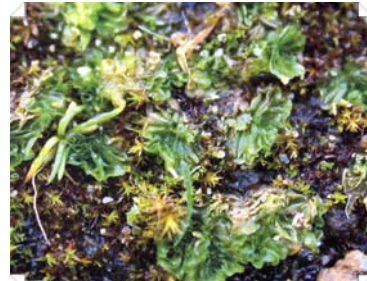


PRESS RELEASE

England's largest site of a rare, protected plant was recently discovered by a north eastern environmental consultancy causing one of the world's largest property developers to change its plans. ING Real Estate Developments (RED) UK Ltd, part of the multi-billion pound Dutch financial institution, ING Group, has engaged Newcastle-based The Environment Practice to act as consultants on its massive £100 million plus regeneration of Hayle Harbour in Cornwall.

The innocent plant, the tiny petalwort moss- one of a select group of protected plant species - was found growing in profusion on one of the harbour quaysides. "It's easy to miss as it's so delicate, and in summer it disappears altogether," says Ruth Chambers, senior ecologist at The Environment Practice. "But it was an important discovery. Damaging the plant is a criminal offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. We've had to advise the developers how to alter their plans."



Petalwort growing at Hayle Harbour

The Environment Practice won the contract last summer primarily because of its expertise in environmental impact assessments. These reports are often a legal requirement of planning applications for large-scale development schemes. Hayle Harbour, near St Ives on the spectacular north Cornwall coast, is in a particularly sensitive area, surrounded by an RSPB Nature Reserve - home to thousands of overwintering wildfowl and waders - and a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

ING plans to regenerate the historical harbour, once an important international heavy engineering centre, into a 'Shipyard Village' with quayside housing, shops, luxury hotel, private moorings and leisure facilities as well as a business centre and industrial workshops. It will also include an improved harbour for the small but lucrative local shellfish industry. "Our role is to ensure the development won't disturb the ecology of the estuary and surrounding area," explains Ruth. "We identify the main constraints and then advise the developers how best to work around them, in consultation with bodies like English Nature and the Environment Agency. For example, if a retail park is near an important bird site, we might recommend providing a buffer zone and screening."

The Environment Practice carried out detailed research including aquatic, bird, invertebrate and vegetation surveys (the latter uncovering the site of 200,000 petalwort moss plants), as well as public consultations and liaison with conservation agencies. The results, together with the Practice's expert advice, will form part of the critical environmental impact assessment report that ING is due to present to the local planning authority in the autumn.

"It has been a complex and challenging project to handle", says Rita Callender, Partner at the Practice, "but exciting". Although the Practice is a small company and based in the north-east, she does not consider this a drawback. "It comes down to experience and good project management. We have a lot of experience in environmental impact assessments, working as a multi-disciplinary team and negotiating between conservation agencies, statutory bodies and developers." Other major projects the company has worked on include a habitat creation scheme for the Cardiff Bay barrage, colliery reclamation sites, and leisure development at Scarborough's North Bay.

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