

NORTHUMBRIAN
WATER *living water*

INTRODUCTION

AN OPENING MESSAGE FROM HEIDI MOTTRAM, CEO:

10 years! We've come a long way together and look what we've achieved.

Innovation Festival 2026 was genuinely our biggest and boldest yet...by the power of 10!

As we celebrated ten incredible years of the Innovation Festival, it was amazing to reflect on just how far we've come.

What started in 2017 as a small gathering of innovators with a handful of sprints has grown into a global movement that brings together thousands of people, united by a passion for making things better.

This year's festival was a real celebration of that journey.

Under the theme of The Power of 10, we challenged ourselves to think ten times bigger, move ten times faster and create ten times more impact.

Over four action-packed days, around 4,000 people came together at our home of Newcastle Racecourse to share ideas, tackle challenges and shape solutions for the future.

Innovators from sectors including water, technology, energy, healthcare, government, communications, manufacturing, design as well as many others, came together to demonstrate the power of collaboration at its very best.

As always, the festival was about much more than innovation alone.

It was about bringing people together, creating new connections, challenging thinking and giving ambitious ideas the space to grow.

Whether in our sprints, showcases, workshops, wellbeing activities or the Young Citizens Work Experience Festival, the energy, creativity and passion on display throughout the week was inspiring.

Before you dive into the highlights and achievements captured in this summary, I want to take a moment to thank the people who made it all possible.

To our sponsors, partners and innovation community, thank you for your continued support, expertise and belief in what we are trying to achieve.

Every year you help us create something truly special.

To our volunteers, crew and organising team, thank you for the dedication, enthusiasm and hard work that goes into delivering an event of this scale.

The festival simply couldn't happen without you.

And finally, thank you to everyone who attended.

Whether it was your first festival or your tenth, you brought the ideas, curiosity and collaborative spirit that have always made the Innovation Festival so unique.

As we look back on a decade of bold thinking, one thing is clear...innovation is not about individual ideas - it's about people coming together to create something bigger than the sum of its parts.

The past ten years have shown us what is possible when we work together, and IF26 has given us even more reasons to be excited about what comes next.

The stories, achievements and ideas in the pages that follow are just the beginning.

The real work starts now as we turn inspiration into action and continue building a better future for our customers, communities and the environment.

Here's to ten remarkable years of Innovation Festival, and to the next decade of making things better!



HEIDI MOTTRAM

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
NORTHUMBRIAN WATER GROUP

OUR STORY SO FAR

THE TIMELINE

10 YEARS
-OF-
INNOVATION

OUR FIRST FESTIVAL: 939 attendees gather for the first time at Newcastle Racecourse.

The first Innovation Festival project was brought to life as the moss tree is put up in Newcastle.

BRIGHT IDEAS FOR A BETTER TOMORROW: The festival literally doubles in size.

The idea for the National Underground Asset Register (NUAR) is born.

GREAT NORTH BY NORTH EAST: The festival officially goes global for the first time, with sprints running through the night.

The festival inspires Innovate East, which takes place with Anglian Water.

2017

2018

2019

The UK Government announce they will be rolling out NUAR across the country.

'Support For All' and 'Water Quality As A Service' received funding in the next round of Ofwat winning bids.

THE BRILLIANT GET TOGETHER: The first hybrid event sees a record-breaking number of attendees and the most extensive celebrities line-up ever!

Entries into the Ofwat breakthrough challenge are drafted and won.

The 'Fairwater' project is funded by the Ofwat Innovation Fund.

BUILDING BACK BETTER: Covid sees the Innovation Festival go completely digital for the first time.

2021

2020

UNTAPPED POTENTIAL: The grand return to Newcastle Racecourse, incorporating all of the above.

No-Dig trials taking place across the North East.

CITIZENS: 2023 saw the festival grow to the next level, with citizens gathering from all over the world.

'River Deep Mountain AI' granted Ofwat funding.

Smart Sewers trials begin in Tyneside.

SPEED AND SCALE: The event sees its first Young Citizens Work Experience Festival to inspire the future generations.

2022

2023

2024

THE POWER OF TEN: The tenth festival was a HUGE celebration of everything we have achieved, and a look into our ambitions for the next decade. It was our biggest festival EVER, with thousands of innovators descending into IF HQ.

Smart Skies Healthy Waters project in development

REGENERATION: Our most sustainable event yet, with zero-waste and hydrogen powered-generators helping the festival and two young citizen events took place.

River Deep Mountain AI project wins OFWAT funding

'Smarter Skies' project is funded.

The sister events take place, with the Essex & Suffolk Water Innovation Festival and the Christmas Booster.

2026

2025

POWER
OF
10

OUR STORY SO FAR

OUR FESTIVAL

Since we started this brilliant event back in 2017, almost **300 ideas** have been progressed, and we predict that our innovation project pipeline is worth **£190M per year**.

As our approach to open innovation has evolved, the quality, scale and impact of the ideas generated has continued to grow.

We celebrated our tenth Innovation Festival in 2026, it was a chance to reflect on an incredible decade of collaboration, creativity and change.

And at this festival alone, around **4,000 people attended**, making it our biggest and boldest festival yet.

We took the theme of The Power of 10 very seriously – as innovators, partners and changemakers joined forces to think ten times bigger, move ten times faster and create ten times more impact.

When we look back over the past ten years, almost **25,000 people** from **5,000 organisations** across almost **50 countries** have come together through the festival.

Over the decade, more than **80 high-value projects** have flowed through our innovation pipeline and beyond, delivering benefits for customers, communities, the environment and the wider economy – many of which are now creating tangible impact in the real world.

Such as:

- The National Underground Asset Register (NUAR), first conceived at the festival, is estimated to deliver **£3.2 billion** of value to the UK and has been adopted by the UK Government.
- Smart Sewers, an innovation designed to help reduce storm overflows, has been rolled out across Tyneside and is contributing to real environmental improvements.
- Our No Dig leakage solution is now widely used across Northumbrian Water Group and is estimated to save around **£500,000 every year**, helping us tackle leakage more efficiently while reducing disruption for customers.

And that's just the beginning.

From AI-powered river monitoring and nature-based solutions to new approaches for supporting vulnerable customers and transforming asset management, the ideas generated through Innovation Festival continue to move from sprint tents into real-world solutions.

Innovation Festival 2026 has added another wave of ambitious ideas to that pipeline, ensuring the next decade of innovation is already underway.

Find out more about our Innovation Festival journey and the projects making a difference today.



IMPACT...TO THE POWER OF TEN!

The theme for Innovation Festival 2026 was 'The Power of Ten', and as always, we took this theme very seriously. We wanted to take a look back over the past ten years, but also do a cast into the future and see how we could really make a change over the next decade. Making the world ten times better!

Over the past ten years, the Innovation Festival has been the launchpad for many of Northumbrian Water's most impactful innovation programmes - turning sprint ideas into real-world solutions that deliver environmental, operational and customer benefits.

Projects born or accelerated through the festival have secured more than **£45 million** of Ofwat Innovation Fund investment, positioning Northumbrian Water as the UK's leading innovator in the water sector.

Festival projects have transformed how we monitor rivers through **River Deep Mountain AI**, pioneered autonomous sewer inspection with Pipebot, developed AI to optimise chemical dosing in treatment works, and introduced **Smart Skies Healthy Waters**, using drones to improve bathing water quality. Innovations such as Support for All have transformed how utilities identify and support vulnerable customers, while

Total Recall is using AI to capture critical operational knowledge. **Smart Alarm Management, Printfrastructure, HAPI** and **SelTank** are improving operational efficiency, resilience and environmental performance, while NWG's leadership in the National Underground Asset Register (NUAR) is helping create a single digital map of buried infrastructure, making excavation safer, reducing disruption and enabling smarter infrastructure planning across the UK.

Together, these projects demonstrate the festival's ability to move ideas beyond brainstorming into funded programmes, business adoption and sector-wide collaboration, delivering measurable benefits for customers, communities and the environment while shaping the future of the water industry.



A WORLD FIRST...

And if all that wasn't enough to celebrate on our tenth anniversary, there's one more HUGE thing to mention...

Earlier this year, we became the first water company in the WORLD to achieve the ISO 56001 Innovation Management Kitemark accreditation from the British Standards Institution (BSI), recognising our structured and organisation-wide approach to innovation.

The accreditation confirms that innovation is embedded throughout the business, from leadership and culture to governance and delivery, and highlights our commitment to creating value for customers, communities and the environment. The accreditation provides independent assurance that our innovation practices align with global best practice and further strengthens our position as a leader in water sector innovation.

But don't just hear it from us...here's [Jo from BSI](#) to tell you more!



2026 IN NUMBERS



Delegates

3976



NWG Employees

27%



Sprint Leads

M48%/F52%



Global Pop Ups

10



Potentials bids

12



Field ops, support and planners

27%



Day 2 Delegates

2127



Sponsor Engagement

122 SPONSORS



YCWEF

1



Implementation fund projects

2



On Site Sprint Activities

58



Impactful Week!

~37 YEARS OF WORK



Business Worth

£89M/YEAR



Projects heard in playback

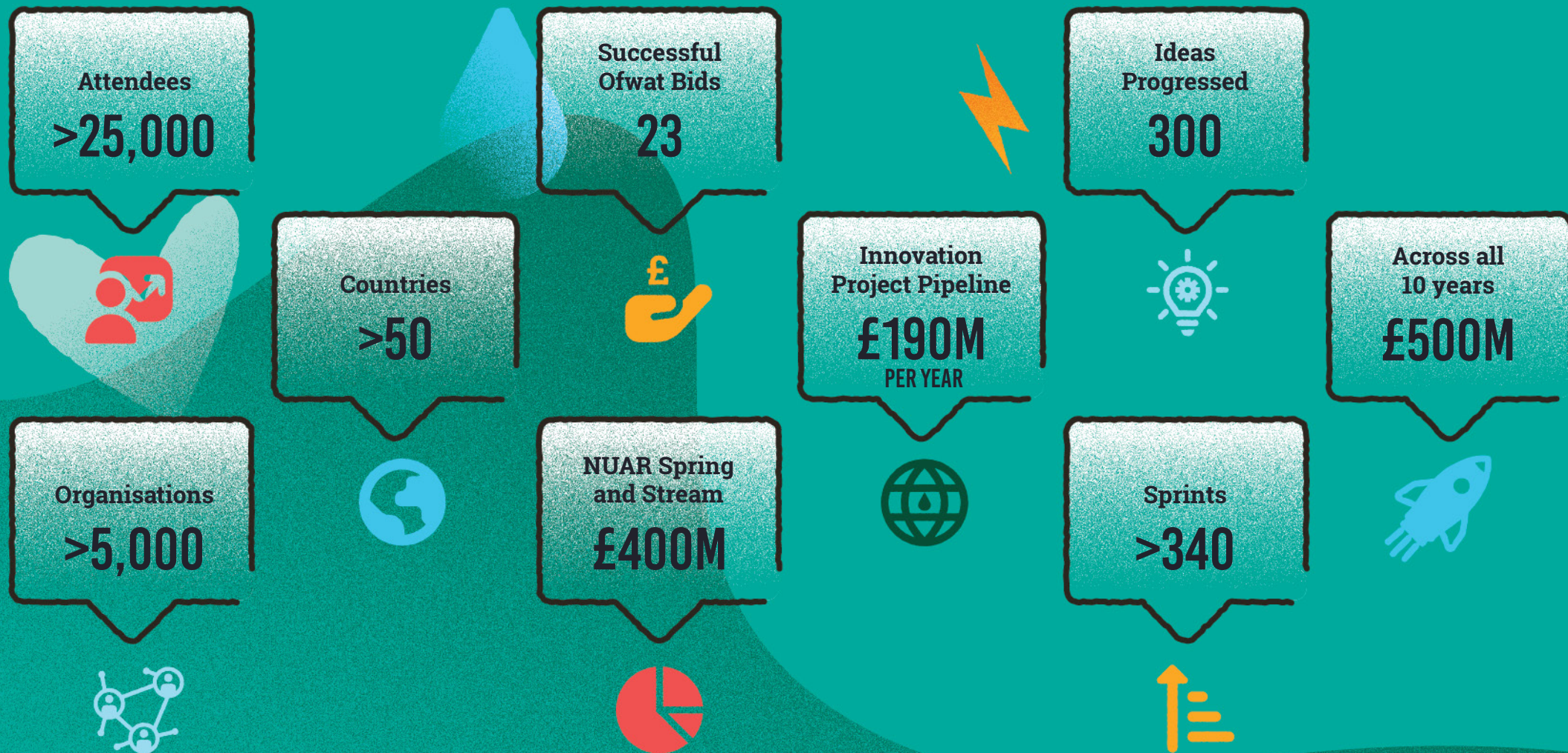
>60



Sprints applying for
KickStarter funding

>20

10 YEARS IN NUMBERS



THE 2026 HIGHLIGHTS...

IF26 was all about time travel, and so we have created this little time capsule for you so you can relive the festival in snapshots!

If you attended, keep an eye out in case you see yourself!

Or really jump back into the festival atmosphere by listening to a very special version of the Planet Possible podcast, filmed on site at the racecourse, here – [The Power of 10 - NWL Innovation Festival 2026 | Planet Possible Spotlight](#)

DAY 1

Understand



DAY 2

Ideate



DAY 3

Prototype



DAY 4

Validate



FULL WEEK HIGHLIGHTS



STARS OF IF26

If you've watched the videos shared on the previous page, the more eagle-eyed of you may have recognised a few famous faces...

Our festivals are never short of special guests, and this year we really nailed the brief...even if we do say so ourselves!

This year, we were delighted to welcome...

Monday: Helen Sharman

Opening the event, Helen, who was the first British astronaut in space, took to the stage for an inspirational talk on pushing boundaries, her space training and what happened in her eight days of orbiting the earth.

Tuesday: Alex James

Tuesday saw Alex James, known for chart-toppers such as 'Song 2' and 'Tender' with britpop band Blur, talking about his leap from the world of music to acquiring a farm, creating a food festival and becoming a writer and cheese and wine producer.

Wednesday: Jodie Ounsley

Star of BBC's Gladiators, Jodie Ounsley, aka 'Fury', was the headline act for Wednesday. Interviewed by two ten-year-old superfans, Jodie shared her compelling story of becoming the first deaf female rugby player to represent England at senior level, as well as her advocacy for deaf awareness, inclusion, and inspiring young people to overcome barriers.

Thursday: Eddie 'The Eagle' Edwards

Ski-jumping legend Eddie 'The Eagle' Edwards closed the show on Thursday with an absolutely brilliant talk all about challenging innovators to overcome their own adversity, and discussed tips on personal resilience.

Adding to the outstanding line-up were returning fan favourites, including award-winning adventurer Tim FitzHigham, futurist Ant Morse, quirky comedy duo FoxDog Studios and musician Chris Read.

Georgia May, Drum Roots, Remy CB, Ha'way 'Sis and Gateshead College also completed the musical entertainment, while Scottish rugby union national Emma Wassell also took part in the event's Women in STEM evening panel and Dr Ashmita Randhawa joined the sprint tents.

And to top it all off, we saw the festival's first flying man, Richard Browning, taking to the skies above the racecourse on a jet pack for a demonstration!



ONES TO WATCH

31 high-potential projects were born at IF26, and are now in the process of going through the machine that is our Innovation Pipeline.

Although they will not all be progressed, these projects have the potential to contribute to a total value of more than **£529m** for Northumbrian Water over the next five years.

These projects include:

SPRINT	PROPOSED PROJECT
★ SCALING SMART SEWERS 10X - HYDRODIGITAL	Scaling smart catchments using next-generation sensors that use edge computing.
★ DEEP DIVE - O2 BUSINESS	Major efficiency from getting more from intelligence from CCTV data.
★ UPSTREAM MATTERS - JACOBS	ENLIGHT-ON creating a blueprint and a model village that tackles emerging contaminants at source.
★ AQUASTALLIONS - SCHNEIDER ELECTRIC	Scale the rapidly deployable mobile smart pumping station to improve service/ITS.
★ MISSION INSPECTABLE - GALLIFORD TRY	Free trial of the ScubaBOT to improve inspections.
★ FAST TRACK - NTEGRA	Pi – Project Intelligence turning completed projects into re-useable intelligence.
★ STOP HOPING, START KNOWING - BINNIES & ELECTRIC TWIN	The UK's first use of synthetics audiences to predict customer behaviour and optimise interventions.
★ BLOOMING ALGAE - KOHTARI	Harnessing predictive intelligence to understand and prevent Algal Blooms
★ DESIGN IN A YEAR - LIVING WATER ENTERPRISE	Reinventing Capital Processes cutting design time from 18 months to 1 month for grey infrastructure.
★ DESIGN IN YEAR - LIVING WATER ENTERPRISE	Creation of an Asset Technology Innovation Hub for rapid testing of new technologies.
★ PRINTFRASTRUCTURE 2.0 - CHANGEMAKER 3D	Scaling 3D concrete printing to larger, on-site printed tanks and structures.

W+STEM
PRESENTS

QUESTION OF SUPPORT



WISTEM EVENT

A Question of Support

One of the standout events of Innovation Festival 2026 was the annual Women in STEM (WiSTEM) gathering, A Question of Support, which explored the vital role of allyship in creating inclusive environments where people can thrive.

The event brought together professionals from STEM, sport and business, alongside young people and emerging talent, to discuss how support, visibility and inclusion help unlock innovation and performance.

The session reinforced that diversity of thought drives better ideas, stronger teams and more impactful outcomes.

The evening opened with a keynote address from CEO Heidi Mottram before a panel discussion and interactive audience session led by Lauren Briggs and Chris Bolt. Panellists included Emma Wassell, Sam Blake, Mark Freed, Alexandra Knight, Darren Finnegan and William Bessa-Simons, who shared their perspectives on resilience, leadership, representation and the importance of creating opportunities for others to succeed.

Drawing parallels between sport and STEM, the discussion highlighted the challenges both sectors have faced around representation and visibility, while showcasing the positive impact of role models, supporters and allies in overcoming barriers.

The event's central message was clear: meaningful progress is driven by everyday actions. By amplifying voices, challenging bias, creating opportunities and fostering a sense of belonging, organisations can build more inclusive cultures that deliver better outcomes for everyone.

As one of the most popular sessions at the festival, the WiSTEM event once again demonstrated Northumbrian Water's commitment to championing diversity, encouraging allyship and inspiring the next generation of innovators.



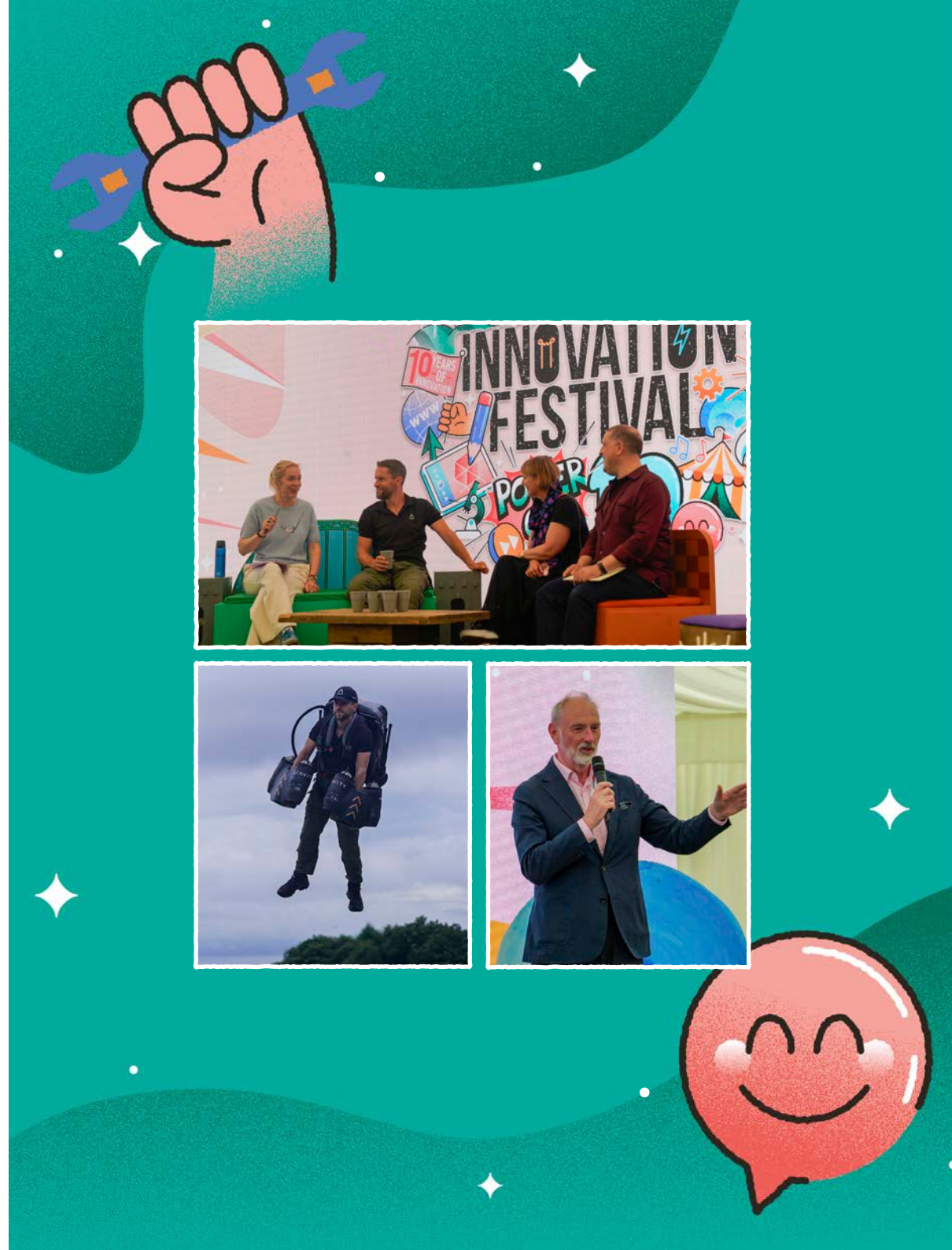
ANTHROPY X INNOVATION FESTIVAL

A new addition to Innovation Festival 2026 was the involvement of Anthropy, which hosted a dedicated panel session for the first time.

The collaboration helped broaden the festival's reach beyond its traditional networks, bringing fresh perspectives and strengthening connections with leaders from across business, society and public life. As part of the festival's tenth anniversary celebrations, Anthropy's contribution reinforced the importance of cross-sector collaboration in tackling complex challenges and demonstrated how bringing together diverse voices can help accelerate innovation and create greater impact.

★ ON THE ANTHROPY PANEL WERE:

- **Erika Clegg** – Author of Junk Values
- **Heidi Mottram** – Northumbrian Water CEO
- **Richard Browning** – CEO and Founder of Gravity Industries
- **Ben Fletcher** – Mayoral Candidate, Cheshire & Warrington
- **John O'Brien** – Founder at Anthropy



NORTHUMBRIAN WATER'S
**YOUNG CITIZENS
WORK EXPERIENCE
FESTIVAL**

**NORTHUMBRIAN
WATER** *living water*

YOUNG CITIZENS WORK EXPERIENCE FESTIVAL

The Young Citizens Work Experience Festival 2026 welcomed more than **400 students** from **19 schools**, giving young people a unique opportunity to explore future careers alongside the main Innovation Festival.

Across four days, students took part in eight interactive workshops delivered by six partner organisations, while also meeting industry experts on our new Careers Stand to learn about the wide range of opportunities available across our business.

From leadership and communication to teamwork and problem-solving, the festival helped students build valuable skills and confidence in a fun, engaging environment.

Feedback from schools, partners and volunteers was overwhelmingly positive, highlighting the festival's growing impact in connecting education with industry, inspiring the next generation and helping young people see the exciting careers available to them.



Student Attendees

430

Joined across 4 days



Schools

19

Attended from across the region



Workshops

6

Each student attended 6 workshops from a programme of 9



Partners

8

Collaborated with us to delivery workshops



Volunteers

64

Supported our school groups and activities



Top Workshops

TOP 3

1. NWG Teamwork
2. Basketball
3. Willow weaving



Stars

4/5

94% rated their experience good very good or excellent



Best Elements

TOP 3

1. Variety
2. Learning new skills
3. NWG Buddies & Volunteers



Skills Improved

TOP 3

1. Teamwork
2. Communication
3. Problem Solving / Creativity

WELLBEING IF26

RECHARGE, REGENERATE, REVITALISE



Mental Wellbeing and MSK health bookable talks and stand



Beach



Massages



Bar Games



Guide Dogs



Charity Tables



Face Paint



Mind Mates



Quiet Room



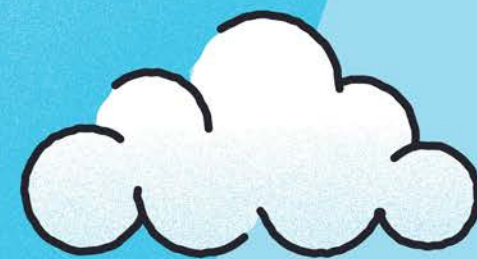
Crafts - Badge and keyring making



WaterAid fundraising fun races



Beekeepers



GLOBAL POP-UPS

For 2026, we are celebrating our festival footprint by running 10 Global Pop-Up Workshops with organisations from 10 countries from all over the world!

Key:



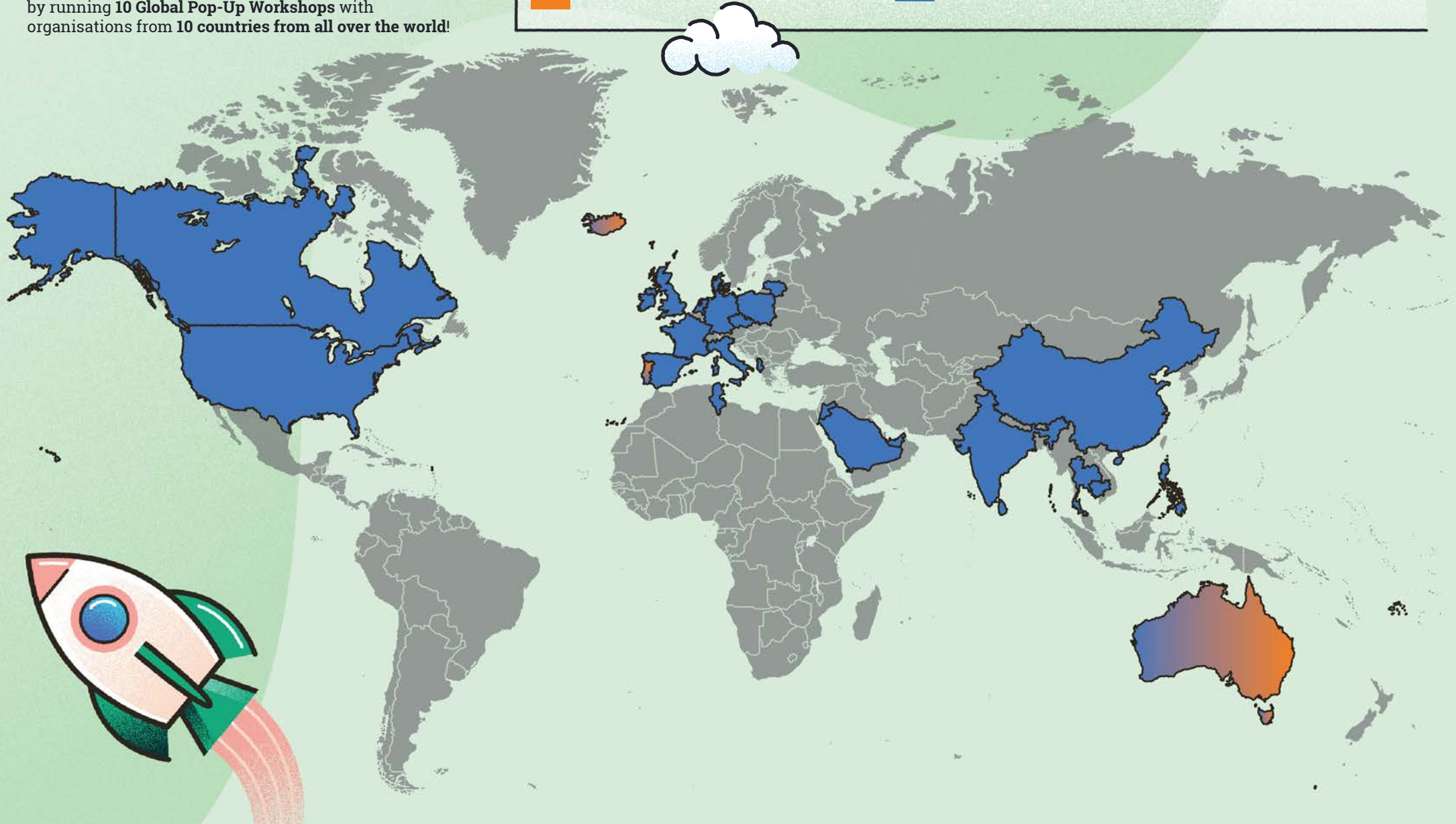
Other Innovation Festivals that have taken place:

— Australia with Sydney Water, Portugal with Águas do Tejo Atlântico, and to Iceland with Veitur.



Countries that attended the festival in 2026:

UK, Ireland, Netherlands, USA, China, Germany, Canada, France, India, Portugal, Iceland, Poland, Albania, Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, Cambodia, Czechia, Denmark, Fiji, Italy, Jordan, Lithuania, Philippines, Saudia Arabia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tunisia, UAE



THE FUTURE CAST

Crystal-ball thinking into the future:

If the first ten years of the Innovation Festival have been about proving what is possible, the next ten will be about changing how the world innovates.

By 2036, we see the Innovation Festival as a truly global movement rather than a single annual event. Thousands of innovators will collaborate seamlessly across physical and virtual spaces, with AI connecting people, surfacing ideas and accelerating problem-solving in real time. Sprints will be supported by digital twins, immersive technologies and global data platforms, enabling participants from every continent to co-create solutions regardless of location. The festival will no longer be measured by the four days it runs, but by the year-round collaborations, ventures and impact it creates.

We believe the festival will become the world's leading open innovation platform for tackling environmental and societal challenges, bringing together utilities, governments, investors, entrepreneurs, academia and communities to solve problems that no single organisation can address alone. Success will not be measured by the number of ideas generated, but by the number of innovations scaled globally, the carbon saved, the communities improved and the lives positively impacted.

Most importantly, the festival will remain true to its founding purpose: creating an inclusive community where anyone, anywhere, with a great idea can help shape the future. As technology continues to evolve, human creativity, curiosity and collaboration will become even more valuable.

In ten years' time, Innovation Festival won't simply reflect the future, it will be helping to create it.



OFWAT'S WATER INNOVATION FUND

The Innovation Festival is a hot bed for brilliant Ofwat's Water Innovation Fund ideas.

Ofwat's Water Innovation Fund is a dedicated programme that funds collaborative, innovative projects across the UK water sector to deliver better outcomes for customers, communities and the environment.

Since it started in 2020, we have secured **23 winning projects** worth **£44million**.

Most recently, in 2026, we secured more than **£5 million** in funding through Ofwat's Water Breakthrough Challenge to deliver three innovative projects aimed at improving customer service, environmental performance and operational efficiency.

23 winners

within Ofwat's Water Innovation Fund to date.

22 winners - Water Breakthrough Challenge | 1 winner - Water Efficiency Lab (WEL)



These projects include:

- Printfrastructure (**£1.9m**), which will use large-scale 3D concrete printing to reduce carbon emissions and accelerate infrastructure delivery
- Smart Alarm Management (SAM) (**£1.6m**), which will use AI and machine learning to help control centre teams respond more quickly and effectively to operational issues.
- OCI³ (**£2m**), an open-source platform that will combine water quality data from multiple sources to help improve river health.

The awards showcase our position as a sector leader in innovation, with us having secured 23 winning bids through Ofwat's Water Innovation Fund since its launch.



£45.7 MILLION

16 Catalyst
projects

6 Transform
projects

1 Water
Efficiency Lab



Partnered 25 Projects £72 MILLION

THANK YOU

A BIG THANK YOU

Northumbrian Water's Innovation Festival wouldn't have made 10 years without it's brilliant sponsors – so now is time for us to say a huge **THANK YOU!**

Scan the QR code to register an interest in sponsoring the Innovation Festival 2027.



THANK YOU FROM
HEAD OF INNOVATION, ANGELA MACOSCAR

Neon Racecourse Sprint Sponsors



Gold Racecourse Sprint Sponsor



Event Partners



Racecourse Sprint Sponsors / Dash Partners / Brought to you by Sponsors / Exhibitors / YCWEF Ambassadors



KEEP IN TOUCH

KEEP IN TOUCH

Stay up to date with the latest innovation news at innovationfestival.org.

Fancy signing up to our innovation newsletter?

★ SIGN UP HERE

Keep an eye on our innovations and sprint outputs by visiting our social channels:



@NorthumbrianH2O
@ESWH2O



Northumbrian Water
Essex & Suffolk Water



@northumbrianh2o
@eswh2o

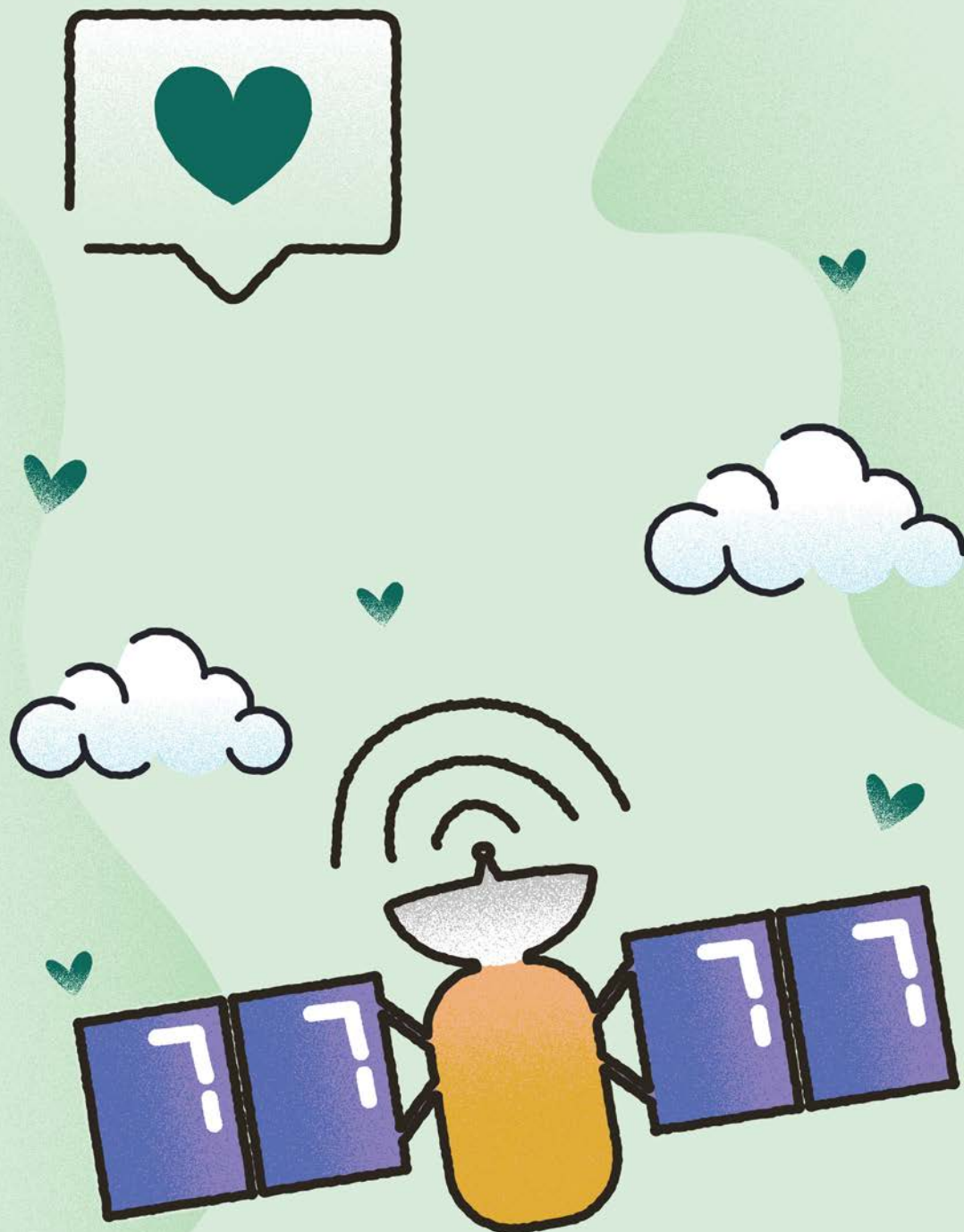


NWG (Northumbrian Water Group)
Essex & Suffolk Water



@northumbrian_water
@essex_suffolk_water

You can also find out more about the ideas and projects which came from **IF26** by joining our **Innovation Festive** sessions in November. Keep an eye out for more information to be shared about these.





SAVE THE DATE

for Northumbrian Water's
Innovation Festival 2027!

5-8 JULY