

# 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

Hauxley Hide & Trail Renovation

## Project Lead

Company/ Organisation	Named Lead	Position
Northumberland Wildlife Trust	Alex Lister	Landscape Manager

## Bluespaces Improved

Year	Claimed	Proposed	Reason For Any Change
5	2.4 km	2.4 km	N/A

## 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		N/A	N/A
Water Environment Steering Group (Internal)		January 2024	N/A
Water Environment Governance Group (External)		February 2024	January 2025

## Project Timescales

Candidate Project Approved	Project Initiated	Project Completed
February 2024	February 2024	October 2024

## Project Summary and Highlights

### Summary

The Hauxley Hide & Trail Renovation project helped improve 2.4 km of water environment at the Hauxley Wildlife Discovery Centre, managed by Northumberland Wildlife Trust, through enhancing the accessibility, visitor experience, and habitats of the site to deliver bluespaces for the public. This was achieved through creation of a new bird hide offering exceptional views over wetland habitat, tree planting, installing a new brass rubbing trail along the accessible trail, and drainage improvements to improve the accessibility of the circular footpath route.

### Highlights

- New Ponteland Bird Hide – now more accessible and safe to use for visitors
- Approximately 300 trees planted at the site to enhance the shelter belt to provide new habitat for both resident and migrant bird species
- A new wetland-themed brass rubbing trail created for families to attract users to the accessible trail through the site
- Drainage enhancements will now allow the circular footpath to remain open year-round
- Creation of extra wetland features on-site linked to drainage improvements



The Bluespaces Delivery Manager visited the site on 7/8/24 to view the improvements delivered in this project. This photo shows a view from the new Ponteland Bird Hide

## Maps

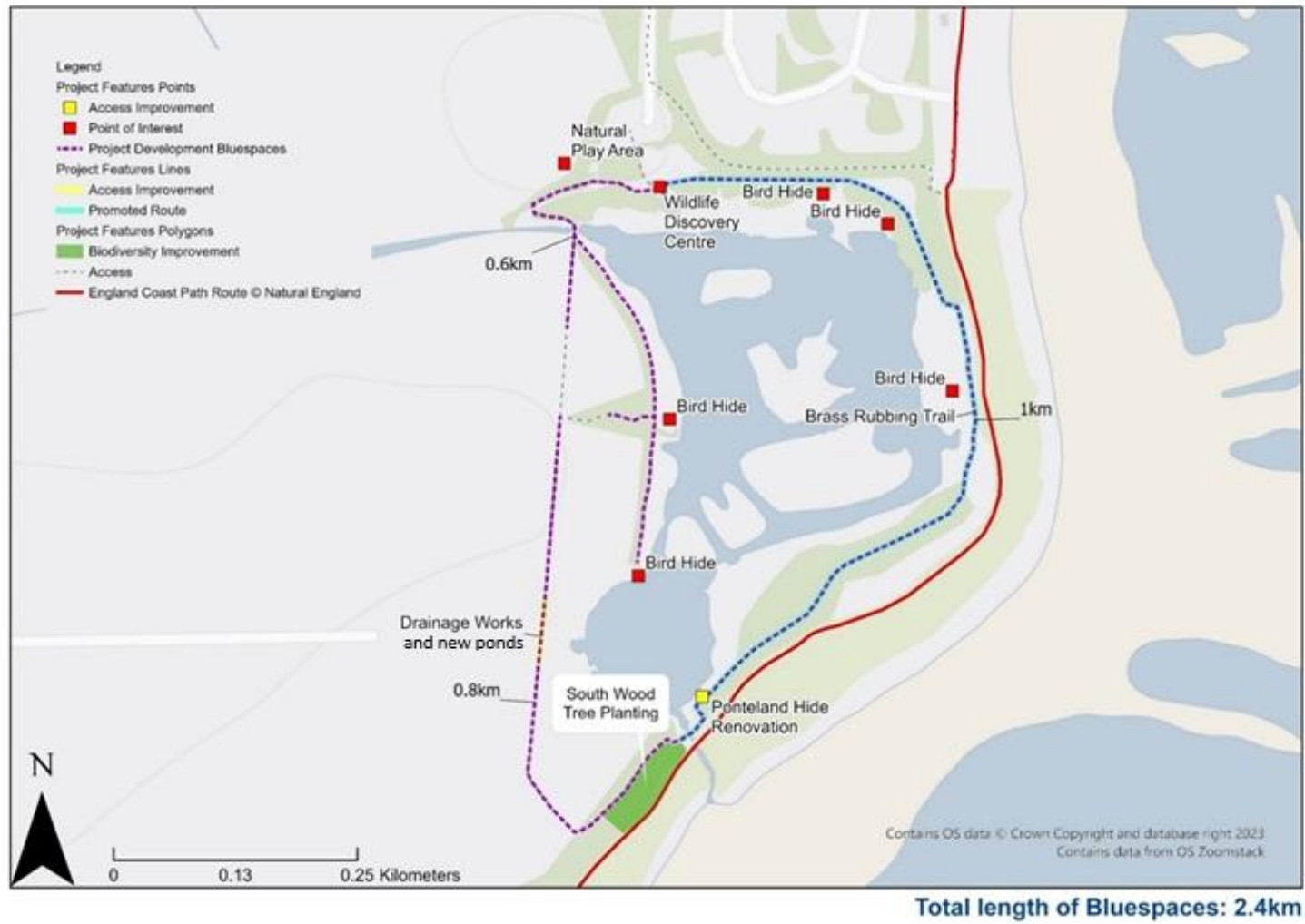




Figure 1: Bluespaces improved at Hauxley Wildlife Discovery Centre

## Project Outputs, Benefits & Evidence Against Criteria

Access, Facilities & Recreation	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The old Ponteland bird hide will be replaced with a new, fully accessible hide, including raising the path leading to the hide for wheelchair access.</li> <li>2. Install new 'brass rubbing trail' with wetlands theme along the accessible trail, allowing all reserve users to participate and engage visitors with the water environment.</li> <li>3. Improve the circular route by draining the wettest 50m of footpath. This will improve accessibility, visitor experience, and prevent more path closures in future.</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 behaviors</li> </ul>
Outputs	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A new replacement Ponteland hide was constructed, offering a much safer and more accessible facility from which to enjoy the water environment. The path to the hide was raised, the door is wider and there are now seating areas for wheelchair users.</li> <li>2. A new wetland-themed brass rubbing trail was installed along the accessible visitor trail, including 9 brass rubbing posts, and a leaflet to be used by visitors. The brass-rubbing trail is advertised on the Hauxley Reserve page of NWT's website, informing visitors that the leaflet and a pack of crayons can be purchased (£1) from the Lookout Café on site. By 30/12/24 174 packs had been sold and a further 94 given out as part of school and community group engagement.</li> <li>3. Ditching work and culvert installation was conducted in autumn 2024. In the previous winter, the footpath was closed from October 23 until March 24 due to flooding. By the end of December 24 the drainage was working well, and the footpath has remained open to visitors.</li> </ol>	
Evidence	
<div>   </div> <p>Replacement hide (pre-branding) and bluespace views from within it</p>	





Access improvements to replacement hide with raised path and wheelchair seating areas



Brass rubbing trail posts (6/9): Pond skater / oystercatcher / frog / barn owl / alder / lapwing



Brass rubbing trail leaflets





New culvert and drainage on wettest section of circular footpath



Aerial view of drained and resurfaced access (along bottom of photo), and of newly created ponds fed from culvert

## Wildlife & Biodiversity

Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase the area and diversity of scrubby woodland on the coastal edge of the site, a valuable habitat for migrants such as long and short eared owls, brambling, fieldfare, goldcrest and woodcock making landfall from Scandinavia. Currently the woodland is dominated by mature sycamore that has been periodically thinned and alder. Species to be planted include willow, alder, hazel, rowan, blackthorn, hawthorn, crab apple, elder and guelder rose.</li> <li>2. Drainage works to improve the circular route footpath will divert more water into wetland areas, providing more wetland habitat for wildlife.</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> </ul>

### Outputs

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Approximately 300 trees were planted at South Wood, on the coastal edge of the site, including willow, alder and hazel, to enhance the diversity and age structure of the scrub / woodland shelter belt. The sycamore monoculture will be gradually thinned over the years once these trees begin to establish, helping to further reduce the domination of the sycamore species.</li> <li>2. Drainage works to improve the circular route footpath have allowed creation of two new ponds downstream of the culvert, providing more wetland habitat for wildlife to utilise.</li> </ol>
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### Evidence



Border of woodland shelter belt where trees were planted





Newly planted trees



New ponds, fed from new footpath drain



Additional & Secondary Benefits	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
1. Footpath drainage works will help alleviate flooding and allow people better/ more access through increased extreme rainfall events.	➤ D1: Provides resilience and adaptation to climate change and/or reduces the risk of flooding
Outputs	
1. Drainage improvements to the footpath and creation of new scrapes mean the low section of footpath on the circular trail is now more resilient to the increased rainfall anticipated in the winter months, helping alleviate flooding and reducing frequent footpath closures in the future.	
Evidence	
See above sections	

## Customer Testimonies & Media

Northumberland Wildlife Trust struggled to get useful feedback from visitors, with comments received usually being 'it's great' 'it's nice' etc. Therefore, they asked their reception team to ask visitors for comments specifically on the Bluespaces works (Hide, Footpath and Rubbing Trail), and why they thought it was good. Visitors were encouraged to say more than the standard 'it's great'. They didn't include negative comments about the reserve such as 'the new hide is brilliant but there aren't any birds', 'why didn't you do the boundary path in stone' and other comments that were not linked to this project.'

### Comments received on Ponteland hide:

*"The new Ponteland Hide is a great improvement from the old one, it's way more comfortable and offers a better view of the muddy area in front."*

*"I love the new hide, it feels more spacious and welcoming, and the fact that it's wheelchair accessible makes it so much better."*

*"The new hide is so much better than the old one, and I really like that its accessible for everyone."*

*"We have been coming here for years, and the new Ponteland Hide really stands out. It's modern, spacious, and just generally better, I think the old one was one of the old originals and could have been 35 years old."*

*"It's so refreshing to see a nature reserve that's actually trying to prioritise accessibility. The new hide and its chairs rather than benches make it a wonderful place to watch birds in comfort."*

*"The replacement to the Ponteland Hide is long overdue but definitely worth the wait, Hauxley keeps getting better".*

*"Brilliant to see the new hide. It really improves the experience, and it's nice to that it's bright and airy, also makes it feel safer."*

*"The all new Ponteland Hide has made a huge difference. I always enjoyed coming here, but the old one was very tired, now it's easier to access and more comfortable to sit and enjoy the views."*

### Comments received on footpath drainage works:

*"Great to see the footpath staying open this winter. The improvements have definitely made a difference."*

*"I've been able to walk the boundary path without any hassle thanks to the works. It's wonderful to have a less muddy path"*

*"The new ditch seems to be a success, I was worried that the footpaths might get too muddy again this year, but they've been fine so far, fingers crossed it stays like that all the winter."*

*"Great to see the new ponds adding wildlife value too. Not only do the paths stay open, but the wildlife benefits as well!"*

*"Lovely that we don't have to worry about this path closing as often during the wetter months."*

*"The path improvements are great"*

### Comments received on brass rubbing trail:

*"My kids absolutely loved the brass rubbing trail. It's fun and educational, a great idea for families as it gets kids to walk around the reserve."*

*"What a fantastic addition. The brass rubbing trail is a brilliant way to teach young visitors about the wildlife in the area. I've never seen something like this before, and it's such a fun way to learn while walking around the reserve."*

*"The brass rubbing trail has made our visit so much more interactive, it got the children running ahead to find the next one, great idea"*

*"It's a creative and educational way to explore Hauxley and learn about the animals that live here."*

*"My kids enjoyed the brass rubbing trail so much that they're already asking when we can come back."*

*"The rubbing trail is such a clever way to get children excited about wildlife. It's perfect for school groups!"*

*"What a unique idea. The trail is a great addition, and it's wonderful to see how it's helping to teach my kids about the wildlife here."*



**Link to press release for brass rubbing trail:**

[‘Top brass’ installed at Hauxley reserve | Northumberland Wildlife Trust](#)

**Link to Hauxley Reserve page on NWT website, within which there is explanation of how visitors can make use of the brass rubbing trail:**

[Hauxley | Northumberland Wildlife Trust](#)

## **Lead Partner Quotes & Testimonials**

‘The new Ponteland Hide has been incredibly well received by visitors, replacing the almost 40-year-old hide with new has also made it wheelchair accessible. While we don’t get many visitors with wheelchairs this facility also makes it more accessible to all visitors.

The drainage works have meant we haven’t had to close the footpath this winter. We will know better come the spring, but it all appears to be working well. The new drainage ponds will add some wildlife value to the area.

The tree planting will take years to be visible to the public, but it has created a small amount of new woodland and boosted the understory in a good amount of existing woodland, this will eventually help screen the reserve from the Northumberland Coastal Path that runs along our eastern boundary.

The brass rubbing trail has proved popular with visitors and has been used by our education staff with visiting groups. It’s a great way to introduce our younger visitors to some of our wildlife.’

**Alex Lister, Druridge Bay Living Landscapes Manager, Northumberland Wildlife Trust**

‘The [brass-rubbing] trail and accompanying booklet are fantastic! It is also a wonderful way to learn more about our wildlife whilst enjoying a walk around the reserve. Once complete, the booklet makes a brilliant record of a visit and can be taken home to show family and friends. I would like to thank Northumbrian Water’s Bluespaces programme for giving us the funding to make this possible.’

**Natasha Hemsley, Druridge Bay Communities Officer, Northumberland Wildlife Trust**

## Other Supporting Evidence

Volunteer hours logged on the project, including preparation for the new hide and tidy-up afterwards, tree planting and tree guard removal:

### Northumberland Wildlife Trust

Practical Conservation - NWT Reserves - Hauxley - Site Maintenance 2 2 2 MEET ON SITE

Activity Volunteer Totals: 01/01/2024 - 31/03/2024

Volunteers	Hours
Allen, Catherine	4.00
Anderton, Steve	16.00
Baxter, Peter	8.00
Bullock, Anita	7.33
Cramman-maltman , Louise	7.75
Drake, Mandy	8.00
Fischer, Margot	11.50
Gibson, David	4.00
Goodfellow, Andrew	12.00
Keville, Audrey	21.00
O'Rourke, Christine	8.00
Parsons, Simon	4.00
Pickering, Tim	4.50
Pope, Louise	4.00
Scott, John	24.00
<b>Total Hours</b>	<b>144.08</b>
<b>Number of volunteers</b>	<b>15.00</b>
<b>Average per Volunteer</b>	<b>9.61</b>