

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

Allen Banks Footpath & Environment Improvements

Project Lead

Company/ Organisation	Named Lead	Position	Contact Details
National Trust	Rebecca Hetherington	Countryside Manager	rebecca.hetherington@nationaltrust.org.uk 07584202351

Bluespaces Improved

Year	Claimed	Proposed	Reason For Any Change
Year 4	2.3 km	2.3 km	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	March 2023	NA	N/A
Water Environment Steering Group (Internal)	March 2023	March 2023	N/A
Water Environment Governance Group (External)	March 2023	March 2023	May 2024 (For Review)

Project Timescales

Candidate Project Approved	Project Initiated	Project Completed
March 2023	May 2023	April 2024

Project Summary and Highlights

Summary

Bluespaces funding has supported delivery of a project to improve 2.3 km of water environment at Allen Banks, a public access National Trust site on the banks of the River Allen in the Tyne Catchment, Northumberland.

Allen Banks and Staward Gorge is the largest ancient semi-natural woodland in Northumberland. Lying in the gorge of the river Allen, it receives approximately 50,000 visitors/year. The site is cared for by the National Trust, with the aim of maintaining and enhancing visitor access, biodiversity and cultural heritage. This project has delivered bluespaces improvements which contribute to all three of these aims.

The project has made significant access improvements along a section of riverside path. New boardwalks, steps, revetment, resurfacing and trip hazard removal will mean that more people can access the riverwalk more easily year-round. Through volunteer days, people have been able to get involved in delivering access improvements, invasive species control and tree planting, giving them opportunity to socialise and keep fit in the outdoors while having a positive impact on the environment.

Installation of deer fencing in the woodland is enabling natural regeneration where dangerous trees which had previously shaded the ground needed to be monolithed. The historic beech avenue which had lost several trees to storms, age and disease has also been enhanced through the planting of replacement trees, which will not only keep the avenue in existence into the future, but also protect it from climate change and pest and disease by diversifying the species mix within it.

Himalayan balsam control has benefited the wider water environment by preventing the further spread of seed in the local area and downstream.

A small number of planned improvements will be completed in June 2024 (ground conditions and weather permitting) as the extreme wet weather since September has prevented full access and transport to the site of some materials.

Highlights

- Access improvements to 520m riverside path
- 3 ha habitat improvements achieved through riparian management, increasing species and structural diversity and standing and fallen deadwood reserves
- 10 replacement trees planted of a variety of species as well as beech on the historic beech avenue
- 113 individual volunteer days engaging people in improvements to the project area



Project Value, NWG Investment & Impact

Total Project Value:

£25,590

Year	Bluespaces Improved	NWG Investment		ODI Reward (£7676/km)
		Baseline	Above & Beyond	
Year 4 2023/24	2.3 km	-	£5,500	£17,654*

NWG has committed to reinvest at least 50% of reward received from this ODI in new projects, after programme costs. The company has already exceeded this commitment each year. In Year 5, the final year of the ODI, 13 projects are already in delivery through partners to improve over 90 km of bluespaces, representing £253,000 of above and beyond investment.

Income Amount	Funding Source
£18,590	National Trust (staff costs, volunteer in kind and capital match)
£1,500	Woodland Countryside Stewardship
£5,500	NWG Bluespaces Scheme
£25,590	Total

Project Outputs, Benefits & Evidence Against Criteria

Access, Facilities & Recreation	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access improvements to a section of riverside path by reprofiling, resurfacing, installing drainage, altering steps and tree management will make paths more usable and accessible year-round, with additional drainage helping to keep routes drier and less slippery. 2. Volunteers will be used to undertake tree planting and Himalayan Balsam control, encouraging people to be active and involved in the management of the site, contributing to health and wellbeing, and engaging the wider community in the water environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A1: Increases access to, engagement with and enjoyment of the water environment ➤ A2: Benefits health and wellbeing
Outputs	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access improvements have been delivered to 520m of path. Work has been undertaken to remove trip hazards, install new drains, steps, revetment and boardwalks and resurface sections of the path to make it more accessible all year round. The work in this area is still ongoing as the continuous wet weather has prevented transport of materials onsite to finish the last 60m section of work. This work will be completed as soon as ground conditions and access allows (planned for June 2024). 2. 17 volunteer task days (113 individual volunteer days) have been undertaken, as well as 8 National Trust staff days used to deliver the path improvement works. The volunteers who have been involved in this project have benefited from the opportunity to help support their local site, socialize, and keep active in the outdoors. Members of the public will benefit from the improved access, enabling them to more easily enjoy the site. 	
Evidence	
<p>Before and after reduced trip hazards and revetment</p> 	
<p>New steps</p> 	
<p>Before and after drain and boardwalk</p> 	

Wildlife & Biodiversity

Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The diversity and biodiversity of the woodland will be improved through replacement of lost trees in the beech avenue, with native tree species used to ensure the habitat is maintained for species in the future. Veteran trees suffering from deteriorating ground, disease and age will be removed or reduced and dead wood habitat created. Species such as Willow and Alder, more suited to the wet ground conditions, will be planted. 2. Himalayan Balsam control is an essential part of river habitat protection. Removal of this invasive species and preventing it from seeding will help reduce its spread in the local area and to other sites downstream. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ B1: Improves the quantity, quality and connectivity of habitats ➤ B3: Reduces risk or impact of invasive non-native species (INNS)

Outputs

1. 10 new trees have been planted to replace Beech Trees which had been lost from the avenue on the West of the site. These trees will ensure that the avenue will continue into the future and also protect it from the impacts of pest, disease and climate change by diversifying the species within it. Veteran beech trees suffering from phytophthora cambivora and within dangerous proximity to the path have been monolithed to retain dead wood habitat whilst protecting access. Deer fencing has been installed around this area to enable natural regeneration of ground flora.
2. Himalayan balsam has been removed by staff and volunteers along waterways in the whole area of National Trust ownership.

Evidence



Monolith beech trees
Deer enclosure and avenue replacement trees



Avenue replacement trees



Balsam removal

Additional & Secondary Benefits	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using a variety of species in woodland restoration will ensure resilience and adaptation of woodland cover should there be negative impacts from climate change or pests and diseases which can have significant impacts on single species (e.g. Ash Die Back). 2. Managing INNS in this area reduces their spread and helps support the work of other organisations in the catchment and downstream as part of a coordinated effort to manage impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ D1: Provides resilience and adaptation to climate change and/or reduces the risk of flooding ➤ D3: Supports strategic project or investment into strategic partnership or landscape/regional activity
Outputs	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deer fencing to enable natural regeneration in areas where trees have been lost has been installed to enable natural regeneration of trees and ground flora. The trees planted consisted of several species to ensure that there is diversity in the woodland going forwards which will build resilience to pest disease and climate change as well as offering better habitat for biodiversity. These included oak, hornbeam, lime, elm, rowan and willow. 2. Himalayan balsam has been removed by staff and volunteers along the whole area of National Trust ownership. This helps contribute to the wider management of INNS in the catchment. 	
Evidence	
<p>See above</p>	

Customer Testimonies & Media

After retiring from work, volunteering gives me the opportunity to give something back to help the environment at Allen Banks after many years of using the countryside. I've also met some great people. The Bluespaces work has definitely improved the footpath for visitors by removing hazards and making the footpath less prone to water damage. There is undoubtedly more we can achieve in the future.

Feedback from a National Trust volunteer



A family enjoying the river near Raven Crag

Social media and press releases are due to take place once all infrastructure work is completed in drier weather. National Trust will work with Northumbrian Water to plan this communication.

Lead Partner Quotes & Testimonials

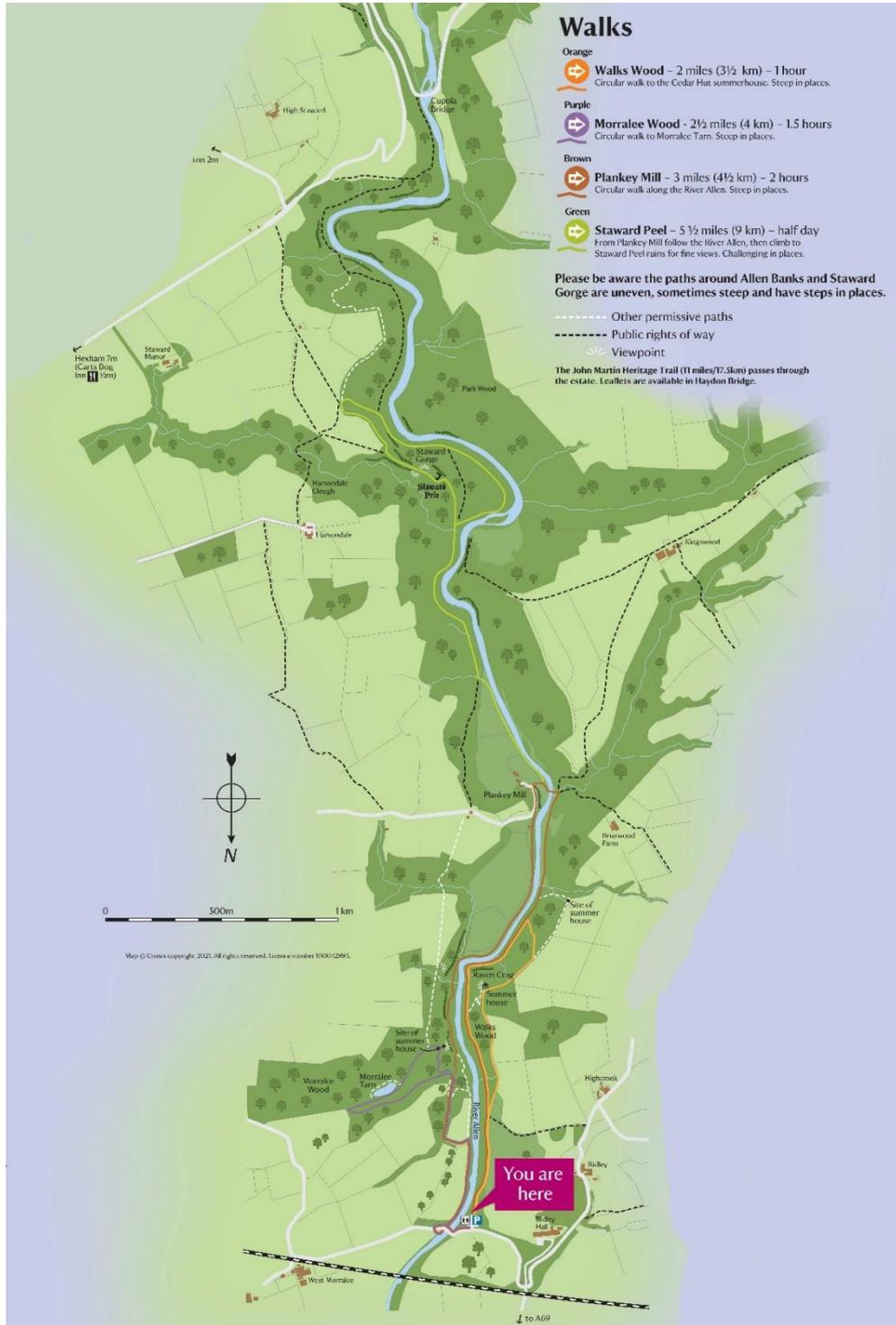
“The Bluespaces funding provided by Northumbrian Water for the access and habitat works at Allen Banks has enabled the National Trust Rangers and Volunteers to make some significant improvements to the footpath along one of most popular riverside walks along the River Allen. The improvements to the drainage and creation of new steps and boardwalks will mean that the route is more accessible year round. In addition the funding has supported an ongoing program of woodland restoration, by providing trees to replace those lost from either storm damage or disease. Ensuring that this special place will be around for people to enjoy, for many generations to come.”

Andrew Poad, General Manager, National Trust

Other Supporting Evidence

[Allen Banks & Staward Gorge | North East | National Trust](#)

[Allen Banks & Staward Gorge NT | Hexham | Facebook](#)



Map of Woodland Walks, orange, brown and green routes all use the path where the riverside improvements have been undertaken