

<h1>Meeting Notes</h1>		Meeting: Water Environment Governance Group	
Attendees: Richard Powell (Chair), Graham Dale, Melissa Lockwood, Mike Madine, Clare Deasy, Stephen Thompson, Kim Wallis, Laura Kennedy		Date: 01/11/21	Location: MS Teams
Apologies: Barry Bendall, Mike Jeffries		Distribution: Attendees and Apologies	
Note: A full set of documents is available in the Water Environment Governance Group Teams Site			
No.	Agenda Item and Notes		
1	Introductions RP welcomed all to the meeting. MJ and BB sent their apologies.		
2	Review of Actions There were three actions on the action log – two have been closed off, one is outstanding (CD to discuss process for reward returns relating to undelivered early sign-offs for multi-year projects with Jim Strange). ACTION: CD to schedule meeting with Jim Strange to discuss potential for reward returns and other matters.		
3	ODI Update and Scorecard CD shared the ODI scorecard which shows progress at programme level. The first part of the scorecard shows the number of projects, with the second part showing the kilometres improved. The scorecard may change further in future to achieve greater alignment with the company scorecard. CD shared the project list for 2021/22 as part of this update.		
4	Y2 Project Sign Offs <u>Greening the Marina</u> ST shared the project evidence form for Greening the Marina. The project is linked to Branch Out and delivers 0.4km at Royal Quays Marina in North Tyneside. It was completed in September 2021 and consists of a 50m ² floating ecosystem and associated interpretation. The total project value increased from £45,000 at approval stage to £100,000 at delivery (with no additional contribution required from NWG).		

- RP shared comments received from MJ via email.
- GD – happy with the project. Supported MJ’s comment regarding the need for care around claiming health benefits as a result of projects. The floating ecosystem is relatively small in the scale of the marina but as a standalone project it is great. It would be nice to have a fleet of floating ecosystems in future. ST agreed and advised that part of the project is proving the concept.
- ML – the ecosystem seems to have established very well and agreed that once the concept is proven it would be nice to have a greater number in an area.
- This was discussed in the context of future sites, including for the Tyne estuary. RP queried whether tidal systems floated offshore can be drawn back to the shore for maintenance and re-floated – ST confirmed this would be the case.
- RP also queried whether chemicals from boats stored in settled mud would be an issue for the monitoring programme. ST not sure but the EA are sampling more widely in the area (though uncertain if that work includes this element). RP suggested it may be worth including this issue in the monitoring strategy.

DECISION: WEGG agreed to sign off the Greening the Marina project.

Pity Me Carrs

ST shared the project evidence form for Pity Me Carrs – a Branch Out project with Durham County Council completed in September 2021, consisting of access and habitats work.

The length for the project has been amended to 1.1km to align with the installed interpretation board footpaths (reduced by 0.4km from that proposed and approved). The group agreed with the justification for reducing the km claimed.

- RP shared comments received from MJ via email. MJ raised the need to ensure that claimed benefits for health and wellbeing can be proved (as raised by GD earlier). Testimonials from project partners can help with this.
- ML and GD – project looks good and has delivered what was expected.
- GD questioned whether there is a need for education to explain why tree removal can be positive, as there may be negative public perceptions of removing trees in terms of carbon sequestration. ST agreed. RP suggested this could be something to be included on future interpretation boards, sharing that wetlands can sequester more carbon than woodlands – worded in a way to help people understand.

DECISION: WEGG agreed to sign off the Pity Me Carrs project.

Y2 Project Update

GD queried whether the team are happy with progress on the other Y2 projects, with only two being signed off so far. CD confirmed that funding had been issued for the other 10 approved projects, and that the team are confident that funding partners will deliver the projects by the end of March.

ST provided an update on the Wilder Coast project, showing the engagement that has been undertaken that will be followed by further work in Autumn and Winter 2021/22. The project has promoted link with other NWG campaigns, such as Bin the Wipe, and engaged a large number of customers and volunteers.

Year 3 Projects

It has not been possible to progress any proposed Year 3 projects through the internal steering group in advance of the WEGG meeting. Instead, a number of projects will be shared for approval via email before Christmas, and a preview of some these projects was shared as follows:

Tarset Ford Fish Passage

ST presented the project, which would be legacy work associated with investment at Greenhaugh STW.

- RP – The proposal looks very good, with good range of benefits.
- RP queried the length of watercourse opened up to fish as a result – ST confirmed this would be 10 km.
- RP queried whether there was a link with long distance footpaths or promoted walking trails. ST advised he would need to look into this further.
- Overall the group were supportive of the project proposed.

Skerne Bridleway and River Restoration

ST presented the project, which would be legacy work associated with investment in STWs at Fishburn and Trimdon which would deliver water quality benefits.

5 The project would build on this and involve river restoration, such as baffles and re-meandering, as well as footpath improvements to allow the creation of a bridleway. The project also builds on the bridge restoration project that has already been completed.

The partner would be Discover Brightwater, which operates across the catchment, therefore this project would be part of a wider suite of enhancements in the area.

- All agreed that the project looks to be a good proposal.

Howgill Beck Restoration

ST presented the project proposal, which is located at RSPB Geltsdale, and links a project funded under the South Tyne Holistic Catchment Project.

- All were supportive of the project proposed.

Newcastle Quayside Floating Ecosystem

ST presented the project proposal, involving the installation of a 97m² floating ecosystem in partnership with the Tyne Estuary Partnership and NE1.

The project would be the first intertidal installation of the floating ecosystems, which presents additional engineering considerations.

It would also link with wider plans to green the quayside, such as the creation of a pocket park nearby.

- RP queried whether the value added in this case would be ecological rather than access, as this is already pretty high quality at this area. ST confirmed this was the case, along with engagement activities to increase the value of the water environment experience.
- RP – reserve full judgement until viewing full plans but look forward to seeing this and believe this is a good proposal to put forward.
- GD – it will be interesting to see how the anchoring system can also deal with the very high flows experienced by the Tyne when there are heavy rainfall events upstream.
- ML – the project offers the opportunity to engage with a very different demographic to other projects. The project is also located on Hadrian’s Wall Path. It is interesting to see how the floating ecosystem concept is being developed (see above Greening the Marina project).
- All supportive of the project proposal.

Discovering Ranworth and Cockshoot Broads

KW presented the project proposal, which links with £3,000 of Branch Out funding (used for an otter holt and kingfisher hole). Previous funding has proved to be very successful. The proposal would be to add to the Branch Out funding to a total of £5,000 which would enable an Expression of Interest application for match funding in December 2021.

- RP – it will be interesting to see how the interpretation links up across the area. The project proposed would be a useful addition.

Blackwater Screening and Fish Passage

KW presented this project which would build upon fish passage plans in the Blackwater and intake screen investment as part of WINEP, and also link with wider legacy work including the restoration of a bridge and work with the Museum of Power.

- RP – this is interesting. There is a lot going on in the area and anything to open this up further is good. It will be good to see how all of the activities link together.
- GD – it will be interesting to see how the various elements are pulled together as a project, as its not yet clear which elements will be put forward as part of the WEI ODI. Any option to improve access on Navigation Way (flooding issues) would be good also. KW advised that this issue has been identified as a potential additional project that would be worked up as part of the pipeline for Year 4 projects.
- ML queried whether the EA branding was linked to the fish pass work. KW confirmed this was the case, along with the screens.

Overall, the group felt the project previews were all of interest, and whilst some may be a challenge to pull together as projects, all seemed eligible as none were outside of the scheme aims.

AOB

CD raised the matter of assurance. Ofwat required evidence of external assurance on the ODI assessment process and evidence of the benefits of delivered schemes. This was not submitted with the APR, and in August NW received a query from Ofwat regarding this. The company made changes to the webpages and uploaded assurance material and information on the ODI to the Water Environment area. Jim Strange also discussed the requirement with RP, and a letter was agreed which was signed by RP and submitted to Ofwat. This was subsequently accepted without the need for further action.

For next year, it is proposed that a statement is prepared by RP to be brought to the WEGG for group sign off to confirm that activities have met the requirements. This would be brought to the meeting before the APR requirement deadline (April). The CCG (The Water Forum) was also suggested as a potential route for sign off for assurance information coming through the WEGG.

DECISION: WEGG agreed to approve a formal annual assurance statement for the WEI ODI at the April meeting.

GD recalled previous discussion around assurance more generally, as there is currently no external, independent assurance on the information provided. RP suggested that this could be done but at some stage there would need to be a limit to the layers of review, and that an element of trust is required. CD advised that NWG’s Internal Audit team have been consulted regarding process and were satisfied with the arrangement involving an external governance group, so that they did not advise of a need for external auditing. MM suggested Lynn O’Brien could provide a statement on her review and advice on recommendations for WEGG.

ACTION: CD to ask Lynn O’Brien for statement on internal assurance.

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CD shared that the WEI ODI will be presented to Water Forum for information in December. A paper has been drafted and can be shared in advance with the WEGG if this would be helpful. This group agreed this would be good, and MM assured the group that any comments received by 9th Nov will be incorporated.

ACTION: CD to share WEI ODI Water Forum paper with WEGG for review.

GD suggested that in the paper it would be good to show what has been done not only in terms of kilometres improved but also the total number of people and organisations involved – a holistic view of the water environment and the impact of the scheme, together with what this has done for the company. The scheme can be shown as a forerunner to something the rest of the water industry could do.

GD raised the ongoing focus on storm overflows and the link between storm overflows and the WEI ODI. It is important to be mindful of language used about the water environment in this regard. MM suggested that anticipated large programme of investment in storm overflows in AMP8 and beyond could offer further opportunity for the WEI scheme to build upon investment through WINEP. GD felt that it would be good to engage with opportunities from storm overflow work as soon as possible to show the company is taking action. MM confirmed that the WEI team are actively reviewing the company’s plans including schemes in the capital plan for opportunities in this regard.

RP noted that this new ODI encourages Ofwat to consider the benefit of additional elements, such as biodiversity and wider environment improvements, that may have previously been removed from plans in efforts to drive down customer bills, despite customer support for such initiatives.

At meeting close, CD reminded all that projects for email approval will be sent to the WEGG before Christmas using the process agreed last spring. The next WEGG meeting is scheduled for January 2022.

Make our meeting effective

