

## 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

Abberton Reservoir Discovery Centre Improvements

### Project Lead

Company/ Organisation	Named Lead	Position
Essex Wildlife Trust	Jo Wray	Site Manager (Abberton)

### Bluespaces Improved

Year	Claimed	Proposed	Reason For Any Change
Year 3/4	3.9	3.9	NA

### 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	September 2022	N/A	N/A
Water Environment Steering Group (Internal)	October 2022	October 2022	N/A
Water Environment Governance Group (External)	October 2022	October 2022	May 2024

### Project Timescales

Candidate Project Approved	Project Initiated	Project Completed
October 2022	February 2023	March 2024

## Project Summary and Highlights

### Summary

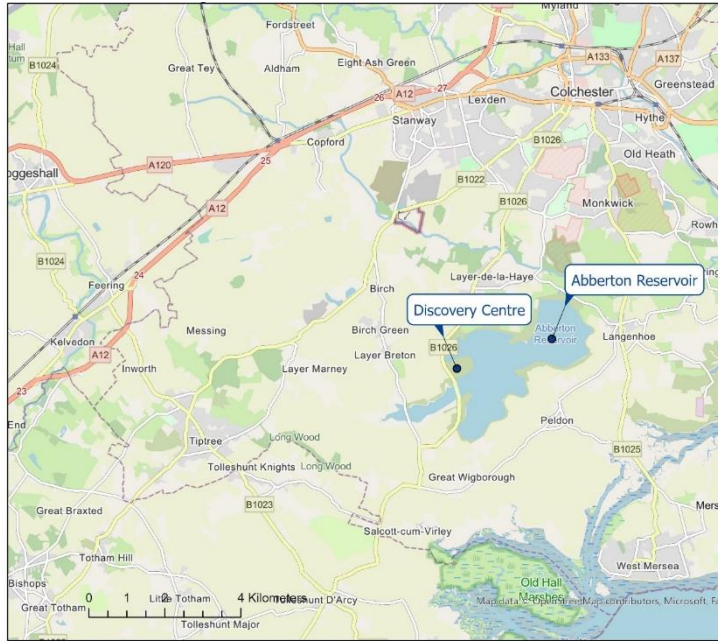
Through this Bluespaces project, Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT), Essex & Suffolk Water (NWG) and partners have improved 3.9 km of water environment at Abberton Reservoir. Abberton Reservoir, owned by NWG, is internationally important for wildfowl and designated as a SSSI, SPA and Ramsar Site. EWT manages part of the site around the Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Centre as a nature reserve, which is one of the most popular reserves in Essex. Partners have worked since 2022 to deliver substantial visitor experience improvements and benefits to wildlife and biodiversity, which go above and beyond NWG's statutory responsibilities to provide and maintain access to the site.

### Highlights

- Footpath resurfacing and improvements supporting access in a variety of weather conditions
- An education dipping platform has been created.
- Two no disabled access benches have been installed.
- A new Mitigation Pond has been created, supporting the healthy population of Great Crested Newt already found on site, with sightings of this protected species in the pond during surveys
- A new pole mounted bat box has been installed, and the bat hide re-roofed
- Improvements to wildlife hides, through improved screens and willow removal improving views for visitors



Maps





EWT Abberton Reservoir Discovery Centre Improvements



Total Length of Accessible Water Environment: 3.9 km

Bluespaces improved at Abberton Reservoir Discovery Centre

**Project Outputs, Benefits & Evidence Against Criteria**

<b>Access, Facilities &amp; Recreation</b>	
<b>Expected Project Outcomes</b>	<b>Benefits</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Replacement dipping platform on the education pond increases enjoyment of the water environment</li> <li>2. Resurfaced footpaths on the reserve including disabled access path to the viewing mound increases and improves access, engagement and enjoyment of the water environment</li> <li>3. Surfacing of woodland walks that currently are not all user friendly and are largely avoided in the winter months increases site access for visitors</li> <li>4. Pond enhancements, replacement fence and vegetation clearance along the Hide Bay footpath increases views to the reservoir and improves visitor experience</li> <li>5. Replacement of disabled access picnic tables and benches improves access and enjoyment for all</li> <li>6. New silhouette screens added to the hides increases awareness and enjoyment of the site while protecting it for wildlife, and willow removal in front of the hides improves the views for visitors</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</li> <li>➤ A3: Influences positive environmental behaviours</li> </ul>
<b>Outputs</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A new dipping platform has been installed at Godden Pond (the education pond). In addition, a new Mitigation Pond has been created, to provide additional habitat for Great Crested Newt, which will remain undisturbed by pond dipping and educational activities.</li> <li>2. Footpath improvements have been delayed for various reasons including wet conditions on site, which have prevented access, and availability of the contractor. The contract for footpath resurfacing has now been agreed, and the contractor is booked in for July. The footpath from Layer Church to the entrance of the nature reserve has been resurfaced, and this has enabled safe access to the reserve for many local residents who wish to walk or cycle from the village</li> <li>3. The work to improve woodland footpaths is also due to be completed in July, as waste chippings from main footpath improvements will be used.</li> <li>4. Pond enhancements have been undertaken, through vegetation clearance and weeding. The willow trees which had grown up along the shoreline in front of the bird hides have been removed to open up views to the reservoir.</li> <li>5. Two new picnic tables have been installed, with disabled access benches.</li> <li>6. New screens have been put up at all bird hides. Silhouette screens were not used as the price for these were far beyond available funding. Removal of willow has provided better visibility of wildlife for visitors.</li> </ol>	
<b>Evidence</b>	
	

New dipping platform on the education pond (Godden Pond), which has also been cleared of overgrowing vegetation



New disabled access benches and visitors enjoying the site



New screening at Island Hide

New screening to the left of Gwen's Hide

New Screening at Hide Bay Hide

The contract agreement for the footpath resurfacing to be completed in July 24 is available on request.

**Wildlife & Biodiversity**

Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. New pond created adjacent to the existing education pond supports the population of great crested newt (GCN) on site</li> <li>2. Improvement works to existing GCN ponds improves abundance and distribution of GCN. A GCN management plan will ensure the continued success and expansion of the species on site</li> <li>3. New roof on the bat hide, internal improvements and a new pole mounted bat box all support the abundance and distribution of bats that use the site</li> <li>4. GCN surveys to provide evidence of natural capital and improvement benefits</li> <li>5. Scrub planting to support species such as turtle dove and nightingale</li> <li>6. Bird boxes and duck nesting tube to support nesting birds</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. The new Mitigation Pond has been created adjacent to the existing education pond. The pond was full in winter 2023/24 and weed has naturally established within the pond. GCNs were recorded in this pond during GCN surveys.</li> <li>2. A GCN management plan has been written, and all ponds are being managed in accordance with the plan</li> <li>3. A pole mounted box has been placed in a location that was suggested by a bat expert; and the bat hide has been re-roofed.</li> <li>4. GCN surveys have been conducted on the nature reserve ponds. A survey report is available.</li> <li>5. Scrub planting has not yet been undertaken at the site but will be a focus of wildlife and biodiversity improvements for winter 2024/25.</li> <li>6. Bird boxes and duck nesting tubes were attached to the Mitigation Pond, see photos below.</li> </ol>
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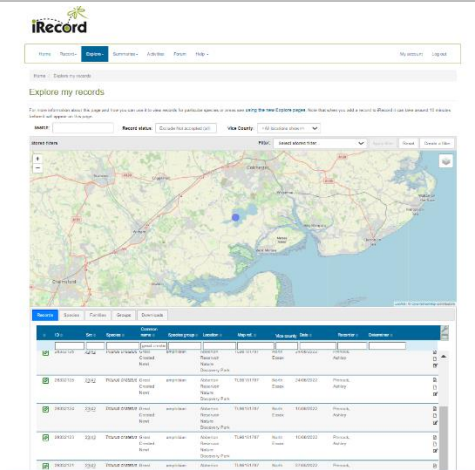
**Evidence**



**New Mitigation Pond being created**



**Pond full in winter 2023/24**



Great Crested Newt Survey Recording



Aerial photo of the site, showing Godden Pond with the new dipping platform in the middle of the pond, and the new mitigation pond below



Great crested newt from one of the licence pond surveys



Bat pole under construction



New duck nesting tube



Tube occupied with a new family



New bat boxes installed

*“Occupancy rates and successful hatch for the duck nesting tubes deployed at Abberton and in surrounding farmland ponds and coastal wetlands has been very high. Some tubes are favoured more by ducks, mostly Mallard, than others and have two or three nesting attempts and successful hatch per tube. Others are never used, or do not result in successful hatch. This is the second year of the project and this now includes the two tubes at the Abberton reservoir visitor centre and Church Bay. While particularly focussed on outreach and communication by being placed here they are also contributing data on where best these tubes should be placed and we hope to deploy more on the main reservoir and mid-section in years to come.” Prof. Tom C Cameron, Professor of Applied Ecology at University of Essex*

Additional & Secondary Benefits	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Footpath improvements provide benefits to those visiting the discovery centre and the local community that use the main footpath along Hide Bay</li> <li>2. EWT is a long-standing strategic partner of NWG and improvements to the site benefit both partners</li> <li>3. Essex is a key region for GCN with improvements supporting regional conservation activity</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ D2: Provides benefits to local communities, the local economy or NWG</li> <li>➤ D3: Supports strategic project or investment into strategic partnership or landscape/regional activity</li> </ul>
Outputs	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The footpath from Layer Church to the entrance of the nature reserve has been resurfaced, and this has enabled safe access to the reserve for many local residents who wish to walk or cycle from the village.</li> <li>2. Improvements to the site have been delivered to the satisfaction of both EWT and NWG, supporting the long term objectives of both partners to protect and enhance the environment and engage people with nature.</li> <li>3. Abberton Reservoir has increased carrying capacity for the GCN population. Essex Wildlife Trust will continue to survey GCN in the ponds and follow the agreed GCN management plan, which supports regional conservation in Essex.</li> </ol>	
Evidence	
<p><i>“This footpath is a gateway to the nature reserve for residents at Layer de la Haye. It enables residents to walk, or cycle from the village safely, hopefully encouraging more residents to use this amazing site which is on their doorstep.”</i></p> <p>Jo Wray, Site Manager.</p>	



Customer Testimonies & Media



**Waterfowl research at  
Abberton Reservoir**

**Information event – meet the researchers and  
Q&A**

**Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> March 1500-1600**  
At Abberton Reservoir visitor centre & on Zoom:  
<https://essex-university.zoom.us/j/98274829648>

Come and hear about our new collaborative research on Mallard in the south east of England with a focus on Abberton Reservoir and the Colchester area.

We are investigating:

- Breeding ecology, movement and survival of Mallard in summer
- What are their habitat needs?
- Winter movement and survival – why are Mallard declining in winter?
- Trialling Mallard nest tubes to help improve nesting success
- Public outreach – colour rings and #Essexducklings



Thought I'd post this here in case anyone is interested in coming along

**Essex Wildlife Trust Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park**  
Published by Charlotte Wells · April 26 at 9:38 AM · 🌐

On Wednesday our home education group built some bat boxes. Yesterday these were installed on our bat roost to provide extra homes for the bats by our Thursday reserve volunteers! These may be used over the summer months as maternity roosts or over winter for hibernation - let's hope the bats like them. The installation was carried out under the supervision of a licensed bat worker as bats and their roosts are protected by law 🦇



**Essex Wildlife Trust Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park**  
Published by Jo Wray · 1m · 🌐

In partnership with [Essex and Suffolk Water](#), during the months of March to May we carry out newt surveys in ponds every two weeks. Great crested newts are protected therefore all surveys are carried out under supervision of a licence holder. Our surveys are made up of two parts. In the evening we look in the ponds with torches to count visible signs of newts and we set funnel/bottle traps in the pond. Early the following morning the traps are checked for newts. Each great crested newt has its belly photographed so that we can build up a record of individuals. Anything that is found in a trap is released back into the pond unharmed. DID YOU KNOW ... the black spots on a great crested newt's belly are as individual as our fingerprints 🐸 Last year we had a new pond dug on the reserve with funding from Two Services Ltd. The pond is developing nicely and we are monitoring this in the hope that great crested newts use this pond soon ... watch this space. Essex & Suffolk Water's licence holder, Ashley Pinnock, has produced a habitat management guidance plan to help us make informed management decisions. 📄 Ashley Pinnock #LoveEssexLoveWildlife



[TWO Services investment ensures key project for Essex Wildlife Trust goes ahead | TWO Services \(two-services.com\)](#)

## Lead Partner Quotes & Testimonials

*"Partnership working between Essex & Suffolk Water (ESW) and Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT) enables greater management at Abberton Reservoir benefiting both organisations. ESW have provided financial help to EWT enabling the nature reserve to be managed for a variety of species including nightingale, turtle dove, stonechat, green hairstreak butterflies, and many dragonflies. EWT provide the work force, through our committed volunteers, many of whom have been volunteering at Abberton for over 10 years. Since great crested newts are on site, ESW licensed staff have given advice on how to ensure we are following best practice when carrying out work on the reserve."*

*"The Bluespaces project has enabled us to provide further improvements to our nature reserve for people and wildlife. The accessible picnic benches have been a real hit with Anneka, one of our volunteers, who uses a wheelchair. Anneka commented that she 'wished everywhere had these'. The new pond for great crested newts is developing nicely and has vegetation in there; so hopefully it won't be long before GCN are found in there on a regular basis. The new fences down to our three bird hides, not only look smart, but are doing the job of hiding visitors when they approach the hides reducing the risk of birds being disturbed. We are excited to get our footpaths improved in June and will be happy that the sections that have been damaged by all the rain we have will be fixed enabling full access to all round the main path on the reserve again."*

**Jo Wray, Site Manager Abberton Reservoir**

*"Working with Essex Wildlife Trust (EWT) Essex & Suffolk Water (ESW) have led Great Crested Newt (GCN) monitoring surveys for each of the ponds at Abberton Nature Reserve for 4 years as of this year (2024). GCN monitoring on site began in 2021 shortly after ESW approached EWT's Abberton site team about setting up an annual monitoring programme to help identify which ponds on site have GCN presence and to help give us a better understanding of population size and distribution across the reserve. The information gained from these surveys helps to inform future management of the site and ponds in particular, ensuring that all ponds are identified so optimal management can then be restored/enhanced for GCN going forwards. This in turn helps to properly conserve and protect the species in future."*

*EWT is responsible for the management of the site and so far, the survey data has helped them to prioritise pond management activities and has been very useful. Of the 9 ponds on site, we have discovered that 8 have GCN present and that we have a medium sized population. EWT Warden Callum Bruce has worked hard with volunteers in recent years to make improvements to the pond habitats on site where we have noticed some have become less favourable for newts. We have also worked together in creating a safer environment for pond dipping educational activities on site by creating a new dipping platform on an existing pond and dug a brand-new pond adjacent to where these activities take place especially designed for GCN where pond dipping activities are prohibited, so to ensure that GCN have a safe haven available to them the area which is free of disturbance during the sensitive breeding season."*

*ESW & EWT have worked together on the GCN monitoring programme every year during the spring for the past 4 years where during that time two EWT site different Wardens along with other members of the ESW Environment team have supported and assisted with this important work. GCN class survey licence training also takes place on an informal basis each year led by me to help others to learn how to do the surveys. So far two trainees have successfully obtained their GCN class survey licences including previous EWT Site Warden Katie Goldsbrough and fellow ESW Ecological Advisor Sarah Clarke. Both are now legally licenced to do surveys themselves and are more than capable of leading their own GCN monitoring programmes across other sites elsewhere if they wish to, which is important for the future of the species if we are to successfully conserve them in the wider environment."*

All monitoring data is shared at the end of each year with Natural England through the survey licence return reporting system and with Essex Field Club via i-Record. The survey data gathered from Abberton Nature Reserves annual monitoring programme contributes to a wider data set both regionally and nationally which helps conservationists collectively all over the country to understand GCN activity and population sizes so that we can conserve this protected and vulnerable species for future years to come.

This is a prime example of how two organisations can successfully work together in partnership to achieve their conservation objectives. GCN monitoring on site has helped to identify suitable habitat and conserve GCN. It has helped give us and understanding of their behaviours, distribution, and their numbers across the site and this has helped to priorities and inform future management decisions. The work has also helped us to provide informed guidance to EWT on how to safely and effectively deliver pond educational activities and also helped to train others in GCN survey techniques which is vital for the future of the species and for fresh emerging conservationists."

Ashley Pinnock, Conservation Specialist, Essex & Suffolk Water/Northumbrian Water

### Other Supporting Evidence & Data

[Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park | Essex Wildlife Trust \(essexwt.org.uk\)](http://www.essexwt.org.uk)

[https://www.facebook.com/EWTAbberton/?locale=en\\_GB](https://www.facebook.com/EWTAbberton/?locale=en_GB)

**Welcome to**  
**Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park**

Welcome to **Abberton Reservoir Nature Discovery Park**. Our trails take you through woodland, grassland and scrub, with three wildlife hides offering astounding views over the largest reservoir in Essex.

There are four trails around the reserve. Watch skylarks parachute down along the **Skylark Trail**, while looking across Great Wigborough, Peldon and Mersea Island from Gwen's hide. For spectacular views of the reservoir and the common tern raft, take the **Reservoir View Trail**. Keep an eye out for barn owls silently flying by or the bright pop of colour from common spotted orchids.

Explore the new woodland of field maple, oak and hazel on the **Discovery Trail**, while being serenaded by nightingales in spring. Over autumn, the scrub and woodland turns bright hues of orange and red. For family fun, follow the much-loved **Brambly Hedge Trail**.

For recommendations, rest, refreshment, and retail therapy, visit us at the Nature Discovery Centre.

**Help us keep Abberton special by becoming a member of Essex Wildlife Trust today.**

For help with planning your route, please talk to one of our friendly team.

**Key**

- Information
- Food and Drink
- Shop
- Toilets
- Parking
- Accessible parking
- Accessible wildlife hide
- Play area
- Tern raft
- View point
- Slope
- Footpath
- Dog Walk
- Brambly Hedge Trail
  - 0.8km / 0.5 mi
  - 15 mins
  - Gentle
- Skylark Trail
  - 1.1km / 0.70 mi
  - 20 mins
  - Gentle
- Reservoir view Trail
  - 1.6km / 1 mi
  - 25 mins
  - Moderate
- Discovery Trail
  - 1.6km / 1 mi
  - 25 mins
  - Moderate

Walking distance  
0 m / 0 yd      200 m / 220 yds

Essex