

Offline Sign-Off Notes		Meeting: Water Environment Governance Group	
Attendees: Sian Whitehead, Richard Powell		Date: 09/05/25	Location: MS Teams Drop-In/Email Chain
Note: A full set of documents is available in the Water Environment Governance Group SharePoint Site <a href="https://nwgcloud.sharepoint.com/sites/TD0273/dcs/">https://nwgcloud.sharepoint.com/sites/TD0273/dcs/</a>		Distribution: Attendees and Email Chain Recipients	
Project Sign-Off Notes and Comments			
Northumbrian Water Projects (North)			
Hummer Beck and Lower Gaunless			
<p>AG commented that there was a huge variety of activity conducted in this project for the budget available. It sounds like it could be building ahead of steam in a river that really does need some attention. Hopefully the HL application is successful and this work can continue to be supported - it is clearly valued by the community.</p> <p>MJ pointed out that the summary of P2 reference is made to some farm visits but that the team have been stretched. In light of the comments on poor agricultural practice this looks like an important but challenging issue which could undermine any short term gains. Does this mean the project could be seen as more of a springboard than a finished outcome? Certainly some of the testimonials feel a bit like that, which is not a problem but it would be good to know of any future plans. For comparison the River Gipping Project is very complete and therefore different in feel. Hard to judge the outcome for this project yet, but the Gaunless is not an easy win.</p> <p>GD stated that this was another great project, and the level of local engagement achieved was particularly impressive as was the creation of the Gaunless Guardians.</p>			
Longdike Burn Wetlands			
<p>AG emphasised that it was interesting to see the detail of how work pivoted when challenges arose. Much of the work was carried out in 2022/23 so it might have been nice to have some more recent photos to see how the wetlands are fairing now. As mentioned on other previous projects, consideration of the longer term monitoring, maintenance and adaptive management is often lacking, but good work done to get them in place to begin with.</p> <p>MJ stated that these little streams across rural Northumberland do not receive much attention but they can be very high quality waterways and so it is good to see a project here. Also working with Northumberland Zoo, who are a very dynamic organisation firmly attuned to nature conservation. The wetlands look great. Particularly good to see not just one but a landscape of multiple sites. This is an example of a project referring to Ferric Sulphate stripping tech (p10) – is this part of the Bluespaces funding? The 4x\$ access issue is an issue throughout Northumberland. The outputs on p12 refer to carbon sequestration by the new wetlands. Possibly, but note if these sites receive high loadings of nutrients from the inflows and surrounding land they may become eutrophic and nutrient loaded then ponds like this ponds can become net methane sources.</p> <p>GD was very happy with this project and the documentation.</p>			

SW reformatted the photos to make it clearer that they are from this year.

#### **Skerne Bridleway and River Restoration**

AG stated that this is an impressive scheme and generally supportive of Bluespaces contributing to larger schemes to maximise impact. However, in agreement with others' comments, it is difficult to see where specifically the Bluespaces contribution has added value, and it seems to me to be a stretch to claim the improvements for the full £800k scheme for a £10k contribution. Perhaps a small addition to the report could clarify?

MJ commented that it was not obvious why Bluespaces was really needed here, although did note towards the end of the report there is a bit more on access with the quotes on P14 and p16 reassuring on this. Given the total project budget, this is a report that needed to be very clear about what the Bluespaces money achieved as, but this wasn't clear. As with the Longdike and South Burn project this work includes nutrient stripping. Is this part of the Bluespaces Funding? The actual current deflectors look great.

GD questioned whether the 3.6km claimed only the section from Salter Lane to the pond at Carr Wood. It is not clear from the various colours of dashed lines on the map. Overall, this looks to be an excellent project delivering significant positive change for the local community and local wildlife. The one concern is that it is not entirely clear what the difference is that the Bluespaces funding has made compared to the £820,000 from other funders. Perhaps this can be clarified in the document.

**ACTION: Bluespaces team to use colours and dashed lines on future maps to be easy and clear to visually understand.**

#### **South Burn**

AG commented that this was a neat project and particularly liked the before and after photo evidence here. Also good to see that working in partnership here helped identify and resolve a misconnection as an added bonus – these can have significant impacts, so it's great to see this positive approach to resolving issues as they're identified by all involved.

MJ commented that this project had a clear focus with very good volunteering opportunities, but are there lessons to be learned about how to maximise volunteering? The Gipping example, in comparison, is clearly very good. P10 refers to removal of over 2 tonnes of fly tipping waste. Those volunteers deserve a huge thanks. This is not easy or glamorous work. As with the Longdike and Skerne examples is the nutrient stripping tech part of the Bluespaces funding? Is it there long term?

GD agreed that this was a very good project addressing multiple issues on the South Burn and including lots of volunteer help. Local people have also noticed the difference. There were two areas of INNS that were not given permission for treatment. Will it be possible to do this in the future? Is there any funding left to treat these if permission is obtained in future? Approved for sign-off.

SW addressed the issue regarding INNS control at South Burn (an area where permission had not been forthcoming) with additional text in the relevant section of the form.

#### **Essex and Suffolk Water Projects (South)**

##### **River Gipping and Himalayan Balsam Improvements**

AG commented that this is a neat little project and it is easy to see how the Bluespaces funding has contributed. Good to see that the project has supported the development of a management plan. Without a strategic and intentional approach it is difficult to make inroads with invasive species and this should help with the longevity of impact, which is great to see.

MJ insisted this was very impressive, rich in information, very self-contained and a clear win for Bluespaces funding. Very easy to sign off this project which hummed with action and engagement. The contents of the report seemed very much to match the nature of the Bluespaces funding, there was none of the ambiguity in some of the other projects. Evidence of very good engagement and liked how the volunteer time in-kind neatly matched the Bluespaces funding. It was helpful to have before and after photos to show the results of the cutting back of Himalayan Balsam. Also good to see suggestions of further (two year) monitoring to keep an eye on the project.

GD commented that this was another great project. A relatively small amount of funding has allowed a group of dedicated volunteers to make a massive difference to a local water course and the walks for the local community. Approved

##### **Upper Roding Trout Project**

AG stated that it was really nice to see a project from a farm cluster group - they are such important and impactful partners to help deliver improvements for our rivers and the evidence from this project can be influential in supporting their future applications to other funders. Great evidence of partnership working in this project.

MJ liked the idea of working directly with farmers especially as this is not easy to do and takes time. It would be good to know if this can be sustained in any way. The reference to isolation amongst the farming community is poignant and spot on. Without this sort of farmer involvement is the wider project in jeopardy in the longer term? On p5 the outputs refer to XXX and XXX. Is this a typo or for anonymity? Also liked the way this project can be a springboard to a Lottery Bid, good to know that the work might be kept going and that Bluespaces acts as seed corn or inspiration. The actual footpath pictures suggested the sites might only be accessible to able bodied visitors - maybe parts are more accessible?

SW responded to typo issue and has amended this in the final document.

GD mentioned that it was great to see some care being given to the River Roding that is so overgrown and inaccessible along much of its length. It is also great to see Bluespaces supporting the Roding Farm Cluster, as finding ways to involve and help farmers and landowners improve their land and water courses for nature, as well as being commercially successful, is so important. A great project. Approved.

##### **Generic comments**

RP stated that all projects are good to go and pleased to see the range of different projects. Also mentioned the need to show the impact of Bluespaces funding contribution, especially on big projects, to show clients what we have done and to have evidence to show that.

AG agreed with comments from RP. Mentioned the need to consider long-term monitoring, maintenance and adaptive management, which is better evidenced in some projects than others – would welcome fuller consideration of this in all projects. Emphasis on the great value of these projects and well done to the team and partners for working so hard in delivery.

MJ wholly agreed with comments from RP and thought that this is not clear in three of these projects, in particular where nutrient stripping tech is being used. This issue of attribution has come up before and project write ups need to be clear on this so it is a challenge for project write ups that needs addressing

MJ also questioned that as some of the projects include nutrient stripping tech, which is expensive to install and to run longer term, is this part of the Bluespaces funding? If so is it tech that is in place permanently or can it be taken out and moved elsewhere. How will its continued use be paid for? In some cases it is hard to know if all the work described is the result of the Blue Spaces funding. Sometimes it seems the work must be part of the wider funding pots. This issue of not being able to exactly demarcate the Bluespaces expenditure has been raised before as a challenge in the project reports – report writers need to be very clear on this.

SW addressed the need for clearer distinction between the nutrient stripping measures (baseline WINEP investment) and Bluespaces funding through additional text added to output 1 of water quality. Some projects needed more information regarding what Bluespaces has actually funded, which has now been added to initial funding source table, and a sentence within summary.

**ACTION: Bluespaces team and report writers to clearly show the impact of Bluespaces funding contribution, especially within larger scale projects, in documentation to present easily to clients for future projects.**

**AOB**

None discussed.