

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

River Gipping Footpath and Himalayan Balsam Improvements

Project Lead

Company/ Organisation	Named Lead	Position
The River Gipping Trust	Ian Petchey	Restoration Manager

Bluespaces Improved

Year	Claimed	Proposed	Reason For Any Change
5	10.8 km	11.8 km	1km inaccessible due to council failing to repair an access bridge

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	August 2024	N/A	N/A
Water Environment Steering Group (Internal)	August 2024	September 2024	N/A
Water Environment Governance Group (External)	September 2024	October 2024	June 2025

Project Timescales

Candidate Project Approved	Project Initiated	Project Completed
October 2024	October 2024	March 2025

Project Summary and Highlights

Summary

Since October 2024, The River Gipping Trust has improved 10.8km of accessible water environments between Ipswich and Stowmarket along the River Gipping.

The River Gipping Footpath and Himalayan Balsam Improvements project has enhanced access along the River Gipping through Himalayan Balsam control, bench installation, signage installation, and social media engagement. 12 volunteers of The River Gipping Trust have delivered this project.

Highlights

- Himalayan Balsam control along the Gipping has increased views of the river, transforming a narrow overgrown path to an open space where the water environment can be enjoyed.
- Three benches installed, including one recovered and restored
- Four interpretation signage installed, including one recovered and restored
- There has been strong local engagement throughout this project with hundreds of positive comments from the public on the work being done including
 - 257 Facebook comments
 - 2753 Facebook likes
 - 27746 people reached



Volunteers installing one out of three new interpretation signs next to Baylham bridge.

Maps

River Gipping Improvements

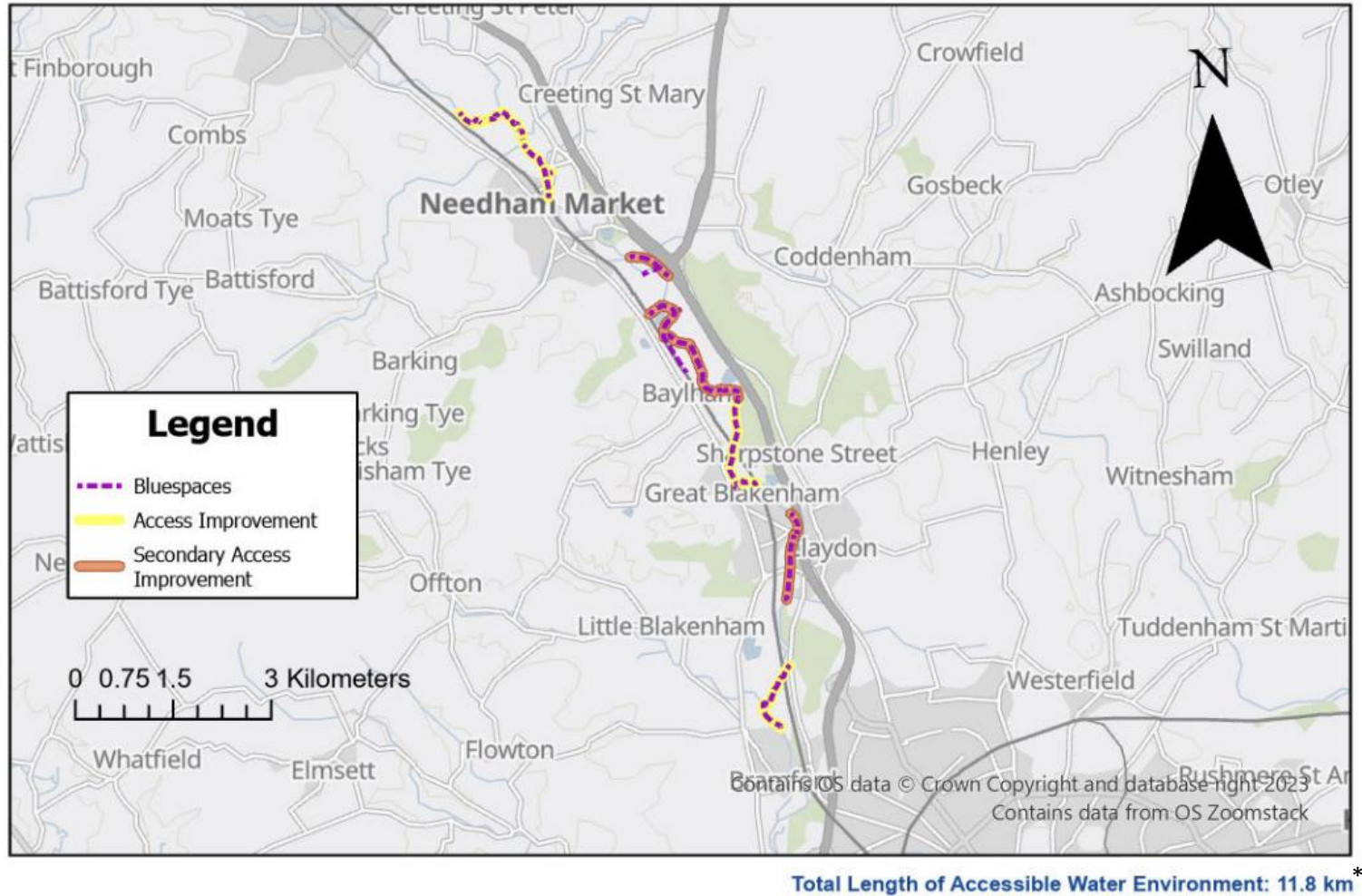



Figure 1: Bluespaces improved at the River Gipping (*1km undeliverable)

Project Outputs, Benefits & Evidence Against Criteria

Access, Facilities & Recreation	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to the water environment will be enhanced through the clearance of Himalayan balsam and migration of footpaths to their original routes adjacent to the river – giving visitors clear views of the river again. This will also have wellbeing benefits as bluespaces are proven to help mental wellbeing. 2. The installation of new benches and signage will provide increased enjoyment and access of the water environment and encourage more usage of the area (by end of March 2025). 3. Volunteering opportunities to deliver this project particularly focusing on balsam bashing will provide health and wellbeing benefits, as well as the opportunity for the local community to have a positive ecological impact. Volunteers can also engage with visitors and educate them about invasive species and their impact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A1: Increases access to, engagement with and enjoyment of the water environment ➤ A2: Benefits health and wellbeing through: ➤ A3: Influences positive environmental behaviors
Outputs	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Himalayan Balsam control facilitated by the purchase of maintenance equipment has increased direct views of the river along the Gipping. Hundreds of members of the public have shown positive support, gratitude and shared the wellbeing benefits they have reaped for the work carried out. Some of these comments are mentioned in customer testimonies below. 2. Two new benches, three new signs, one recovered bench and one recovered sign have provided increased enjoyment of and access to the Gipping, visitors have stated on social media they have taken large walking routes thanks to the widened path and increased views of the river. 3. 12 volunteers at the River Gipping Trust have participated in delivering this project, 5 new volunteers joined the group since the project started in October 2024 and have helped balsam bashing. Volunteers have provided testimonies below. Visitors to the riverside were often engaged by volunteers balsam bashing, this is how two new volunteers recently signed up to the River Gipping Trust. 	
Evidence	
<p>Volunteers at the River Gipping Trust have commented on the wellbeing and ecological benefits of balsam bashing for this Bluespaces project <i>"I am a retired person who enjoys longer walks and while walking the Gipping last summer I could clearly see that the riverside path needed constant maintenance & improvements to ensure that it could be walked and enjoyed by all. I met with members of the trust who were involved in a work party and I decided to become involved. I am happy to spend a couple of days a month to support the efforts of the trust and do something worthwhile for the community"</i> said Steve Dingley who joined the trust in October 2024.</p> <p>Phil James said <i>"As a regular volunteer to RGT involvement I have been most impressed with the enthusiasm of both the Trust and my fellow volunteers. To see the changes that we are making to keep the river and footpaths clear and the joy from regular users appreciating our work is worth missing my gym time!"</i>.</p>	
<div>Project lead Ian with one of the three new interpretation boards.</div>	



Recovered and restored bench and signage found under the brush of Himalayan Balsam at Shamford (sign) and Claydon (bench).







Two new benches installed by volunteers upstream and downstream of Baylham Mill.



Direct views of the river created, and original footpath regained and used after Himalayan Balsam clearance.



Invasive Himalayan Balsam crowding the footpath and blocking views of the river (12m to the left) before works.

Wildlife & Biodiversity	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<p>1. Ongoing control of Himalayan Balsam and production of a management plan for invasive species control will allow the establishment of native flora and reduce the spread downstream. This will also help the restoration and connectivity of the natural riparian environment, having huge benefits for wildlife.</p>	<p>➤ B1: Improves the quantity, quality and connectivity of habitats</p> <p>➤ B3: Reduces risk or impact of invasive non-native species (INNS)</p>
Outputs	
<p>1. Control of Himalayan Balsam has been effectively carried out from the period of October 2024 – February 2025. Benefits to native flora and fauna will be monitored as control of the invasive continues and will be assessed in two years.</p> <p>2. The River Gipping Trust have created a management plan for the coming two years of Himalayan Balsam control. This includes continued management of current areas controlled under this Bluespaces project by Trust volunteers and a set of volunteer days in partnership with National Highways and Stowmarket Town Volunteers.</p>	
Evidence	
<div>   </div> <div>   </div> <div> <p>Midstream Section Before and After</p> </div> <div> <p>Himalayan Balsam clearance before and after along the 5.5 km middle section of the River Gipping.</p> </div>	
<p>Management Plan available on request.</p>	

Water Quality

Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The control of Himalayan Balsam will allow the establishment of native flora along river banks, helping to reduce erosion in the winter months when banks are left bare from balsam stands. 2. Improved signage and mowing regimes will help visitors keep to footpaths and reduce erosion along riverbanks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ C1: Reduces pollutants entering waters from point or diffuse sources ➤ C2: Contributes towards improved status or no deterioration of rivers or bathing waters or protecting drinking water ➤ C3: Improves state and function of water, including naturalisation, visual appearance, litter and odour

Outputs title

1. Control of Himalayan Balsam will allow native plants to re-colonise the marginal area of the river, reducing soil vulnerable to erosion in the winter.
2. Improved signage has helped visitors to identify walking routes by the river. Widening of the footpaths and increased views have also made it clearer for the public to keep to footpath. In the winter this should further help the public to encroach less on the riverside bank.

Evidence



The original river side footpath reopened.



Footpath signage at Packards Loading Dock showing walking routes by the river.



Original footpath before and after the Bluespaces work at Creting St Mary. Volunteers plan to regularly mow the newly cut areas through the summer months leaving a 500mm wild strip at the river's edge.

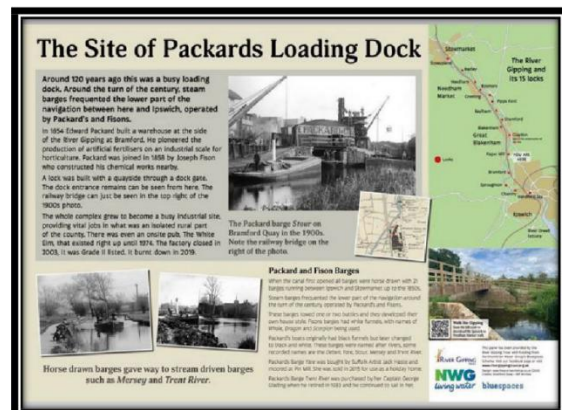
Additional & Secondary Benefits

Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
1. The local community will benefit from improved access to their local bluespaces – having access and views directly to the water in the summer months when access is most sought after. They will also be better educated about the area and be able to contribute to positive improvements through volunteering.	D2: Provides benefits to local communities, the local economy or NWG

Outputs

1. The local community have been actively engaged from the beginning of this projects work, there have been hundreds of positive comments on social media regarding works undergone and the impact it has had on improving direct views of the water environment. Interpretation has included local knowledge and historic river use, helping educate the local community.
2. 12 volunteers have participated in delivering the Bluespaces project and five new volunteers have joined the group since the project began.

Evidence



Interpretation signage on historic use of the river for the benefit of the local community.



Limited to direct views of the River Gipping before and after the Bluespaces work at Creting St Mary.

Customer Testimonies & Media

The River Gipping Trust have had a very positive response locally, with 2,753 Facebook likes, reached 27,746 people and had 257 comments on Bluespaces project posts since the start of the project in October 2024. A spreadsheet of all of these comments is available on request.

Social media responses from the public include the following:

Himalayan Balsam clearing in Hawks Mill on the 13th November 2024: *"Thank you [thumbs up] really appreciate all your hard work. I remember the path close to the river and look forward to walking it again"*

Interpretation installation at Paper Mill, Bramford on the 15th January 2025: *"You are all doing a brilliant job and making our walks so much better along the river, so much improvement. Well done and thank you 😊"*

Bench installation at Baylham on the 19th January 2025: *"Must say a big thank you to you all for the amazing work your doing along the Gipping. We walked from Creeting towards Stowmarker today and couldn't believe the difference since last time we did. We've been walking this path for many years now but havn't done it for a while because the path has become narrow and muddy. The difference you've made means it was a really enjoyable walk and we could actually see the river."*



The River Gipping Trust is at River Gipping tow path. ***

7h · 🌐

This week Trust volunteers were working between Hawkes Mill and Badley getting the footpath back alongside the river (where it historically always has been) thus improving the walking experience during the summer months and helping to eradicate the invasive species of Himalayan Balsam that grows between the river and the path. Now cut, Trust volunteers plan to mow this area once every 4-weeks during the growing season promoting grass growth and leaving the current path to naturally rewild where it is some distance from the river bank. The current path was also given a trim to Badley. We will be back again next week to continue the work further towards Badley.



The River Gipping Trust ***

29m · 🌐

Further Footpath work adjacent to the river at Bramford. Volunteers also trimmed the path at G.Blakenham (between the two road bridges). Next week we plan to do Hawkes Mill to Badley



Two of many Facebook posts by The River Gipping Trust on Bluespaces work

Lead Partner Quotes & Testimonials

We have made the footpath so much more enjoyable and assessable for the public who use them.

If we can keep on top of all the areas cleared I have calculated we could well eliminate around two million balsams. With the extra equipment Bluespaces have provided and with the extra five volunteers that have joined us that we met up with while doing this work along the footpath, we feel we are in good shape to complete the work this year.

Two million Balsams? All the areas cut back had large clusters of the Balsam, each square metre of 'died back' Balsam growth contains thousands of their seeds (each plant can produce up to 1,000 seeds) which left unchecked would result in around 300 plants per square meter. Half a mile long x an average width of say 10ft (800m x 3M) = 2,400 SqM x 300 plants per SqM = 720,000 plants, in just half a mile section!. Over the three primary sections that's around 2 million plants in total!!!. More if we add on the smaller secondary sections!.

... So on behalf of all the Trustees and users of the footpath a big thank you. We could not have done it without your help and support.

Ian Petchey, RGT Restoration Manager

The greatest benefit that the project provides is by removing a vast amount of nettles volunteers are able to get at the Himalayan Balsam without getting stung from head to toe. We have been making a measurable difference to the amount of balsam on the Gipping according to the survey that the Suffolk Wildlife Trust carried out a year or two ago and this project will allow us to continue to reduce its impact further.

Paul Cain, RGT Trustee and volunteer

Other Supporting Evidence & Data

The River Gipping Trust have received a mass amount of public support, a long detailed list of social media responses has been recorded in an excel sheet, available on request.

The group have released a series of newsletters on their work for their volunteers including the Bluespaces project, available on request.

Northumbrian Water Group's Bluespaces Project

The Trust has now successfully completed its Footpath improvement project with NWG's Bluespaces. Last October the Trust was granted funds from them to improve the walkers' experience and access along the riverside footpath between Bramford and Badley and to help eliminate clusters of Himalayan Balsam growing alongside the river. The project included:

- The reinstatement of many stretches of the footpath closer to the river
- The elimination of thousands of Himalayan Balsam plants during 2025
- The purchase and installation of three interpretation boards along the river
- The purchase and installation of two public accessible benches along the river

Restoration
News-sheet
Issue 8 - Spring 2025

Restoration
Well-being
Biodiversity
Heritage

- Reinstating Badley Footbridge 2
- Parish Councils Support 3
- SCC Path Improvement Work 4
- Bench at Claydon 5
- Sharnford Interpretation Board 5

- Bluespaces Improvement Project 6
- Footpaths closer to river 6
- Hindmeyer Balsam Clearance 7
- 3 New Interpretation Boards 8
- 2 New Benches 10

Date	Person	Comment Made	FB Likes	Reached	Comments
Creeping St Mary & St Peter 11th December 2024					
12/12/2024	Gail Gordon Brown	Thankyou I	189	2051	21
	Brenda Mitchel	Amazing and great photos			
	Janice Dent	Great job and photos thank you for all your hard work 🙌			
	Andy Last	Excellent job. Shame you can't dig the river out to make the river deeper and reduce the risk of flooding			
	Allan Miller	Once again, thank you for all that you do, enjoy your Christmas you all deserve it.			
	Janice Lilly	Thank you 🙌			
13/12/2024	Melvyn Kitchener	A lot of hard work guys... well done 🙌			
	Joan Purcell	Well done!			
	Allan Miller	Once again, thank you for all that you do, enjoy your Christmas you all deserve it.			
	Susan Newland	Well done x			
	Susan Bigmore	Wow that is amazing job you have all done. Thank you so much 🙌			
	John Moore	I don't say this often. But you guys do a great job and should be pleased with yourselves			
	Glenn Oxford	Thank you so much. Managed the walk from Stowmarket lorry park to Roots n Shoots, the new bridge is fantastic.			
	Bernadette Pitt	Thank you for all your hard work. Much appreciated.			
	Clanger Jill	Wow... superb work			
	Marie Broodryk	A job well done and much appreciated 🙌			
14/12/2024	Lorraine Chatfield	Thank-you much appreciated. Love these walks x			
	Thomas Baze	Love! Looking forward to seeing and walking			