Affinity Water steps into Minecraft

Initiative a part of Affinity Water's Environmental Innovation Projects.

In 2021/22, we stepped into the world of Minecraft to use it as an engagement and educational tool for the water cycle and home water efficiency.

This was one of three initiatives as part of our Environmental Innovation Projects.

Core modules have been developed and tested with a Children's Steering Group, both in person and online. Further community engagement has been achieved in our Misbourne area with the release of the game to Save Our Streams participating customers, and future engagement events are planned.

The modules help improve understanding of the water journey by travelling through a full water cycle – from a cloud to a tap, and back to a cloud. There is also a fun hidden level with ducks! We arranged student visits to a water reservoir alongside the modules, with activities such as solving water pumping stations problems, removing bacteria from water and learning to successfully budget water.

In our 2020–25 business plan, we proposed to test our refreshed community approach and committed to deliver community trials to empower and support our customers to save water, to learn and improve on what we do, so that we can develop a deeper understanding of our region and develop methodology for successful engagement that can be replicated in the future.

This year, by working in partnership with the community we completed three 'Environmental Innovation Projects' that have already started delivering greater benefits to our customers and the environment.

- Affordable housing, where we developed and tested new engagement approach with Social Housing Partners to help social housing tenants save water and money
- Education Methods, where we used Minecraft to teach school children about water cycle and how to save water
- A new framework for working with New Appointments and Variations (NAV) company to better understand these businesses and help them implement water saving technologies in the future (i.e. grey water recycling and rain water harvesting)

The benefits of the three projects have been assured externally by an independent third party and by the Customer Challenge Group (CCG) that represent the voice of our customers. The group have scrutinised and helped refine each of the three projects. Their questions and challenges have prompted a number of significant changes and improvements for customers.

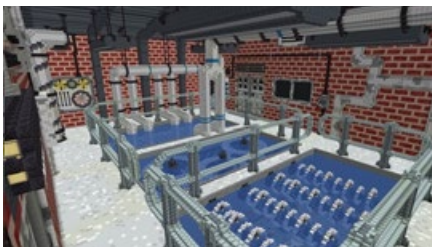
The existing industry standard approach to teaching the water balance doesn't engage future customers in a compelling or gamified way. We wanted to transition from this approach to a more dynamic online platform, one which participants aged 7–13+ are already engaging with. Minecraft was the solution.

The first Minecraft Children's Steering Group was held online in March 2022.

A group of 16 children joined us to try out the newly developed Minecraft Water World, encouraging multi-disciplinary learning including STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects. Our teacher-led session guided children – aged between 7 and 13 years old – through the Minecraft world on a water efficiency educational journey. Every 'room' of the game is based around the source to tap journey, and included quizzes, challenges and facts to learn each step of the way. All children were Minecraft fans and popped into the 'Affinity Water Virtual Office' to immediately begin learning water-based facts. A short test encouraged them to apply their newly acquired knowledge, and then they teleported, became water droplets, and sped off down the river (with the ducks!).

Next, they're on to the pumping station, swimming up pipes to a challenge to repair and reconnect the internal pipes. Then, whizzing through to the treatment works where they're given a UV lightsabre to kill off bacteria and clean the water. Up next was the water storage area, where they learned to do some water budgeting, trading a limited amount of water for everyday tasks. Finally, they popped up the bath plughole and explored the dual-flush buttons on the toilet and found themselves in the sewers.

The second Minecraft Children's Steering Group was held in person in our Hatfield office, in March 2022. We had 14 attendants – aged between 4 and 11 years old – who quickly got to the initial test level, and even the youngest testers were finding out the information they needed and moving through to the next 'room'. It was an impressive start! It was a big hit with participants and parents alike, and the trip into the sewers gathered several new fans.



Comparing both groups and their comments, we have hit the right balance between fun and applying the new knowledge through a game or puzzle. The feedback and suggestions were consistent, such as bigger bacteria for UV sword swiping, and the inclusion of more hints. This is valuable as these ideas came directly from our experienced Minecrafters and a child-centred learning experience.

Our Genes

- **Stewards of the local Environment**
- **Helping customers use water better**
- **Giving customers an exceptional service**

Customer outcomes

- Making sure you have enough water, whilst leaving more water in the environment
- Providing a great service that you value

UNSDGs