Make our meeting effective

Offline Sign-Off Notes

	Meeting: Water Environment Governance Group	
Attendees: Fiona Morris (for first hour), Clemmie Moule, Sian Whitehead, Emily Baldock	**Date:** 05/06/25	**Location:** MS Teams Drop-In/Email Chain
Note: A full set of documents is available in the Water Environment Governance Group SharePoint Site https://nwgcloud.sharepoint.com/sites/TD0273/dcs/	**Distribution**: Attendees and Email Chain Recipients	

Project Sign-Off Notes and Comments

Northumbrian Water Projects (North)

Caring for Cocker Beck – AG thought that this was a lovely project working directly with a community group with a huge value for the local residents.

GD mentioned it was great to see Bluespaces supporting the local community group in delivering these improvements.

Cut Throat Dene Restoration – AG commented that there is a lot of further work needed on this project. This was mentioned previously when looking at the original proposal and AG liked that this project also included a look ahead to what more could be done to this largely neglected watercourse in future phases of Bluespaces or beyond.

GD stated that this was a good project trying to rescue a neglected stream. Great progress in this phase and also in identifying key activities for a phase 2.

ACTION: Bluespaces to determine what further work could be done on this project in the future.

Healing Hazel Dene – AG thought that this project seemed to encounter a raft of problems derailing original plans, from flooding to permissions, but pointed out that a small contribution from Bluespaces into a programme of wider work is clearly beneficial.

GD commented that this great smaller project that has made a real difference. Good to see the local community engagement, the perseverance through the problems and commitment to maintain the area.

Links with Nature – AG noted that this was a great example of providing co-funding into a much larger partnership programme delivering wider benefits. Good to see some practical river restoration activities alongside broader environmental and engagement benefits and is fully supportive of this approach.

GD re-iterated that this was a large collaborative project delivering practical improvements, community engagement and volunteering. Perhaps it would be helpful to highlight more clearly what the difference is that the Bluespaces funding has made.

SW mentioned that the Bluespaces funding went into the project's general revenue budget and was used alongside other funding to support staff and project costs. The project lead could have attributed the Bluespaces contribution to a particular cost, but that this would have been an arbitrary retrospective allocation.

Old Durham Beck – AG stated that it was great to see some in-river enhancement through this project and the indicative decline of giant hogweed seems very impressive. It's great this has been monitored and hopefully they can continue these efforts.

GD stated it was good to see the in-river enhancement activities and the progress on eliminating giant hogweed. Also, the engagement with landowners along the Beck and the improvements they have made to reduce runoff pollution.

Stockton Becks Restoration – AG liked that this specified the added value that the Bluespaces funding brought to the wider project – with capital delivery funded elsewhere, this supported the community engagement, which is such great added value for these projects.

Destination Tweed: North Northumberland – AG mentioned that this is another large and impressive scheme that it's great Bluespaces could support. It's clear where the Bluespaces money was directed which helps understand the value it has added. A lot of engagement activity has been undertaken, particularly in a cross-border project. Seems to be another candidate for future funding if possible.

GD commented that it was unsurprising it is taking longer to deliver physical benefits than planned due to such a vast project and so many stakeholders. It is good to see progress has been made and particularly the level of engagement with local people and schools that has been supported by Bluespaces.

Water and Wellbeing Warden – AG commented that this was a really interesting model, funding a warden at NNRs via a partnership, and it's impressive to see the highlights listed and the benefits and outputs delivered here. Seems to be a successful model that could be supported elsewhere as well.

GD emphasised that this was an excellent project and happy to sign off on it. Questioned what the plan for the end of the two year period will be and how this progress will be maintained.

SW responded that the wider project still has another year to run, supported by other partner funding. Sam, the warden, will be using this time to continue to raise the profile of the reserves and associated works amongst local community groups. Significant increase in volunteer pool already secured, which they can now continue to draw on. Given the obvious benefits that this post has brought, there is a real appetite to try and maintain the role going forwards – partners will also be using this next year to look at future funding options.

Essex and Suffolk Water Projects (South)

Gores Brook Community Action – AG commented that this project focused on a neglected river getting some much-needed attention with great community engagement and positive impacts on local residents.

GD thought this was a good project and happy to sign off.

Martlesham Wilds – AG really liked the ambition of this project and commented that whilst disappointing that the saltmarsh creation has been delayed, it has delivered significant benefits. Is there opportunity to continue supporting this in the next phase once permissions are in place?

CM stated that the Bluespaces team will scope opportunities to work more on this project.

GD thought this was a fantastic project delivering significant positive change for the local community and local wildlife. The one concern for is that it is not entirely clear what the difference is that the Bluespaces funding has made compared to the £1million from other donors. Perhaps this can be clarified in the document.

ACTION: Bluespaces team to scope out more opportunities for this project.

ACTION: Bluespaces to determine whether the specific difference of Bluespaces funding for this project compared to the funding from other donors needs to be clarified in the final document.

Tin River Restoration and Flood Management Project – AG commented that this was a really nice contained project that covers a lot of essential elements. They have planted a mix of native trees and shrubs in the buffer strip – so often the shrub is not included but they're a great addition.

GD thought this was a good project and happy to sign off.

Generic comments

FM didn't identify any major issues from the project packs and didn't have any project-specific comments and was happy to approve them all, with the following generic comments and observations:

- The legacy left by Bluespaces projects is inspiring, in particular projects that addressed anti-social behaviour (e.g. Gores Brook), and great to see the impact of this. We need to ensure that future projects seek to secure similar strong legacies where possible.
- Although Health & Well-being isn't quantified, it's a strong output from these projects.

AG happy to approve all projects.

RP commented on the diversity and wide range of different projects. Agreed with AG on project comments.

SW responded that both Martlesham Wilds and Links with Nature projects are examples where the value of Bluespaces funding has been queried in relation to the significantly greater amounts of resources coming from elsewhere. Going forward, we can ensure that there is a clearer understanding of exactly what Bluespaces will fund. However, we shouldn't underestimate the importance that even our small contribution can make to how a project bid is perceived by the main funding partners. Bluespaces' endorsement of a project, evidenced by our relatively small financial contribution, can make the difference between the project getting off the ground or not. We need to be more upfront about the importance of even a relatively small Bluespaces contribution. In some instances, we may not be able to lay direct claim to many specific tangible outputs, but we can share the credit for enabling the project to happen in the first place, and for it happening at the scale it has.

SW also mentioned that in addition to RM's approval, there were approvals from three other members of WEGG, which was sufficient for formal sign-off. Given that there have been no substantive project-specific comments that need to be addressed, these projects are now all fully signed-off, without the need to re-present them to RM as Chair.

RM confirmed all projects as signed-off.

ACTION: Bluespaces team to be more upfront about the importance of any Bluespaces funding contribution going forward with future projects.

AOB

CD thanked all those involved for their involvement and support for the Bluespaces scheme through AMP7 and invited all to the suggested celebration event, which a date is currently being determined for. The Bluespaces programme will now be led by JM with support from the new Bluespaces Lead, SW, CM, EB and the wider Bluespaces Team with CD and ZF providing strategic company support.

RP and FM thanked CD for all her involvement.

RP mentioned need for some management of profile and what the actual difference we are making in the bigger projects but nothing insurmountable and we can discuss as we go forward.

AG excited to see the evolution into AMP 8, and was particularly pleased to see that there is maintenance and feasibility funding available. Also reiterated comments from previous meetings that it would be helpful to see where the Bluespaces funding was targeted - perhaps something that could be picked up in the next phase?