

Deep in a Swindon sewage treatment plant, complex chemical reactions are taking place which are justifying an act of faith by a Bradford chemical company, as **synergy** reports

## Cutting the cost of cleaner water

**Millions of tonnes of sewage are produced by Britain every year, and an innovative approach to managing the chemicals used in processing it could become a template for dozens of other similar industries.**

Traditionally, waste treatment companies like Thames Water have bought and managed the chemicals they need to de-water waste and produce sludge which can ultimately be sold as agricultural fertiliser.

Ciba Specialty Chemicals in Bradford is one of Thames Water's major suppliers of these polyelectrolytes, but the relationship has just undergone a fundamental change and their interaction no longer ends with the purchase of chemicals.

Instead, in a pilot scheme at Thames Water's Swindon Treatment Works, Ciba's engineers are playing a more integral role in how their products are used, and both parties are delighted with the result.

Chris Rowell, Ciba's account manager for Thames Water, says the new approach means everybody does better.

"We are no longer a provider of a product so much as we are a provider

of a service. They pay us a bit more for that service but in turn we can cut their costs further down the line because we are managing our own chemicals in their process," he said.

"It's quite a change and it needed a lot of trust between the two parties; it's exactly the sort of innovation that works well between organisations which have already had a long relationship.

"We're always keen to look at bringing innovations to the market and developing our service, so the opportunity to try this new way of working was something we leapt at."

That opportunity came courtesy of a Yorkshire Forward presentation in October 2004, where the principles of the Chemical Management Services (CMS) approach were set out to several chemical companies.

The approach was pioneered in the United States by the Chemical Strategies Partnership and has been applied in the electronics and automobile industries.

It is being championed here by International eChem, a consultancy made up of respected chemicals industry

leaders. Paul Hodges, director of ICI at Runcorn for 18 years, is the company's chairman and played a key role in the Ciba-Thames Water scheme.

"The problem in this situation was that a company like Thames Water had many different costs related to the process: chemical costs, treatment costs, removal costs. No one person was in charge of reducing these.

"What CMS does is spend a bit more at the start and save at the end by bringing a trusted supplier like Ciba in and giving them responsibility for cutting those costs at the end of the process."

Chris Rowell is in no doubt about the advantages of the CMS approach: "It has strengthened our relationship with Thames Water by improving the quality of the sludge they produce, increased our profitability and opened up some new opportunities for us.

"On the back of this project we are talking with other water companies who are existing customers looking to improve the way they operate."