

# Water Environment Improvements Project Evidence Form

## Scope & Purpose

This form is to be used by the external Water Environment Governance Group (WEGG), to review, validate and formally approve the length of bluespaces improved for the Water Environment Improvements ODI. The form will be completed by the Water Environment Team with support from project partners and presented to the WEGG. After formal approval, the km of water environment improved will be recorded against the ODI and projects will be marked as completed on the Water Environment Scorecard and illustrated as delivered in the Bluespaces Mapping Portals.

## Project Name

Caring for Cocker Beck

## Project Lead

Company/ Organisation	Named Lead	Position
Friends of the Denes	Blake Vaughan	Project Lead

## Bluespaces Improved

Year	Claimed	Proposed	Reason For Any Change
5	4.1 km	4.1 km	NA

## Water Environment Assurance

This project has been reviewed internally to ensure it has delivered benefits above and beyond our baseline and regulatory obligations to improve the water environment accessible to customers across at least two out of three aspects. Following our assurance process, the project was approved by both our internal and external groups for review before delivery. This form presents evidence of project completion and the outputs achieved, to request project sign off.

Level	Project Acceptance Date	Project Approval Date	Completed Project Sign Off Date
Project Team	May 2024	N/A	N/A
Water Environment Steering Group (Internal)	June 2024	June 2024	N/A
Water Environment Governance Group (External)	July 2024	July 2024	June 2025

## Project Timescales

Candidate Project Approved	Project Initiated	Project Completed
July 2024	August 2024	March 2025

## Project Summary and Highlights

### Summary

Northumbrian Water has worked with the Friends of the Denes in Darlington, to deliver 4.1 km of improvements along Cocker Beck. A 1.5 km length of Cocker Beck runs through a series of woodland and riverside areas (denes) collectively comprising approximately 11 ha of land, providing local water environment for the local community. The urban area is densely populated and dominated by terraced housing with no private gardens and so access to these areas is particularly valued. Friends of the Denes is a community-led group which aims to ensure the local environment is attractive, safe, stimulating and welcoming for all visitors, and to promote and encourage the use of the denes by a wide range of people. Friends of the Denes works closely with Darlington Borough Council (DBC) to organise weekly volunteering sessions, as well as running occasional events and projects.

Bluespaces funding has enabled the Friends of the Denes to enhance the water environment in the denes by improving recreational facilities to increase usage by the local community; improving accessibility through footpath surface enhancements and increased seating; and improving the design of less-used denes to decrease anti-social behaviour and create a more family-friendly environment.

### Highlights


- The addition of two new benches in each of Footy Dene and Padley Dene, and the relocation of a fifth bench to Sheddy Dene, has created new seating areas for enjoyment of the public space.
- Path resurfacing in Sheddy Dene has made the route more accessible year-round.
- Addition of a flower bed and other wildflower planting to Padley Dene, as well as the new seating, has made this previously neglected area of the denes a more usable and attractive area for visitors to enjoy.
- The community orchard in Bee Dene has been enhanced by the addition of more fruit trees, and bird boxes have been installed in various locations throughout the denes.







## Project Outputs, Benefits & Evidence Against Criteria

Access, Facilities & Recreation	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increased access, engagement and enjoyment of the water environment will be achieved through improved accessibility on site, including new seating and surfaced footpaths, events to engage the local community with the site, and improvements to recreational facilities that will increase use.</li> <li>2. The project will benefit health and wellbeing through providing volunteering opportunities, better recreational facilities, the expansion of the community orchard and more visible habitat features encouraging interest in local wildlife. As the denes are adjacent to many terraced housing with no private gardens, the project area has particular importance for improving health and wellbeing in the local community through access to high quality bluespaces.</li> <li>3. Positive environmental behaviours will be encouraged through volunteering, events, and strategic landscape design to reduce antisocial behaviour in certain areas.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A1: Increases access to, engagement with and enjoyment of the water environment</li> <li>➤ A2: Benefits health and wellbeing through:</li> <li>➤ A3: Influences positive environmental behaviours</li> </ul>
Outputs	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A new seating area, with two benches, was created in Padley Dene, which also benefitted from a new flower bed and other wildflower planting, thanks to help from volunteers from the local branch of mobile phone company 'EE'. An existing bench was removed from an area of this dene that used to attract anti-social behaviour, and was restored and relocated to Sheddy Dene. Access through Sheddy Dene was improved through footpath resurfacing, creating a circular route that now takes in both sides of the beck. Two further benches have been purchased and are being installed beside the football pitch in Footy Dene, where localised surface drainage and regrading will also be completed in summer 2025 to make the pitch more durable. A bog garden has also been created in this dene providing an additional attraction for people and wildlife. Strong links have been forged between the Friends of the Denes and the adjacent Arthur Wharton Foundation where users of that community facility can benefit from its immediate proximity to the improved blue and green spaces.</li> <li>2. In addition to the above-described improvements to recreational facilities, a total of 8 volunteer tasks were organised. These engaged 33 local volunteers in fruit tree planting, scrub clearance, wildflower plug planting and installation of nest boxes, all of which have provided greater opportunities for enjoyment of wildlife. All of these activities provided opportunities for the Friends of the Denes to engage in care of their local environment.</li> <li>3. Volunteering opportunities and an active community group both provide an avenue for local investment and engagement in the area. The previously-neglected Padley Dene suffered from anti-social behaviour but installation of benches, paving and a flower bed, and increased visibility of the area from the overlooking houses has deterred such behaviour since its installation, and created an amenity for the local community to enjoy. The profile of this area will be raised further in 2025 when awareness-raising events are planned.</li> </ol>	
Evidence	
	
<p>New benches and flower bed in Padley Dene, and old bench relocated to Sheddy Dene</p>	



Volunteers helping with creation and planting of a new flower bed in Padley Dene



Before and after footpath resurfacing in Sheddly Dene (final surface grading to be completed in summer 2025)



Volunteers helped to install nest boxes in three of the denes



Clearing scrub from the side of Padley Dene, increasing visibility of the area to neighbouring housing



## Wildlife & Biodiversity

Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Habitats will be improved through the planting of replacement trees for those that have fallen in recent storms, ensuring the tree corridor along the Cocker Beck is connected. The planting of wildlife-friendly shrubs, wildflowers and pond plants, along with the creation of a bog garden, will enhance the currently low botanical diversity along the stream.</li> <li>Bird species will benefit from the installation of bird boxes throughout the Dene, replacing the nesting opportunities lost through fallen mature trees in recent storms, and the expansion of the community orchard will provide an increased food source for many bird species. Increasing the botanical diversity on site will also benefit many invertebrates, including pollinators. These activities will all be led by the Darlington and Teesdale Naturalist Field Club.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ B1: Improves the quantity, quality and connectivity of habitats</li> <li>➤ B2: Improves the conservation status and or abundance or distribution of species</li> <li>➤ B3: Reduces risk or impact of invasive non-native species (INNS)</li> </ul>

## Outputs

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Four new fruit trees were added to the community orchard, with more planting planned in the forthcoming months, while a new flower bed was created in Padley Dene. This was planted with a mix of spring-flowering bulbs, pollinator-friendly shrubs (including Sage, Buddleia, Lavender, Mint) and wildflower plugs (including Hemp Agrimony, Purple Loosestrife, Cuckooflower, Common Valerian, Lesser Spearwort and Ragged Robin). Along one side of this dene a bankside hedge and bramble scrub were cleared and opened up. Although the main purpose of this was to increase site visibility to address anti-social behaviour, it afforded an additional opportunity for wildflower planting. Further wildflower plug planting was conducted in Play Dene and Footy Dene, with Play Dene now host to the wildflower Snakes Head Fritillary, and Footy Dene now benefitting from a newly established bog garden.</li> <li>Additional nesting habitat for hole-nesting birds was created by the provision of 16 boxes, which have been installed in Sheddy Dene, Play Dene and Tennis Dene. The fruit trees, shrub and wildflowers that were planted will all benefit pollinating insects, as well as being visually attractive and creating a greater diversity of flora.</li> </ol>
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## Evidence



Trees added to the community orchard





Play Dene wildflower meadow establishing, and Snakes Head Fritillary in the meadow



Bog garden being planted in Footy Dene and then protected from dogs and walkers by brush sticks while they establish



Selection of nest boxes installed in Sheddy, Play and Tennis Denes



### Additional & Secondary Benefits

Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
1. This project will benefit the local community through enhancing an essential natural space- particularly for the many with no private gardens it is key to health and wellbeing opportunities. It will increase opportunities to engage with the bluespace through events, volunteering, better facilities, more seating and surfaced footpaths, and improved wildlife habitats.	D2: Provides benefits to local communities, the local economy or NWG

### Outputs

1. The improvements delivered in this project have all made a positive contribution to the recreational opportunities along Cocker Beck. Volunteer engagement during completion of funded works has provided opportunities for improved health and well-being, as well as raising the profile of the denes as an outdoor resource to be enjoyed. The physical enhancements to the site, including access upgrades, more seating, a more resilient sports facility and a greater diversity of wildlife will all contribute to future enjoyment and appreciation of the water environment and its surroundings by visitors. Local residents have committed to watering and weeding newly planted areas, to support their establishment, and these areas will then be maintained as part of the Friends of the Denes' ongoing activities.
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### Evidence



A volunteer day organised to clear brambles



## Customer Testimonies & Media

*'The works to the Denes help reinforce a sense of purpose and ownership to those perhaps more peripheral and less formally used areas – enabling you to sit and appreciate these valuable open spaces on your doorstep ! It also encouraged ourselves as a company to recognise the benefits the Denes bring to the local community and for us to help with further planting to reinforce the positive changes these new facilities have brought.'*

**David Boulton MRTPI, Director, ELG Planning, Darlington**

*"Volunteering at the Denes gives me the opportunity to be outside in nature, enjoying the sights and sounds of the different seasons.*

*It helps my wellbeing knowing that in installing seats and small community gardens, we are helping to improve the environment for local residents, and increase biodiversity in our local park.*

**Caroline, volunteer**

### **Quotes from local residents:**

*'I was particularly pleased to see the improvements in the Padley Dene which had always seemed a bit of a forgotten space at the end of the Denes. It now feels a lot more pleasant and less full of rubbish and drug detritus, while keeping the wild bits as habitat.*

*The new bench in the Sheddy Dene is very popular, especially with dog walkers!'*

*'The padley dene is much improved and a nice space to relax, seems the drunks and druggies have moved on to North Lodge Park.'*

*'The path in the sheddy dene is a welcome addition. We are now able to use this side of the beck in wet weather and during the winter months.*

*The new seat in the sheddy dene is in a great position and is very popular.'*

## Lead Partner Quotes & Testimonials

*'Overall the project addressed many aspects of the cockerbeck improvements.*

*The improvements in the Padley Dene (re-positioning of the seating and increasing seating and flower beds) has addressed the antisocial behaviour experienced by local residents. The improvements also included partitioning the hedge which created gaps in the hedge allowing better visibility of house owners into the Dene and less likelihood of people hiding out of sight. The improvements also initiated council improvements in reducing the brambles and long term planting wild flowers. Increasing biodiversity in the Footy Dene and the Play Dene by the introduction of bog plants such as Purple Loosestrife and Purple Agrimony to the existing plants in these wet areas.*

*The repositioning of a bench to the sheddy dene has been popular and the construction of a path to the south of the beck has been a popular addition. Getting the right quality of construction for the path has been a challenge but hope to engage another contractor soon to ensure this is completed in the desired fashion.*

*For bird life we have added bird boxes to the Sheddy Dene and Tennis dene and we are hopeful that these will be used this season.'*

Blake Vaughan, Project Lead, Friends of the Denes

## Other Supporting Evidence

Inventory of nest boxes purchased and installed:

7 x woodstone, 28 mm hole

6 x woodstone, 32 mm hole

3 x treecreeper boxes

Distribution of bird boxes:

Sheddy Dene - 6 round hole and 1 Tree Creeper (some existing bird boxes removed due to damage)

Play Dene - 3 round hole and 1 tree creeper

Tennis Dene - 4 round hole and 1 tree creeper