

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

Natural Newton Junction

Project Lead

Company/ Organisation	Named Lead	Position	Contact Details
Durham County Council	Coralie Niven	Senior Parks & Countryside Ranger	03000 264584 Coralie.Niven@durham.gov.uk

Bluespaces Improved

Year	Claimed	Proposed	Reason For Any Change
Year 4	1.1 km	1.1 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 2022	NA	N/A
Water Environment Steering Group (Internal)	March 2022	March 2022	N/A
Water Environment Governance Group (External)	March 2022	March 2022	May 2024 (For Review)

Project Timescales

Candidate Project Approved	Project Initiated	Project Completed
March 2022	November 2023	March 2024

Project Summary and Highlights

Summary

Bluespaces funding has been used in combination with a grant from Branch Out to support delivery of improvements to 1.1 km of water environment at Low Newton Junction Local Nature Reserve, Newton Hall, on the edge of Durham City in County Durham. This is a well-used [Local Nature Reserve owned by Durham County Council](#), providing access to blue and green space for the local community. Significant improvements have been achieved to access and recreational facilities as well as improved wetland habitats through invasive non-native species control, coppicing and scrub clearance, despite less partner funding being attracted than originally anticipated.

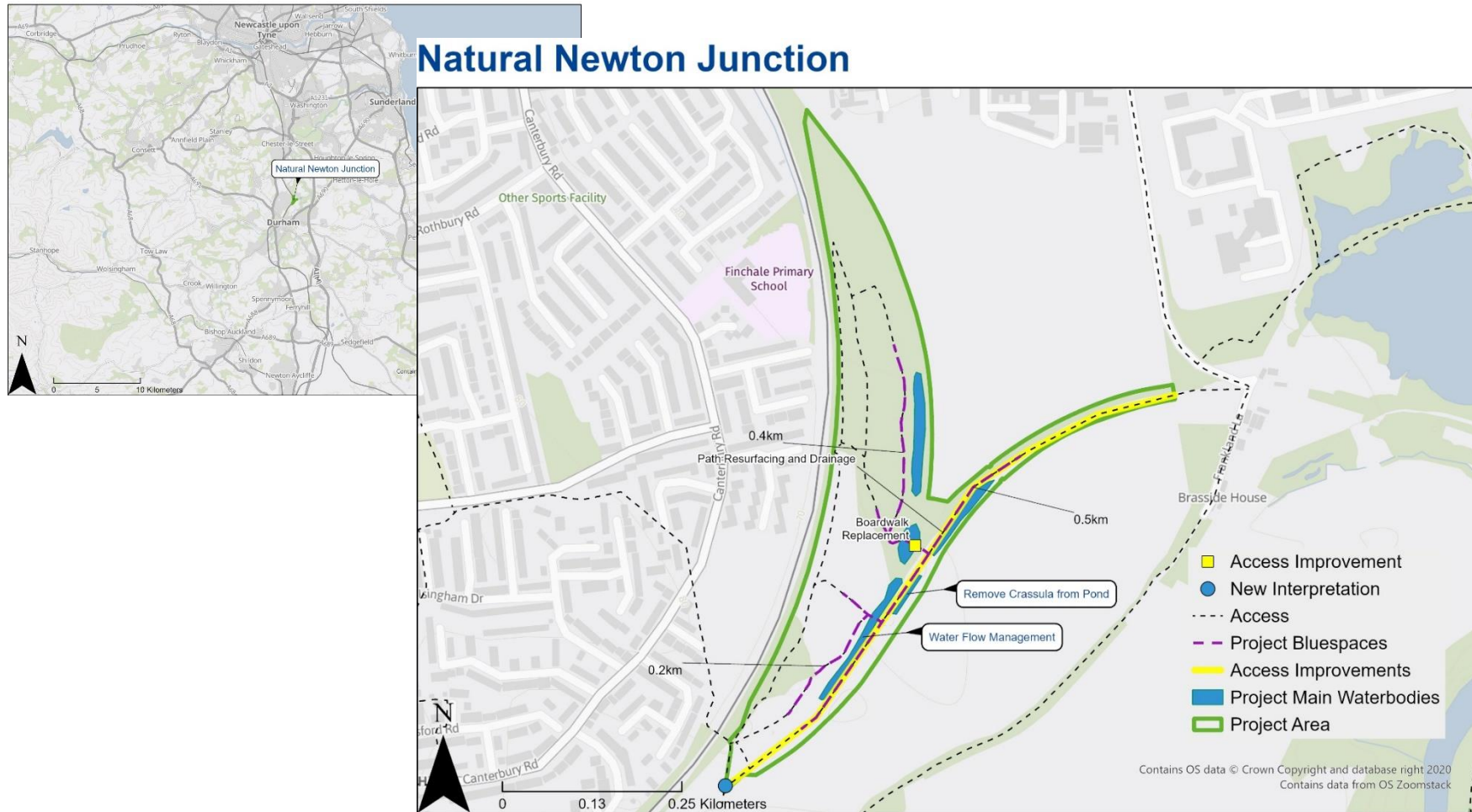
This site was visited by the Bluespaces Delivery Manager on 03/05/2024 to view the improvements made in this project.

Highlights

- Removal of Crassula from the Great Crested Newt breeding pond
- Renewal of a section of boardwalk
- Removal of scrub and coppicing of willow from the wetlands
- Improved visual access to the wetlands for site users
- Engagement of volunteers in delivering some elements of the project
- On-site interpretation – Still in design process but due May 24



Maps



Total Length of Bluespaces: 1.1 km

Bluespaces improved at Low Newton Junction Local Nature Reserve, Newton Hall, Durham City

Project Value, NWG Investment & Impact

Total Project Value:

£16,700


Year	Bluespaces Improved	NWG Investment		ODI Reward (£7676/km)
		Baseline	Above & Beyond	
Year 4 2023/24	1.1 km	£0	£3,300	£8,443

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 Sources	Funder
£1,000	DCC – In kind volunteer hours
£5,000	DCC Sustainable Transport
£1,900	DCC Landscape Team
£5,500	NWG Branch Out
£3,300	NWG Water Environment Scheme - bluespaces
£16,700	Total



Project Outputs, Benefits & Evidence Against Criteria

Access, Facilities & Recreation	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access improvements through replacement of 6m section of boardwalk and path resurfacing and drainage improvements along the main 850m linear route through the site. This will promote and encourage access and enjoyment of the area for families and disabled users. 2. Installation of a new interpretation panel at the site will increase visitor engagement with the water environment. 3. Volunteers will be able to deliver improvements and engage with nature, with associated health and wellbeing benefits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A1: Increases access to, engagement with and enjoyment of the water environment ➤ A2: Benefits health and wellbeing through: ➤ A3: Influences positive environmental behaviors
Outputs	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The 6m of boardwalk has been replaced by volunteers in winter 23/24. Path improvements have been completed which includes resurfacing of key areas susceptible to flooding/silt build up, alongside improved drainage along and across the main footpaths. 2. A new interpretation panel is currently in design and is expected to be completed for installation in May 2024 (see draft below). This includes a map of the site with accessibility information, and details of the site’s history and wildlife. It also displays site rules to encourage positive environmental behaviour. 3. Volunteering sessions have been delivered on site which have included boardwalk construction, coppicing, scrub control and fencing. Volunteers have included Durham County Council practical volunteers, local individual volunteers, local cub group and two short term placement students from East Durham College undertaking Level 2 in Land & Wildlife Management. 	
Evidence	
	
<p>Re-construction of the boardwalk by volunteers</p>	

Welcome to Low Newton Junction Local Nature Reserve

Low Newton Junction Local Nature Reserve provides a rich wildlife corridor on the edge of the East Coast main line and Newton Hall housing estates.

The site was previously used as both a sand quarry and a railway junction and this history has had a direct bearing on the habitats now present. Species rich grassland carpets the old sand quarry, containing a variety of wildflowers such as northern marsh orchid, harebell, ox-eye daisy and birdsfoot trefoil.

Woodland and scrub boarder the east of the site and follow the line of the disused railway to form an important habitat for birds such as jay, chaffinch, mistle thrush and reed bunting. Small areas of heather provide an excellent cover for invertebrates, while marsh and ponds which have developed along the old railway lines to the north and the east of the site, provide a valuable habitat for toads, frogs, newts, dragonflies, and damselflies.

Birdsfoot trefoil is the larval food plant of the dingy skipper butterfly and a population of this nationally and regionally rare butterfly can be found here.

Greater crested newts are present at Low Newton Junction. Due to their low numbers, these species are protected by law. It is an offence to handle or photograph them without a licence. If you accidentally catch a newt, please return it to the water.

There is a lot of tree cover at Low Newton Junction. Birch, oak, willow and hawthorn are all on present in the nature reserve.

Parks and Countryside Service
www.durham.gov.uk/countryside
 03000 264 589
countryside@durham.gov.uk
 Durham Countryside Volunteers

Key to map

Tree	Quarry
Boundary	Gap
Footpath	Rise up
Railway	Slope down
Cycle track	Parking
Nature Reserve boundary	Access track

Copy of the new interpretation panel



The location where the interpretation board will be installed



Path surfacing improvements with improved drainage



New fencing at the entrance to the site

Wildlife & Biodiversity

Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Installation of a sluice and woody debris made from birch brash to manage water levels and flow of water through the site will enable the quantity, quality, and connectivity of the wetland habitats to be enhanced and maintained. 2. Vegetation clearance including scrub removal, reduction of willow and removal of some birch to open up areas of wetland and maintain and enhance the Local Nature Reserve habitats for protected species such as Great Crested Newt. 3. Removal of Crassula from ponds, which would otherwise block out all light making these habitats non-viable for wildlife. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ B1: Improves the quantity, quality and connectivity of habitats ➤ B2: Improves the conservation status and or abundance or distribution of species ➤ B3: Reduces risk or impact of invasive non-native species (INNS)

Outputs

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Due to time constraints and less funding secured from partners than anticipated within this project timescale, the sluice and use of woody debris to enhance the wetland areas has not yet been fully completed. However, progress has been made; the brash has been prepared and stored on site by volunteers, and the lead partner has committed to install these features in autumn/ winter 2024. 2. Vegetation clearance has been undertaken. Machinery was used to desilt the wetlands which have established on top of the former railway line track bed. Volunteers, staff and contractors were all engaged in coppicing and scrub work. 3. A significant proportion of Crassula has been removed from the pond, a big task as it had been 10 years since the last clearance. The volume of Crassula remaining in the pond is now at a level which staff and volunteers can manage by hand. One of the rangers has created a drift net which can be used to capture the smaller fragments. This will allow the pond to revegetate with native flora and for further removal to be less invasive.
--



Evidence



Coppice work, brash piles created to be used next winter, and scrub area cleared



Pond and wetland clearance was undertaken in January 2024, including Crassula removal

Water Quality	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Habitat improvements will contribute to the ecological function and visual appearance of the water environment. 2. Path resurfacing and drainage improvements will reduce footpath erosion contributing to silt in the ponds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ C3: Improves state and function of water, including naturalisation, visual appearance, litter and odour
Outputs	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Crassula control has resulted in better ecological function of the trackside wetland habitats – native aquatic vegetation can now establish and the invasive is less likely to spread. The visual appearance is also greatly improved, where surface water can be seen from the footpath more readily. Coppicing and scrub removal has allowed more light into some wetland areas, creating a more diverse habitat and better wildlife experience for visitors. 2. The footpath resurfacing and improved drainage have reduced erosion from foot traffic considerably on-site, and as a result silt is no longer building up in the drainage channels or ponds from the paths. 	
Evidence	
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;">   </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Better visual of wetland and meadow habitats from coppicing / culvert installation across newly surfaced path</p>	

Additional & Secondary Benefits

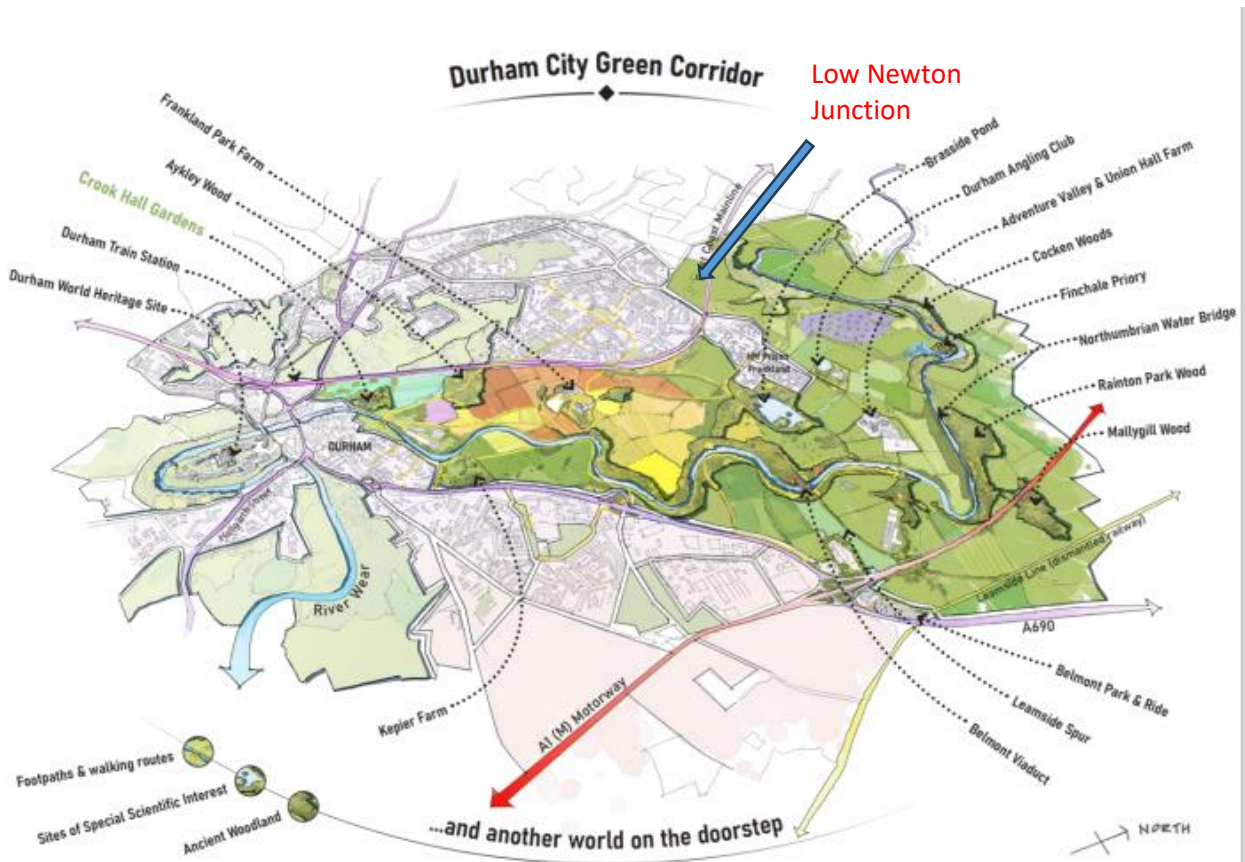
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Site is within walking distance from Newton Hall which is a large local community, and improvements will be of benefit to many residents who use the site for recreational purposes including walking, cycling and horse riding. 2. Improvements to this Local Nature Reserve link to Durham County Council's Biodiversity Strategy and plans for the Local Nature Recovery Strategy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ D2: Provides benefits to local communities, the local economy or NWG ➤ D3: Supports strategic project or investment into strategic partnership or landscape/regional activity

Outputs

1. The project has improved the site for the local community by enhancing habitats and therefore the wildlife experience, improving the accessibility of the site, and providing more information via interpretation.
2. This project has supported investment into the site and resulting in benefits for the diverse habitats and wildlife which uses them. The management of this site and any investment is assisting in positive delivery towards the council's Biodiversity and Local Nature recovery strategy. The site also forms part of and demonstrates early improvements to bluespaces within the [Durham City Green Corridor Project](#), which is led by the National Trust and Durham County Council in partnership with other organisations and will delivering change at landscape scale over the coming years.

Evidence

See customer testimonials and above sections



Customer Testimonies & Media

These footpaths are so much better, I don't need wellies anymore, thank you!

Site user

I love this site and it's so lovely to see it getting a little TLC and not neglected like so many do

Site user

Lead Partner Quotes & Testimonials

Low Newton Junction is a really well-used site by the local community, and it has been fantastic to access funding to help this special site develop and improve for both wildlife and people. Visitors have expressed their appreciation for the site improvements and they really love to see it getting the attention and investment that it deserves. The funding has had a really big impact to a special site, and Durham County Council are in talks with the Green Corridors project to hopefully attract more investment and include it within the project scope."

Coralie Niven, Durham County Council

Other Supporting Evidence & Data

Link to Reserve guide

<https://www.durham.gov.uk/media/3999/Low-Newton-Junction-Nature-Reserve/pdf/LowNewtonJunctionNatureReserve.pdf?m=636735642308930000>