THEY WORK, INCORPORATING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY INTO THE HEART OF THEIR OPERATIONS. HE ALSO EXPLORES THE WAY IN WHICH SOME OF OUR LARGEST COMPANIES ARE STRIVING TO BE POSITIVE MEMBERS OF THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY. **TREVOR BATES** THEN LOOKS AT FUTURE BUSINESSES THAT ARE DEVELOPING OUT OF OUR UNIVERSITIES, AND AT THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF THE REGION'S ENVIRONMENTAL TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES.

SOMETHING IS SHIFTING IN THE WORLD OF BUSINESS. COMPANIES ARE COMING UNDER EVER-GREATER PRESSURE, FROM WITHIN AS WELL AS WITHOUT, TO TAKE SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS MORE SERIOUSLY. IN ENGLAND'S NORTHWEST THERE ARE SOME LEADING PLAYERS IN THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY.

WORDS BY MICHAEL TAYLOR.

Most people in the UK hadn't even heard of Enron until its dramatic collapse grabbed headlines around the world at the tail end of 2001. The crash of the energy trading company exposed a myriad conspiracy of greed, of looking the other way and of corporate duplicity. The final humiliating denouement of Enron and its executives, complete with seedy stories of shredded documents and huge bonus payments, has shocked corporate America to its core.

But for the grace of God, good planning and sheer luck, the UK has not suffered as humiliating and shocking a collapse as Enron. The fact that one of the world's biggest accountancy firms, Andersen, also collapsed as its complicity in the debacle was exposed only highlights the seriousness with which rules on corporate governance and corporate social responsibility are now held.

But the Enron affair is of a different character. True enough, even before the present fallout from the Texas-based giant, you could point to a legion of examples of companies all over the world who failed to take societal concerns into account and then fell foul of well-orchestrated campaigns about their business performance. One of the most notable examples of this has been Shell, which faced a barrage of negative publicity about both the disposal of the Brent Spar oil platform in the North Sea and subsequently about its conduct in Nigeria. The campaigns against the oil giant resulted in boycotts, lost sales and declining profits. It prompted a shift in attitudes in boardrooms right across the world - "where's our Brent Spar" executives would ask, forcing them to reassess what it means to be a socially and environmentally responsible organisation.

It has thrust corporate social responsibility to the top of the corporate agenda, forcing businesses to justify their activities at every level. The Confederation of British Industry's director general Digby Jones knows this. In June 2002, he mounted a strong defence of the reputation of British companies following concern about a rise in anti-business sentiment. He accepts that business must shoulder some responsibility for negative attitudes. He called on the business community to redouble efforts to "demonstrate the fundamental importance of socially-inclusive wealth creation."

Sustainable business practices represent more than just good corporate citizenship and a fireguard around your reputation; sustainability pays real dividends. On London markets the new FTSE4Good Index series has been designed to track the performance of large companies dedicated to high standards of environmental performance, human rights and stakeholder engagement. Backtesting shows that the top 50 of these companies, tracked through the FTSE4Good UK 50, would have outperformed the conventional FTSE 100 by 15% over the last five years. The Dow Jones Global Sustainability Index (DJGSI) similarly tracks the performance of the world's most

'sustainably-managed' companies. From 1994 to 2000 the companies on the DJGSI would have outperformed the standard Dow Jones Global Index by 15% per annum were the index to have been created seven years ago. Sustainability means good business, in every sense.

There are businesses in England's Northwest that not only answer the questions before they are even posed, but they set the very standards of good practice and good citizenship that others follow and copy.

One pre-eminent force behind corporate social responsibility is a particular treasure of the Northwest, the Co-operative movement. It has left a legacy of social responsibility based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity; Co-operators also believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others. One of the guiding co-operative principles specifies that 'co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.'

Paul Burke is the social accountability manager at the Co-operative Insurance

BRENT SPAR?

Society in Manchester. His work is vital in assessing the secondary effects of the business on the wider community and driving new initiatives to make the Society a relevant business with strong social credentials. He questions some of the very notions of how business philanthropy is practised and how companies really engage in communities.

"Philanthropy has been in existence for many years, but has been evolving and changing to meet the needs of today's customers, businesses and society, leading to what we now call community involvement. We live in a sceptical world, full of mistrust, where customers are wary of any organisation that appears to be giving 'out of the goodness of their heart'.

"But is this really the basis of community involvement? It is in part a positive and community spirited activity for any organisation to be involved in and can help a business to build relationships with the local community, improve employee morale and build reputation, as well as helping the organisation to feel good about having put something back into the community, but this is only part of the story.

"Apply the right strategy to any community involvement programme and this provides a solid business case from which to work. The starting point of any community involvement activity should be to look at the needs that exist within society and at the issues which cost the business money, where the overlaps exist is where the community involvement aspects of any social accountability programme should sit."

Burke explains that one of the key issues facing his company is drug addiction and drug related theft; they cost the insurance industry an estimated £723 million each year. It is with this in mind that the Co-operative Insurance Society (CIS) supports drug addiction charity, Addaction. Burke says: "By supporting this charity we are providing help where it is needed the most. At times we have faced criticism for our support but we cannot afford to ignore the fact that people who take drugs cost our business. This is a serious problem and by helping to address this issue, we are in effect helping our business, the insurance industry as a whole, policyholders, the local community and drug addicts."

Burke also urges staff at the Society to get involved in community projects, be it volunteering or mentoring. "The support of our employees underpins our entire community involvement programme. Their commitment secures the programme's effectiveness and they are important ambassadors of the schemes. The volunteering carried out by staff members means that CIS 'donated' more than £128,000 worth of employee's salaries in support of good causes over the last twelve months."

Projects like these have led to Burke taking on greater responsibility for developing corporate social responsibility programmes. He has been appointed as a director of the

Corporate Responsibility Group (CRG), an organisation made up of 56 of the UK's leading companies, all of whom are committed to adopting a social, ethical and environmentally responsible approach to business practice and have a strong track record in developing corporate social responsibility initiatives.

"I hope to be able to share with colleagues our experiences in CIS and the wider co-operative movement and convince those outside the Group that corporate social responsibility is of moral importance and a vital business necessity," says Paul Burke. And he'll continue to be responsible for pulling all aspects of CIS's Social Accountability Programme together and ensuring that the objectives and commitments made by the Society are on target to meet the deadlines set out in the Social Report.

Elsewhere around the region United Utilities, an energy supplier, is at the forefront of social programmes. Engagement in wide-ranging environmental and social programmes, and development of lasting community partnership initiatives form a key part of the Group's business decision-making. The company has also been prominent in the field of environmental and social reporting, winning several major awards culminating in the company being ranked 12th by the United Nations in a study of the world's top corporate citizens.

United Utilities was one driving force behind a Northwest-wide programme developed to gauge the environmental and social performance of the Northwest's leading private, public and voluntary sector organisations: Evolve Towards Sustainability.

Launched by the Environment Minister, the Rt Hon Michael Meacher MP, in December 1998, it is a partnership programme led by Sustainability Northwest and the Northwest Business Leadership Team, sponsored by

Pilkington plc, the Co-operative Bank and Biffaward. The main objective of the Programme is to celebrate excellence in environmental and social performance. Organisations participating in Evolve engage in a process of self-assessment that enables them to determine their strengths and identify areas for improvement. The scope of the Evolve programme covers environmental performance; how organisations in the region respond to the needs of both internal and external stakeholders; and how social and environmental responsibility can be balanced with economic performance.

Since its launch, the Programme has recruited some of the region's largest organisations, and these are now involved in assessing their corporate social and environmental responsibility and benchmarking their progress against each other and sector examples of best practice.

Against this seemingly positive backdrop, there are pressures building within government for greater regulation of corporate social responsibility, a policy drive that is resisted at every turn by the myriad of organisations representing the business community. A private member's bill on corporate responsibility was put before parliament by Labour MP Linda Perham that would make companies publish environmental and social impact reports each year. "We do not support a mandatory approach and believe that a one-size-fits-all policy is not possible," was the response from the CBI, but there is a recognition that to fend off future bids to compel them to audit socially, businesses need to sharpen up their act.

But there are other pressures being brought to bear on business: falling share prices, heightened competition and increasing regulation. Corporate social responsibility has to come from the heart and involve a root and branch acceptance of the core principles. It has to run through a company like a cheeky message through a stick of Blackpool rock. It's not just a tick in a box, it has to represent a new force in modern capitalism, or it is nothing.

And it's worth remembering that one of the greatest recent supporters of social responsibility in corporate America was an energy company from Texas called Enron.

WHERE'S OUR

Swampy in the corner?
The undercover yoghurt-weaver?
The quiet revolutionary with a
heart that bleeds and a rather
natty pair of bicycle clips?
Ditch the clichés and set the
stereotypes aside - a new kind
of executive is climbing up the
corporate ladder and bringing
sustainability into the boardroom
of England's Northwest. Enter the

NEW WHITE SHIRTS.

INTERVIEWS BY STEVE CONNOR. IMAGES BY TRACEY GIBBS.

“I am delighted Littlewoods
are with the
leaders in
the field of
corporate social
responsibility -
I feel proud that
my company
understands the
importance of
sustainability
because it really
matters for all
of us.”

Sarah Barlow
Ethical Auditor
Littlewoods.





“We’re serious about social and environmental issues at CIS and it’s one of the reasons I feel so at home in the organisation. Our commitment to reporting - and acting-on our corporate performance in these areas is more than PR gloss, it sits at the heart of the way we want to do business in the future..”

Jennie Gibbons
Social Accountability Team
CIS.



“It was one of the main reasons I joined United Utilities in the first place - United Utilities’ long-standing commitment to schemes that provide a real benefit to the community it serves.”

Steve Chapman,
United Utilities.

CORPORATE

Every good campaign has a Geoffrey Piper.

Blessed with skills of diplomacy and determination in equal measure, the chief executive of the Northwest Business Leadership Team (NWBLT) has notched up an impressive range of achievements in the region since the Team was formed in 1992.

Piper recognises above all that every business, no matter how small or large, has an impact on the communities in which it operates. Impacts can occur through the recruitment and training of employees or via the purchasing and promotion of products and services. At the same time, the decline of traditional industries over recent years has caused a range of community-based social problems such as poverty and unemployment, which often exacerbate other social issues.

The roots of the Team lie in the aftermath of the riots that took place in the Toxteth area of Liverpool in 1981. Set against a backdrop of one of the most deprived parts of a city in rapid decline, the riots were amongst the worst ever seen on mainland Britain and shocked ordinary people to their core. Piper, then the senior partner of accountants Deloitte in Liverpool was instrumental in bringing business leaders and community groups together to look at practical solutions. "Some serious thinking went on back then that brought together some of the leaders in the business community. We realised that a strategic plan for the Northwest could help the region achieve a great deal," he reflects.

By 1993 Piper was key in bringing together the public and private sectors to form the NWBLT, formally launched that year by the Prince of Wales in Blackburn. The Team targeted five projects that included bids for the Olympic Games; regeneration in Hulme and Moss Side in Manchester; and the establishment of environmental best practice, which involved the formation of an environment action group. The group laid down the requirement for all companies in the team to adopt and actively implement an environmental policy.

The NWBLT now brings together a group of the most influential business leaders in the region to address key strategic issues affecting the well being of the Northwest and the quality of life of its citizens. The team works closely with the Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) and the Northwest Regional Assembly (NWRA) to improve key aspects of the region's competitiveness (such as skills and communication) and the marketing of the region's assets. Indeed, those bodies have subsequently adopted many of its functions. The team also plays a significant role in promoting best practice in social inclusion and sustainable development through its member's corporate community investment activities and commitments.

What the NWBLT has achieved, however, is all the more impressive when you consider it was formed in the era before extensive initiatives to take social exclusion and regeneration as a policy priority.

"Once we had our strategy, we used it relentlessly to float through ideas which eventually led to the formation of Sustainability Northwest," he says, referring to the region's business-led, sustainable development organisation.

The election of a Labour government in the UK has sought to involve businesses in programmes or initiatives to address many of the social problems occurring in local communities. For example, the government's Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and New Deal for Communities, all seek to involve the private sector. In addition, the adoption of corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies by many companies, and the increasing use of the private sector to deliver products and services that were previously the preserve of the public sector, have led to a proliferation of corporate community partnerships.

In the Northwest several companies have spearheaded their own initiatives, many rooted in their own ability to influence events within their immediate sphere. The key factor is the recognition of a problem, and an assessment of where the company can be most effective. The achievements are impressive.

The Co-operative Bank, for instance, is working in partnership with the innovative Community Foundation for Greater Manchester to set up the 'You want it - You got it' fund to achieve sustainable, long-term improvements to the lives of young people in the Greater Manchester region.

The fund is giving grants of £500 to up to 20 youth-based community projects such as the Wellfield project in Bolton, Greater Manchester. Here, a group of teenagers has turned a derelict house on a run-down estate into a much needed community centre, providing services such as a crèche and youth centre, giving the estate a greater sense of community and leading to a drop in the incidence of petty crime.

COMMUNITARIANS

The founders of the project will use the grant to fund training in outdoor pursuits so that they can provide kids on the estate with expanded opportunities. In addition to the grants, recipients are given training provided by Weston Spirit and the Greater Manchester Council for Voluntary Organisations.

Part of the Co-operative Bank's 'Customers Who Care' programme, the initiative follows a 2001 campaign with customers to combat youth poverty. Deciding to focus on child poverty in specific deprived areas in Greater Manchester, its consideration was not how much to give, but how to give most effectively. The bank found an

links with the communities in which it operates. In 2000/01, Kellogg's community investment totalled a £850K programme of cash donations, employee time and gifts in-kind.

It has provided core funding and representation at board level to the Moss Side and Hulme Community Development Trust and Old Trafford Community Development Project, thus enabling local people to be involved in the regeneration of their own communities, and has forged a

sale through their warehouse outlet network. Littlewoods donates 10 per cent of BDF Newlife's products. Littlewoods also works closely with the national charity In-Kind Direct, which offers products to other registered charities through a specialised brochure. Through the charity, Littlewoods has donated a significant amount of merchandise to a range of charities over the past 12 months.

United Utilities (UU), which operates water and electricity utilities internationally,

ITS CONSIDERATION WAS NOT HOW MUCH TO GIVE, BUT HOW TO GIVE MOST EFFECTIVELY

intelligent solution in the Community Foundation, part of a growing national network of umbrella charities that form channels for giving to local community projects and charities.

Simon Williams, head of corporate affairs at the Co-operative Bank says the main priority is to match ideas with ambition. "We originally commissioned research to discover the views of 200 young people living in deprived areas of Manchester and Brighton. The researchers met with talented and creative youngsters who had big ideas and aspirations but who felt very much alienated from the system and neglected at a local level."

Says Nick Massey, Chief Executive of the Community Foundation for Greater Manchester: "You want it - You got it", is a pioneering initiative that demonstrates how effective a community involvement programme can be. By giving training alongside funding we are empowering these young people, giving them a real sense of responsibility."

Kellogg's, which has its European corporate headquarters in Manchester, believes 'that many of the complex social problems facing people and communities cannot be resolved without business participation'. As such, the company has become a prominent player in corporate social responsibility and, in particular, has forged strong

strong relationship with the national charity Rathbone, which provides training and support for young adults, particularly those with learning difficulties. Kellogg's has supported the cost of Rathbone's Special Education Advice Line for the last three years.

Part of the mission of the Liverpool-based retail group Littlewoods plc relates to 'being a responsible corporate citizen that takes an active part in improving the quality of life in the communities we and our customers live and work in.' In 2000/01, Littlewood's total contribution to community investment was £2.5 million. This figure comprised cash donations and 'in kind' support, such as surplus products, employees' time and the use of company resources. Littlewoods community investment focuses on regeneration, charity work, mentoring and in-kind giving.

In 2000/01, Littlewoods gave £1.4m (cost value) of product to BDF Newlife, the national birth defects charity. BDF Newlife repairs and de-brands company products for

recognises that because of its size and the nature of the products and services provided, the company 'inevitably has an impact on the communities in which it operates'. During 2000/01, UU's community investment amounted to over £2.8 million. In order to address the environmental impacts of its activities, UU has developed a range of community-based environmental programmes and initiatives. These include the Eden Rivers Trust programme, the Cumbria Broadleaves project and the Fazackerley Reed Beds initiative.

Many of these projects exist in the realm of grace and favours. The projects undoubtedly do sterling work; the biggest challenge for the Northwest is to ensure that the benefits and legacies of such projects are understood right through a company and amongst other business leaders. This is, partly, where the Northwest Business Leadership Team comes in: the region indeed is lucky to have Geoffrey Piper, and lucky to have some fine examples of corporate community partnerships. Luck isn't all you need, though.

DOING BUSINESS IS ABOUT MORE THAN PILING IT HIGH, SELLING IT CHEAP AND POCKETING THE CASH. THAT'S THE MESSAGE COMING OUT OF THE BOARDROOMS OF ENGLAND'S NORTHWEST, WHERE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS ARE BECOMING STANDARD PRACTICE FOR SOME OF OUR LARGEST CORPORATIONS.

WORDS BY MICHAEL TAYLOR.

“The wind industry that we could service from England’s Northwest will be worth £3 billion by 2010 - that means new jobs and new businesses developing out of clean, sustainable energy.”

Chris Shearlock
Renewable Energy Business
Development Manager
Envirolink Northwest

CREATIVE ENERGIES

Few of the facilities on Manchester University’s sprawling campus can claim a better enterprise pedigree than the Zochonis Building. On this hallowed ground Tom Kilburn and Sir Freddie Williams did their pioneering work on the first stored-memory computer and Eric Laithwaite of linear motor fame passed through its portals.

Today the former electrical engineering building hums with a new creative energy as the first intake of 31 students on Manchester Science Enterprise Centre’s (MSEC) groundbreaking Master of Enterprise programme learn the business essentials of converting high-technology concepts into survivable companies.

Centre director, Professor David Auckland, sees the £4.7m MSEC project as the intermediate layer between formal education and the ‘business incubator’. The incubator concept was born out of his previous incarnation as founder and moving spirit of Campus Ventures, a university project that has successfully nurtured 85 business start-ups in six years, 86 per cent of which are still in existence.

Down in the smartly refurbished basement setting of MSEC’s Business Creation Centre postgraduates are given a desk, phone and computer and exposed to entrepreneurial training and mentoring designed to make them and their chosen technologies ‘oven-ready’ for the incubation stage. Auckland calls it “a laboratory where you test enterprise”.

All the projects are speculative but he thinks that up to 50 per cent will end up in the commercial arena. Some of those undergoing germination offer innovative solutions to environmental problems such as manganese-based absorbent balls - snappily branded as ‘mangoballs’ - for removing heavy metal pollutants from water; systems for monitoring waste; poison-eating bacteria and a novel method of plugging spent oil wells.

Once they have obtained their ‘M.Ent’ degrees Auckland expects - and indeed hopes - the most enterprising of his proteges will progress into the region’s growing incubator network in which Campus Ventures is becoming a major player.

Incubators feeding off and into growth industries like bioscience and multimedia, closely linked to the strong university research base, are a key element of a new, wide-ranging regional economic strategy to boost competitiveness and quicken the pace of business formation. Start-up rates in the Northwest are increasing, as is the percentage of those surviving at least three years (58.5 per cent), but on both counts the region performs below the UK national average.

By late summer four incubators will have been established to capitalise on innovation-rich industries. The focus in South Cumbria is on marine and offshore technologies; in Burnley on aerospace and IT; in Bolton on performance textiles, and at Westlakes Science Park in Cumbria, on environmental technologies and services. Incubators will be positioned within seven other industrial clusters supplementing similar facilities in the eight mainstream Northwest universities.

This rush to open incubators has raised fears among grant-giving bodies like the Northwest Development Agency (NWD) - a principal funder of these projects under its cluster development programme - about who will populate them. Are incubators, the question

goes, a fine idea in theory but scuppered in practice by a serious lack of driven, research-led entrepreneurs? It’s a concern Auckland is quick to acknowledge.

“This is why those of us in the world of business creation have established the MSEC. The first intake is just the tip of a very big iceberg that will start to fill these incubators. It’s unfair to plunge young people straight into the incubation process when they’ve had no experience of the commercial world. It’s also inefficient because the incubator has to spend a lot of time and money on them before they get to the front line of commercial activity.”

Four departments within Manchester University and UMIST are pioneering the 12-month Masters of Enterprise programme and another five across all four Manchester universities will join in September 2002. Liverpool is also set to join this new enterprise bandwagon. “What we have done in a curious sort of way is draw business creation and technology transfer into a formal educational setting. That’s never been done before anywhere else in the world”, says Auckland.

David Auckland’s M.Ent programme will be just one component part of a project that is looking to take entrepreneurial activity into the heart of the Northwest’s disadvantaged areas. North Manchester Business Park is an important economic driver for the regeneration of East Manchester, where the loss of traditional manufacturing has left the area suffering from depopulation and decay.

AS ESTABLISHED BUSINESSES GET TO GRIPS WITH SUSTAINABILITY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY, ATTENTION IS BEING REFOCUSSED ON THE ROLE THAT SMALLER, FASTER-MOVING BUSINESSES AND ENTREPRENEURS CAN PLAY IN MAKING REGIONAL REGENERATION A REALITY.

WORDS BY TREVOR BATES. IMAGES BY TRACEY GIBBS.

...AND CLEAN TECHNOLOGIES

The project will integrate MANCAT, a local Further Education provider, into the enterprise culture alongside postgraduate research in Information Technology, technology transfer and incubation facilities. The intention is to give people from deprived local communities the aspiration, skills and vocational qualifications to compete for the thousands of new jobs expected on the park.

Catherine Potter, Managing Director of Campus Ventures who will take a fifth of the space in the 100,000 sq. ft. ICON building for incubation purposes, is anxious to avoid a situation where most of the jobs are taken by people from affluent commuter suburbs and the park has little or no economic impact on those living close by.

During a fact-finding drive around the area recently Potter was left in no doubt from a graffiti message - "North Manchester Business Park - making fat cats fatter and local people homeless" - that, for some people, the park is a political issue. She believes that provision of a social incubation service for MANCAT students on the same location would help to meet local needs.

"The area is badly provided for in terms of basic services but we have to replenish this sector from the inside. If you simply import them you are not doing what is intended - rejuvenating East Manchester."

Salford University's enterprise activities, which have generated 35 start-ups in two years, already have a distinct community bias. Money-Line, for example, sprang out of a research programme linked to the concept of a community bank and has been working effectively in one of the city's neediest areas. It provides affordable loans for those who cannot gain access to mainstream commercial finance and is expanding into rural areas.

Until recently the UK has had few mechanisms for bringing entrepreneurs with good ideas but no capital or security into business. Northwest universities have shown how quickly this can change - often with the enthusiastic backing of business 'angels' and venture capitalists.

Bioscience is a good case in point. Not only is Manchester Innovation's 75,000 sq. ft. bio-incubator fully occupied, but two of the resident companies, Renovo which is developing wound-healing treatments and Intercytex, a tissue repair start-up, have each won backing of £8 million from the venture capital market.

UMIST Ventures (UVL), the exploitation arm of UMIST, has also built an impressive reputation for bringing lab-discoveries to the marketplace. During the past two years it has identified 150 developed ideas with commercial prospects and is currently working with 20 spin-out companies.

One promising newcomer, Gentronix, has developed a fundamentally new and innovative detection system for cancer-causing chemicals. Chemicals that cause cancer are known as genotoxins because they damage a cell's genetic material (DNA). Gentronix's new technology is a superior, cheaper and faster alternative to existing tests and recently won backing of £250,000 from a private investor.

UMIST has a strong tradition of problem-solving in the energy industries with research groups focusing on improved fuel efficiency in cars, fuels for the future, climate change, environment-monitoring and clean technologies in manufacturing. Often this expertise has been transferred into spin-out companies.

Two other separate regional initiatives involving EA Technology - a Capenhurst-based consultancy - and a group within Manchester University are underway to develop micro Combined Heat and Power (CHP) technology for domestic homes based on the Stirling heat engine.

Supplied as 'drop-in' replacements for existing boilers, the new systems, according to a recent study, could achieve savings of up to 30 per cent on the typical domestic fuel bill and annual reductions of 1 million tonnes of carbon equivalent by the year 2010 based on 250,000 installations.

EA Technology has been running field trials with 20 units in houses in Chester on behalf of a UK utility and hopes these

"Mangoballs are a low cost, low energy way of removing precious metals and toxic, heavy metals from solutions they could make a real impact in clean-ups worldwide."

Alex Marshall M.Ent
University of Manchester

can be extended this winter to include several hundred units. It claims early results are "very promising". Apart from providing hot water and central heating, the gas-driven engine can produce about £200 of free electricity.

"A lot of environmental technologies cost money but the beauty of micro CHP is that it saves money. It's also an extremely cost effective way of saving carbon," says programme manager Jeremy Harrison. He expects commercial production to start within two years.

The trials are being closely watched by Envirolink, a non-profit making organisation contracted by NWDA to stimulate growth in the region's environmental technologies and services sector. Over 700 companies work in the sector, generating sales of £1.3 billion and employing 24,000.

Richard Pearce, an Envirolink board director and former chairman, believes micro CHP epitomises the sector's potential for sustainable wealth creation. "There is a golden opportunity to get this technology into the wider marketplace and ideally get these units manufactured in the Northwest."

Jackie Seddon, Chief Executive of Envirolink, sees this and other links between business innovation and higher education as offering a real key to sustainability.

"As a European region that paid a seriously high environmental price for its heavy industrialisation, we've got no choice but to work harder and harder to find cutting-edge technological solutions in areas like contamination, pollution and energy use. What is equally clear is that these solutions have a global market, one that our companies in the Northwest want to make their own."





Greater Manchester Waste Group

Resourceful solutions from GMW



Bolton Thermal Recovery Facility

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Waste. It's one of our greatest regional challenges.

England's Northwest produces almost four million tonnes of municipal waste each year and, if our collectively wasteful behaviour continues unabated, that figure is set to double by 2020.

The pressure is on and the rubbish is piling up. Behind every tonne of waste that tumbles into our landfill sites lie many more tonnes of precious resources we simply can't afford to squander, not to mention the release of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide and methane. Our region's landfill sites are filling at an alarming rate, with only five years of capacity left, and ever-greater pressure is being placed on businesses, local authorities and individuals to clean up their act.

Greater Manchester Waste Ltd (GMW) - the largest waste disposal and management company owned and controlled by a local authority - is one of the key players when it comes to addressing the problem of waste. GMW manages and disposes of waste as carefully and responsibly as possible but, crucially, it is also looking at ways to conserve resources, reduce waste levels and contribute to the sustainable development of England's Northwest.

The company's Thermal Recovery Facility in Bolton is one development that GMW considers an important contribution to sustainability. The plant handles 120,000 tonnes of waste each year and from this waste generates 10MW of electricity - enough to heat 7,000 homes. Plans for an associated, local, district heating system are currently being discussed, and the ash from the facility is being recovered with the aim of reusing it in the construction industry.

Recycling is increasingly a core area of business for GMW. Working with partners that include local authorities and Shotton Paper, the company is collecting waste paper from Greater Manchester and helping turn it back into useable paper stock. Kerbside collections schemes are playing an ever more important part for GMW, and paper collections will soon be expanded to include garden wastes and other materials. GMW's four dedicated Materials Recovery facilities have already made an impact, with each one processing around 1,000 tonnes of waste every day - during a single year, the facilities recover 50 million aluminium cans and 200 million steel cans for recycling. GMW is also enriching the Earth, collecting garden cuttings from civic sites that are then shredded, composted and used to regenerate nutrient-poor soils and assist in the creation of new natural habitats.

GMW is more than just a waste management company. It sets out its portfolio as waste management expertise and consultative advice; research opportunities and technological innovation; practical solutions to waste problems; collection services and educational information and support within the community. Links to the local community - and to a wide range of stakeholders - are not taken lightly at GMW. The company has established a Community Liaison Forum to help it gauge the opinions and concerns of people living in or near its facilities. A Visitor Centre has been constructed, specifically as an educational resource for the region's children, which has the aim of convincing future generations of the need to reduce waste and increase recycling. GMW has an eye on the future for its own employees, too, having achieved 'Investors in People' accreditation.