

<h1>Meeting Notes</h1>		Meeting: Bluespaces Governance Group	
Attendees: Emily Baldock, Matt Butcher, Jim Cokill, Zoe Frogbrook, Anna Gerring, Jo Matthews, Clemmie Moule, Rebecca O’Connell, Richard Powell (Chair), Patrick Welsh and Sian Whitehead		Date: 27/08/25	Location: MS Teams
Apologies: Helen Dangerfield		Distribution: Attendees and Apologies	
No.	Agenda Item and Notes		
1	Welcome All were welcomed to the meeting and to the newly established Bluespaces Governance Group, comprising new and previous members, with thanks extended to all.		
2	Introductions All members were introduced to each other: Jim Cokill is the Durham Wildlife Trust Chief Executive; Anna Gerring is the Deputy Director of Strategic Development at the Rivers Trust; Clemmie Moule is currently the ESW Bluespaces Delivery Manager at Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust and will move into her new role as Bluespaces Lead at NWG at the end of September; Jo Matthews is the Integrated Catchment Manager for Essex and Suffolk Water; Emily Baldock is the Bluespaces Officer at Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust also assisting with the charity’s communications; Matt Butcher is the NFM Lead for East Anglia with various roles in the EA involving water quality and incident management; Patrick Welsh delivers nature recovery projects for Natural England; Rebecca O’Connell manages the Environment Programme Team for the EA, working closely with catchment partnerships; Sian Whitehead is the NW Bluespaces Delivery Manager at Durham Wildlife Trust; Zoe Frogbrook is the NWG Head of Environment and Sustainability; Richard Powell was on the NWG Water Forum and he chairs the Bluespaces Governance Group.		
3	Review and Approval of Terms of Reference The Terms of Reference document was created as useful guidance to refer to when needed by anyone involved with the Bluespaces scheme, and are an improved version, adapted from the previous AMP. Emphasis was added on the possibility of reviewing and adapting the document as a group. A key takeaway from the document is that project approval requires at least 50% group input – if less than this, a project will not proceed. If the vote is exactly 50%, the Chair will cast the deciding vote (although this has only happened once in 5 years due to holiday absences). The Bluespaces Governance Group will meet every 2 months with projects being approved offline over email during busy periods. An aim to meet once a year in person has also been established throughout the current AMP until 2030. A sharepoint will be created for meeting notes and project forms for all members to access. All members agreed they were comfortable and happy with the Terms of Reference and gave their approval with the option to revisit them if needed.		

Bluespaces Crash Course

What are Bluespaces?

The meeting presentation provided context for the Bluespaces scheme and explained its processes. Current team (EB, JM, CM, SW) were introduced; new Bluespaces Advisor and Bluespaces Delivery Manager (ESW) roles are being recruited

‘Bluespaces’ is defined as a freely accessible area within 100 metres of any water environment.

The Bluespaces scheme was introduced following a 2020 NWG customer survey where customers expressed their interest to increase access to water environments. The aim for Bluespaces projects is to deliver at 2 of 3 categorised improvements under Access & Recreation, Wildlife & Biodiversity and Water Quality with a flexible framework for the funding scheme.

AMP7 Summary

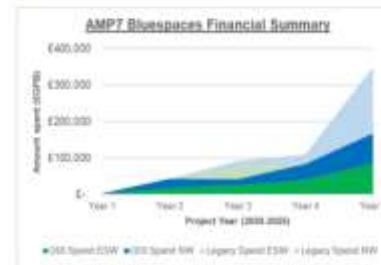
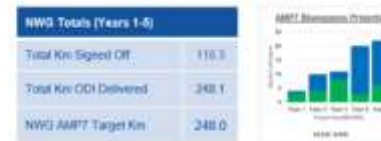
The current goal for the scheme is to improve 500 km by 2030. Current progress for this is positive as last AMP’s target of 248 km was overshoot by 0.1 km.

In AMP7, 59 Bluespaces projects were delivered and 248.1 km improved. 38 of these projects were based in the NW region and 27 based in the ESW region with an overall £588,176 invested.

4 The Bluespaces scheme operates on a catchment-based approach and key stats and metrics are currently being collected and monitored for future project development.

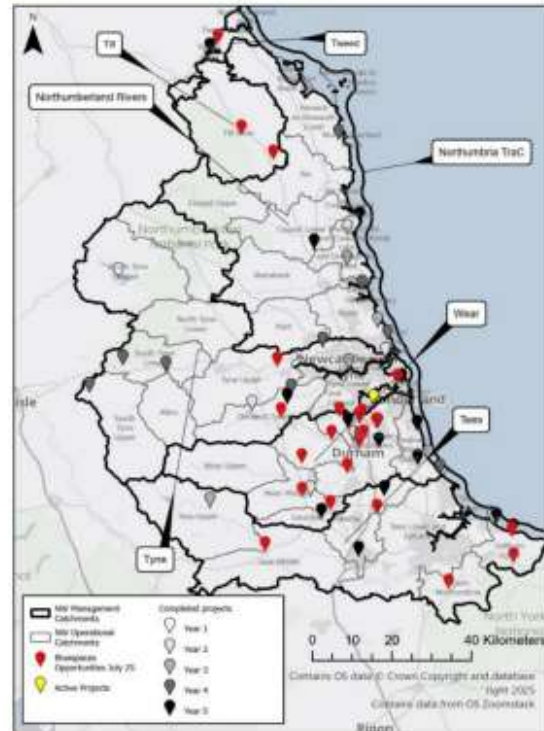
Overall AMP7 Programme Summary

- 59 projects 37 for NW and 22 for ESW
- 248.1 km delivered
- £588,176 invested
- Masses of benefits...
 - 19,219 trees planted 11,883 in NW and 7,337 in ESW
 - 18,788 members of the public engaged 11,793 in NW and 7,000 in ESW
 - 6,393 volunteer days 4,343 in NW and 2,050 in ESW
 - 500 public or training events 477 in NW and 23 in ESW
 - 416.6ha ha of new wetland 3.7ha in NW and 413.3ha in ESW
 - 145 new benches, seats, or signs 80 in NW and 65 in ESW
 - 95 in channel or fish passage features 87 in NW and 8 in ESW

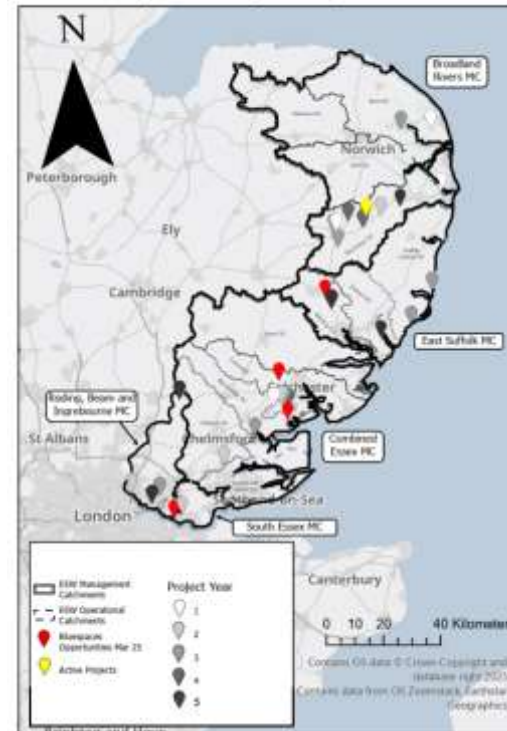


Work with partners is ongoing to deliver further km improvements towards the 500 km by 2030 goal set out in NWGs our vision for our coasts and rivers.

NW Bluespaces Project Map



ESW Bluespaces Project Map



AMP8 Programme: What's Changed, What's New?

AMP8 programme has bigger ambitions with more money (£6.6 million) available to deliver more benefits across small- and large-scale projects.

There is no longer any ODI regulatory obligation, only WINEP.

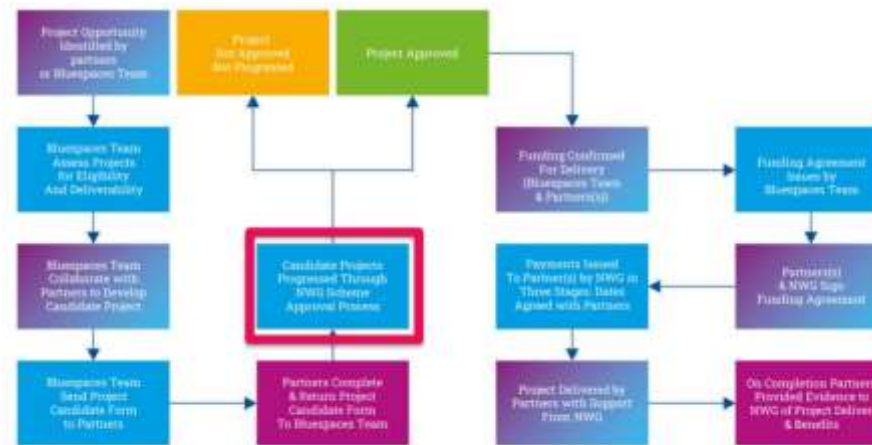
With the greater funding for this AMP, partners may be supported at all stages of potential project development and delivery, a larger team will be formed with a more structured communication plan, a focus on meaningful metrics will be applied and an online management tool for the programme implemented. This tool is currently being developed and will aid information extraction and ease of partner project application.

Group members observed that the changes made reflect early conversations on feasibility, maintenance and metrics and it's good to see these changes being implemented from feedback.

Thanks were given to the previous WEGG members and for the feedback from the last AMP that led to these improvements, encouraging future feedback from all. It was noted that there is still some work in progress: the feasibility fund will be run as a pilot and be adapted going forwards in addition to the maintenance fund and monitoring of metrics.

Approving a Project

A diagram of the process flow of Bluespaces project approval was shown in the presentation.



The Bluespaces Governance Group will provide a big picture overview, with judgement and insight from each member's professional backgrounds and experiences.

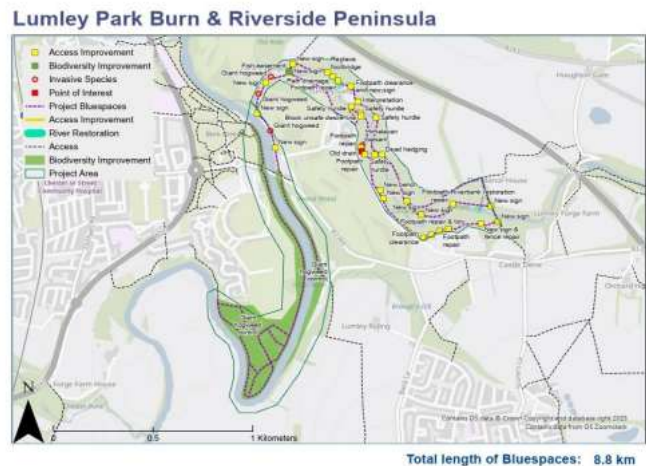
In contrast to the last AMP when all project funding was paid upfront, in this AMP, payments will be in third instalments, although upfront payments will be retained in exceptional circumstances where partners don't have the necessary cashflow.

	<p>Questions</p> <p><i>Opportunity to look at projects on the ground after sign-off to offer support following the conclusion of a project?</i></p> <p>Members have previously visited progressing and final projects, to work with partners and keep an eye on progress and any future visits to projects, completed or otherwise, would be fully supported; regional site visits for locally-based group members could be organised at appropriate times.</p> <p><i>Is there a third option to return to projects previously rejected for future development?</i></p> <p>Rejected projects needing more information are usually discussed with partners to better understand the proposal rather than rejecting it. The likelihood of a project being rejected by BGG should be minimised given the pre-BGG checks that projects go through: initial checks by managers, passed on to new Bluespaces Lead and then passed on to Bluespaces Governance Group for final approval.</p> <p>A big picture overview with Governance Group members contributing their own specific knowledge is critical to refining the scheme and to make it as good as it can be. The different organisations, opinions and expertise will create a high standard of delivery and evidencing from partners.</p> <p><i>Current approach of the scheme is opportunistic and case-by-case; could this be improved by a shift in focus of metric monitoring to a particular location or 'topic'?</i></p> <p>The Bluespaces team is currently doing this to explore and develop projects and to decide how to deliver the right projects to the right places with increased funding. In terms of measuring benefits and what this looks like will be developed going forward in this AMP to work out how metrics will affect and come into play for the next AMP.</p> <p>There will be a closer look into the metrics next quarter along with the evaluating benefits from projects. Areas that need a stronger focus will be investigated with a wide scope of what enhancement means e.g. access.</p> <p>It was also emphasised that in these early stages of the programme, we need to maintain momentum with incoming projects, alongside taking a strategic look at where and what we are funding.</p>
5	<p>Year 6 Projects for Approval</p> <p>Projects from NW region and from ESW region, for a total proposed 34.3 km of improvements, were presented for approval.</p> <p>MB declared a potential conflict of interest due to his involvement with Fiddler's Hill.</p> <p>The conflict of interest procedure will be discussed as and when the conflicts arise as they may vary from project to project, but MB was advised to remain quiet unless questioned for today's Fiddler's Hill discussion.</p>

Area	Project Name	Lead Partner	Proposed Km
NW	Lumley Park Burn & Riverside Peninsula	Wear Rivers Trust	8.8
	Cut Throat Dene Restoration (Phase 2)	Wear Rivers Trust	4.8
	Flowing Forward – Bluespaces Gaunless	Wear Rivers Trust	15
ESW	High House Farm Wildlife Enhancements	High House Farm	2
	Fiddlers Hill Wetland Improvements	Essex & Suffolk Rivers Trust	3.7
NWG	Total Km Proposed		34.3

North: Lumley Park Burn & Riverside Peninsula

Lumley Park Burn & Riverside Peninsula



Delivered by:	Wear Rivers Trust
Bluespaces contribution:	£67,250
Total project cost:	£77,510
Bluespaces proposed:	8.8 km

- Improved access with upgraded footpaths, drainage and safety features;
- Stabilised riverbanks using green engineering (willow spiling, coir rolls, log revetment);
- Managed invasive species for public safety and biodiversity gains;
- Delivery of volunteer-led conservation (including water quality testing) to build community stewardship.

How sustainable is the removal work on invasives in terms of value for money and discrete effort?

This would be a 3-year project allowing for repeat visits, and so increasing likelihood of eradication; the new staged payment process will offer greater leverage on output delivery and the group can be consulted on options if needed.

Does the Bluespaces scheme expect to see specifics, such as objectives, outlined and detailed in the proposed delivery?

The scheme maintains clarity through the new legal funding agreement being used for this AMP. Partners must meet designated milestones and there is a clawback agreement in place for extreme cases. The Bluespaces Governance Group will always be consulted if any issues arise.

Will milestones be tailored to each project?

Milestones will be bespoke to each project, but at this stage in the programme we are on a learning curve. Some partners have previously received Bluespaces funding so there will need to be support for those partners to help them understand the changes made.

ACTION: RO'C to send over previous project work at Lumley with £200,000 funding working with Wear Rivers Trust, which is worth reviewing in context of previous work done for future discussions with partners about this project.

It was observed that this sort of discussion demonstrates the value of the Bluespaces Governance Group and that all information should be reviewed to understand the full context on all the funding previously provided to this project location. It was proposed that reviewing this earlier work could be an early milestone in the project.

DECISIONS: Project approved.

North: Cut Throat Dene Restoration Phase 2

Cut Throat Dene Restoration Phase 2

Cut Throat Dene Restoration



Total length of Bluespaces: 4.8 km

Delivered by:	Wear Rivers Trust
Bluespaces contribution:	£50,000
Total project cost:	£53,500 +
Bluespaces proposed:	4.8 km

- Riparian habitat improvements – scrapes, remeandering, leaky dams, flow deflectors, riparian planting;
- Tree and wildflower planting;
- Upgraded and new access signs;
- Education and community engagement;
- Volunteering opportunities – INNS control, litter clearance, green engineering, tree planting.

The first stage of this project, funded in AMP7, was a Bluespaces project that investigated sources of poor water quality and identified remedial solutions and opportunities for improvements. This second phase is proposing to deliver those improvements.

How have the watercourse kms been calculated with the overlap?

Km overlap is due to splitting the work into 2 phases. In phase 1, some short-term improvements were delivered in part of the project area and there will be delivery of additional, longer-term improvements along those same kms, as well as improvements in other parts.

There is a need to discuss how to treat proposed improvements of km that have already been improved in previous projects. There’s huge value in being able to revisit stretches of water course to do more in subsequent years, whether it’s feasibility or additional delivery; it would help build the profile of Bluespaces positively in the community. Being transparent about it is key, and having clarity on what is claimed is essential for public scrutiny. Records will be kept of all km that have been improved more than once.

INNS control undertaken by the Wear Rivers Trust needs to be done in line with the Regional INNS control strategy, currently run by Tyne Rivers Trust.

The Group liked that it builds on the first phase project, and includes some additional water quality monitoring; would make a great end-to-end case study.

Are all permissions in place?

This was confirmed.

Will the overall value of this project be increasing?

Once unsecured partner contributions had been confirmed, this would increase the total project value. However, at present, the lead partner hasn't been able to get those figures confirmed.

If no figures are known with confidence and if there is still the issue of overlapping kms, perhaps project approval on this needs to be postponed. Any 'placeholder figures' should be disregarded, This project proposal is not as clear as the previous and the overlap of kms is confusing.

Changing the per km payment rate at this stage may create an awkwardness with the partner due to the original funding offered. It was proposed that comments on the proposal could all be brought back to the partner and that any candidate discussion is perfectly acceptable, emphasising that the purpose of the Bluespaces Governance Group is for this exact scrutiny. This discussion needs to be carried forwards to clarify finer project details with partners.

A second assessment of this project could be done sooner than the next group meeting over email when details have been confirmed. The group supported offline assessment and check-in, emphasising the need to maintain transparency with partners and to getting answers to the questions raised before offline approval.

In response to concern about partner capacity to delivery, it was observed that partners will always express confidence in project delivery, but that the instalment payment process does help to mitigate that concern.

ACTION: CM/SW/EB to add projects for offline assessment to Bluespaces Action Tracker

DECISION: Project not approved – consensus among members for Cut Throat Dene Restoration Phase 2 to be postponed for offline assessment once further information is gathered.

North: Flowing Forward – Bluespaces Gaunless

Flowing Forward – Bluespaces Gaunless

Gaunless - Butterknowle to West Auckland



Total length of Bluespaces: 7.8 km

Gaunless - West Auckland to South Church



Total length of Bluespaces: 4.7 km

Gaunless - South Church to Wear confluence



Total length of Bluespaces: 2.8 km

Delivered by:	Wear Rivers Trust
Bluespaces contribution:	£150,000
Total project cost:	£551,000
Bluespaces proposed:	15 km

- Access improvements including improved waymarking and litter clearance;
- Citizen science surveys – water quality, Riverfly, habitat quality and INNS;
- Educational outreach through Wear Warriors Award;
- Restoration of degraded riparian zones – bank stabilization, leaky dams and riparian shading;
- Farm engagement and habitat interventions to address diffuse pollution and agricultural run-off.

Some improvements were made on the Gaunless, as part of an AMP7 project, but km claimed as part of that project were not included in this project.

In relation to the WEIF contribution, the finance breakdown should include the whole project delivery rather than treating the Bluespaces as separate; why is this overall amount of money needed and what is it going towards specifically to provide the vision needed for the current half a million value?

There needs to be collective agreement on the level of detail being asked of candidates. We need a detailed understanding of the Bluespaces elements, but there is no influence on other funds, although it is good to understand the whole output for the bigger picture.

Does this value stack up when the National Lottery money hasn't been secured?

A better understanding can be retrieved by going back to the partner, but Bluespaces funding is needed as a springboard for the partners. There are also previous EA interventions that need reviewing for this project too. However, WEIF funding has not been agreed yet and the overarching aim of this project needs to be understood.

The Bluespaces scheme is not just for match-funding, it is also for springboard use and helps show the interdependency of funding streams. A discussion is needed to consider what can be done in cases of reduced funding and smaller projects.

It was a big and ambitious project that is great to be involved in and it's good that the reporting is contributing to national reporting schemes. If other funding doesn't come through, can Bluespaces element continue independently?

With bigger sums and more ambitions, an understanding of how NWG’s money is spent is essential, being mindful of both money and reputation. An understanding of the breakdown is also key for larger projects. This project is currently too early in the development stage to proceed especially without HLF guaranteed. This project can’t be signed off without the bigger picture provided in more detail and that it would be unwise to approve a project for a potential £551,000 with only guaranteed £150,000. That there will be a continued discussion within the Bluespaces team to finalise this and the project will go to a second assessment over email once this information is gathered.

Once the finer details are acquired, this project would be useful as a Bluespaces flagship project and it would be positive to do something big and bold.

ACTION: A survey will be conducted of previously completed and ongoing projects by the Bluespaces team to avoid relevant information only appearing later in the process.

ACTION: SW to gather more information from partners for offline assessment.

DECISION: Project not approved – consensus among members for Flowing Forward – Bluespaces Gaunless to be postponed for offline assessment once further information is gathered.

South: Fiddlers Hill Wetland Improvements

Fiddlers Hill Wetland Improvements

Fiddler's Hill



Delivered by:	Essex & Suffolk Rivers Trust
Bluespaces contribution:	£40,000
Total project cost:	£238,000
Bluespaces improved:	3.7 km

Highlights

- Riparian habitat improvements - scrapes to retain floodwater and redistribute water to the meadow, fens, channels and ponds for seasonal livestock grazing;
- Black poplar planting, bird and bat boxes, spoil reptile basking banks;
- Interpretation boards and community action with the local parish council and local primary school - including classroom activities and a field visit.

This project looks good and is a great example of a project laid out and defining what Bluespaces funding is paying for. It is a good standalone project that aims to delivery good results.

EA funding has already paid for the designs, permitting, planning consent, early engagement etc. and that there is lots of different funding, making this a well-supported project overall.

The group agreed that the project looks good and is strong with its range of funders, presenting a great opportunity to contribute to a bigger scheme where permissions are all in place; Bluespaces funding has enabled the interpretation boards, which is great to see. Proposal could have more detail on how the scheme will be monitored.

DECISION: Project approved – consensus among group to approve Fiddlers Hill Wetland Improvements for project funding.

South: High House Farm

High House Farm Wildlife Enhancement

High House Farm



Delivered by:	High House Farm
Bluespaces contribution:	£21,050
Total project cost:	£23,325
Bluespaces improved:	2 km

Highlights

- Pond restoration and prevention of overflow onto the public footpath with spoil re-use for thatching reedbed buffer habitat;
- Ditch clearance, re-opening and watercress seeding
- Repairing of broken footpath signage, installation of new footpath signage and a large interpretation board;
- Four live action webcams for schools to engage with installed at different habitats on site;
- A mobile platform for use by artists, school and birdwatching groups with the hope of art made to be exhibited locally;
- Biodiversity improvements - 5 hibernaculas, two otter holts, two kingfisher nests - 5 hibernaculas, two otter holts, two kingfisher nests, three egret nests, and 9 bats/owls/bird boxes.

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This project was due to be proposed last year, but was delayed due to the landowner being involved in an accident. The funding is being provided upfront as the partner is a single landowner with whom there is established trust, an example of flexible payment with different projects.

This is a nice project but it would be helpful to see it in the wider context e.g. how the current footpath is currently used (or not) and if it links up to a wider access network. Is there scope to promote Bluespaces more widely to the farming and agricultural communities at farm cluster events?

Positive comments of support from all members of the group.

DECISION: Project approved – consensus among group to approve High House Farm Wildlife Enhancement for project funding.

6	<p>Discussion Points</p> <p>Chairman determined that the meeting should close without further online discussion due to scheduled meeting time being fulfilled and the points discussed already by the group. All group members advised to reflect on discussion with a future 30-minute MS Teams meeting to be arranged to discuss remaining topic points in agenda.</p> <p>The Bluespaces strapline discussion should be held offline with all votes cast by the end of the week.</p> <p>Next meeting to be held in October for 2 hours with a 30-minute session scheduled in the interim if needed.</p> <p>ACTION: Bluespaces strapline vote to be done offline with all group members submitting their vote over email by Friday 29th August.</p> <p>ACTION: Any feedback from group members to be emailed to emily.baldock@essexandsuffolkrivertrust.org</p>
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