

Meeting Notes

Meeting: Bluespaces Governance Group

Attendees: Emily Baldock, Matt Butcher, Zoe Frogbrook, Fiona Morris, Jo Matthews (chair), Rebecca O'Connell, Richard Powell, Patrick Welsh and Sian Whitehead

Date: 28/10/25

Location: MS Teams

Apologies: Jim Cokill, Helen Dangerfield, Anna Gerring and Clemmie Moule

Distribution: Attendees and Apologies

No.	Agenda Item and Notes																																																											
1	<p>Welcome & Introductions</p> <p>JM welcomed attendees to the meeting, in CM's absence, to review project evidence and candidate forms.</p>																																																											
2	<p>Review of Actions</p> <p>Previous actions were checked; all reported as either complete or in progress.</p> <p>The strapline and logo have been finalised and will be circulated after the meeting with thanks extended to all group members for submitting their opinions and ideas.</p> <p>ACTION: SW to share new Bluespaces strapline with Bluespaces Governance Group members.</p>																																																											
3	<p>Bluespaces Team Update</p> <p>Team Recruitment: From next week, the two new Bluespaces roles will be in post ; the new Bluespaces Advisor role, and new replacement of Bluespaces Delivery Manager for the South at ESRT. The new Bluespaces Advisor role will bring in a scientific perspective, GIS skills and communications support.</p> <p>Year 6 Programme Summary: Current forecast for delivery in Year 6 is 64.8 km (including 4.4 km carryover for evidence review). 29.5 km has already been approved for delivery with 5 km still awaiting information from partners. This statistic is a great achievement, reflecting the success of Bluespaces as the Year 6 goal of 25 km has already been exceeded. Feasibility forms were announced to be for internal NWG review after scoring by the Bluespaces Team.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 60%;"> <table border="1"> <caption>Year 6 Programme Summary</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Area</th> <th>Project</th> <th>Status</th> <th>km</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td rowspan="5">NW</td> <td>Lutley Park Burn & Riverside Restoration</td> <td>Approved, awaiting legal agreement</td> <td>5.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Flowing Forward - Bluespaces Gaulees</td> <td>Approved, awaiting legal agreement</td> <td>15</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cul Thomat Dene Phase 2</td> <td>Awaiting additional information</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>James Wood Park Nature Trail (Year 5 project)</td> <td>For review</td> <td>1.2*</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Deerhous</td> <td>For review</td> <td>10.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">River Swenish Restoration at Hedgeley Estate</td> <td>Feasibility pilot</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">NW Sub Total</td> <td>40.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="6">ESW</td> <td>High House Farm Wildlife Enhancements</td> <td>Approved, awaiting legal agreement</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fiddlers Hill Wetland Improvements</td> <td>Approved, awaiting legal agreement</td> <td>2.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Stanston Beck (Year 5 project)</td> <td>For review</td> <td>3.2*</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Restoring, Accessing and Interpreting Abbots</td> <td>For review</td> <td>9.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hill</td> <td>For review</td> <td>5.1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The Grange Natural Flood Management Project</td> <td>For review</td> <td>5.1</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">Blue Steps along the Saffron Trail</td> <td>Feasibility pilot</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">ESW Sub Total</td> <td>24.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>NWG</td> <td>NWG Total</td> <td></td> <td>64.8</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div> <div style="width: 35%;"> <p>29.5 km approved for delivery and awaiting legal agreement</p> <p>5 km awaiting additional information from partner</p> <p>Currently 64.8 km forecast in delivery Year 6 (including *4.4 km carryover)</p> <p>4.4 km for evidence review today</p> <p>28.5 km for candidate review today</p> <p>2 feasibility pilot projects</p> </div> </div>	Area	Project	Status	km	NW	Lutley Park Burn & Riverside Restoration	Approved, awaiting legal agreement	5.5	Flowing Forward - Bluespaces Gaulees	Approved, awaiting legal agreement	15	Cul Thomat Dene Phase 2	Awaiting additional information	0	James Wood Park Nature Trail (Year 5 project)	For review	1.2*	Deerhous	For review	10.6	River Swenish Restoration at Hedgeley Estate			Feasibility pilot	NW Sub Total			40.8	ESW	High House Farm Wildlife Enhancements	Approved, awaiting legal agreement	2	Fiddlers Hill Wetland Improvements	Approved, awaiting legal agreement	2.7	Stanston Beck (Year 5 project)	For review	3.2*	Restoring, Accessing and Interpreting Abbots	For review	9.2	Hill	For review	5.1	The Grange Natural Flood Management Project	For review	5.1	Blue Steps along the Saffron Trail			Feasibility pilot	ESW Sub Total			24.2	NWG	NWG Total		64.8
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Make our meeting effective



Year 5 Evidence Packs for Review

North: James Steele Park

Washington Wildlife Group have delivered a 1.2 km circular wildlife trail with interpretation boards, waymarkers, bird and bat boxes installed, with ongoing engagement and wildlife recording.

The project received praise, especially from group members who had been on site and experienced the improvements first-hand, stating it to be a humble project that achieved its targets. The delivery manager was also commended for patience and perseverance with the various delays and difficulties that the project partner encountered in delivering this project.

James Steele Park

Delivered by:	Washington Wildlife Group
Bluespaces contribution:	£3,000
Total project cost:	£4,460
Bluespaces improved:	1.2 km



Highlights

- Creation of a 1.2 km waymarked circular Nature Trail
- Scrub and grassland management to create clear, accessible routes
- Installation of bird nest boxes
- Activities including evening bat walk and wildlife recording

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A discussion on the consistency of measuring bluespaces improvements across different projects was started among the group, discussing the potential weight of difference between 1.2 km of river restoration compared to 1.2 km of a nature trail.

Emphasis on projects with vastly different budgets, but the same numeric benefit was provided as an observation rather than a challenge of the scheme.

The distance of '100 metres' from the water's edge as the qualifying range for bluespaces improvements was re-iterated as the current metric.

The matter of other factors, such as public engagement and biodiversity within these bluespaces and how these differ across projects with similar numeric km values, was also discussed with the conclusion to discuss in a future meeting for a more in-depth consideration among the group.

ACTION: ALL to consider and review guidance on reporting and quantifying bluespaces improvements (e.g. comparison of 1.2 km of nature trail vs 1.2 km of river restoration). To be discussed further in the next meeting.

DECISIONS: Evidenced project signed off.

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South: Starston Beck

Norfolk Rivers Drainage Board have reinstated the river channel with a fish bypass at the top weir and removal of the middle and downstream weirs improving fish migration. Steep banks have been reprofiled, increasing access to the meadow and totalling 3.2 km of improvement across three mini sites. Local media coverage by ITV Anglia was an exciting result of the project.

Comments on the delivery partners involvement were raised, but role of Water Management Alliance in the project eased scepticism. The site is seen as a fantastic resource for communities and the project is a great example of a catchment-based approach and a partnership project.

How are claims on numeric bluespaces km in part-funded projects rationalised in terms of what proportion we claim of projects?

The Bluespaces contribution is reviewed to help facilitate and make the project successful. The previous ODI method for the AMP7 is not applicable for the current AMP8 WINEP Programme.

For projects where Bluespaces are providing a small contribution to much bigger project (e.g. HLF), we need to focus on how Bluespaces has facilitated delivery through that contribution, rather than just reporting direct delivery of funded improvements. It was agreed that precise wording should be used to enhance transparency of how much of total project cost was Bluespaces (eg, Bluespaces supported delivery of, facilitated, or contributed to improvements),

ACTION: ALL to consider discussion point of bluespaces km claims across varying funding contributions and project scale under new AMP8 guidelines rather than AMP7.

ACTION: MB, RO'C and PW to share thoughts and opinions from EA and Natural England perspectives of bluespaces contribution measure and value, considering the importance of circular routes and trails for runners as an example under bluespaces improvements.

DECISION: Evidenced project signed off.

Starston Beck

Delivered by:	Norfolk Rivers Drainage Board
Bluespaces contribution:	£10,000
Total project cost:	£184,000
Bluespaces improved:	3.2 km

Starston Beck Fish Passage

- Removal of middle and downstream weirs and bypass of top weir has improved fish migration
- Creation of embryonic reed bed
- Creation of 2 new river channels to maximise use of low flows and accommodate higher flows
- Bank reprofiling and protection has provided safer access to the meadow area
- Installation of informative signs on the project's history and benefits
- Featured on ITV Anglia News and in several press releases

Commented [CM1]: This doesn't make sense to me, could you reword please

Year 6 Candidate Projects for Review

North: Deerness

This project, led by Wear Rivers Trust, hopes to deliver 10.6 km of bluespaces improvements at various focal points along the river, spanning 4 financial years with completion in autumn/winter of 2028. The funding request is £104,660 with Bluespaces providing the bulk of funding. It would create access improvements, contribute towards biodiversity and water quality improvements and revisit fish passes that received funding from EA several years ago for any maintenance and repairs. There is also agreement with the landowner to do some tree planting along a stretch of the river.

Near the confluence, there is an opportunity for wetland creation with scrapes and bank erosion repairs to protect the footpaths and create wildlife habitat. A permissive pathway would also be formalised with signage and way markers creating a circular route to signpost visitors around the pathways. Mapping and control of Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed will also be carried out. Opportunities for volunteer engagement in citizen science will stem from water quality testing and riverfly surveys.

Camera traps will be deployed to look for evidence of otters and water vole, and collaboration with Durham Wildlife Trust will help identify potential sites for mink traps. Overall, a diverse project aiming to deliver a wide variety of improvements. *Will anything be done to address the ongoing anti-social behaviour in that area?*

Although not a direct issue to be improved upon by the project, Wear Rivers Trust are aware of the issue and there is a current goal to work with the public and inform them of the issues. There is also a strong volunteer presence of two local community groups that are active and keen to be involved in the project, which should help harness enthusiasm and a positive attitude for the project.

Should the project lead have the expectation of carrying out water quality sampling on the fish pass sites of the river?

There is currently a solid baseline to build on from this and it's mainly a good way of getting volunteers engaged.

Is there a metric or comparison for calculating the appropriate funding for staff time in terms of capacity and what that staff time is delivering?

A previous measure was provided for the previously approved Gaunless project and a similar breakdown has been provided for this project, including specific tasks, number of staff days and which members of staff will be doing them.

The group expressed unanimous support for the project.

DECISION: Project approved.

Deerness, Years 6-9



Delivered by:	Wear Rivers Trust
Bluespaces contribution:	£104,660
Total project cost:	£130,600
Bluespaces proposed:	10.6 km

- Monitoring and reparation of fish passes
- Tree planting and wetland creation, to create riparian shading and new wildlife habitat
- Green engineering and riverbank repairs to protect footpaths, reduce sediment discharge and create wildlife habitat
- Access improvements including new steps, interpretation and waymarkers, and litter removal
- Mapping and control of Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed to allow restoration of native flora
- Volunteer involvement in water quality testing, riverfly surveys and monitoring of otters, mink and water voles

Commented [CM2]: We need to use language that is less deterministic. 'Will' -> 'hopes/could/can/would'

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Make our meeting effective



South: Abbots Hall Farm

Essex Wildlife Trust hopes to make improvements to previously arable farmed land that closed in 2020 due to COVID. The planned re-opening as a public site is August Bank Holiday 2026. The project is aiming to deliver 9.2 km of Bluespaces improvements in this area of the Blackwater estuary, including saltmarshes and pond restoration. Interpretation boards, including a panoramic viewpoint sign, and way marking signage will be installed to guide visitors around the site and benches at 400 metre intervals will increase the access for all visitors.

Volunteer-led restoration hopes to provide great engagement for the local community and help spark excitement prior to the site's opening. Overall, a great variety of improvements across the area that can enhance the site for wildlife and new public visitors.

An insight from Natural England into nearby projects and involvement of a higher tier agreement on the western portion of the site was provided, outlining the grassland/scrubland creation plans and potential pond creation/restoration. The intention is to apply for land parcels in a pilot project with BNG factor involved, making it their first habitat bank and first attempt to combine green finance in terms of BNG with grant funding. There is also an ambition to link this project with Abberton Reservoir. Due to conflict of interest, PW will not be voting on the project approval, but commented that it will be nice to see the new access opened up to the public, which will add real value to the area.

The funding breakdown was commended for providing a clear breakdown of the Bluespaces contribution towards the bigger project (£92,000 contribution towards total project value of £0.5m). This project also acts as an example of demonstrating that funding given to organisations like the Wildlife Trust, where the question of funding what they should be doing regardless of external funding, is still necessary to make real differences with that extra funding. Overall, this project is a really good example of what makes Bluespaces a great option for people and demonstrates to customers the impact the scheme is having.

Appreciation of the benches at regular intervals was given with emphasis on enabling those less able to walk long distances without rest stops to enjoy the full site. Gaining recognition for the Bluespaces contribution to the project was highlighted as an important factor to include in signage as the funding is a considerable amount,.

Comments were given on the project as an example of how to have a funding stream, like BNG, but also funding to manage access directly.

Previous involvement with this site and all work having been put into it was discussed by group members with excitement around visiting the site once it opens to see the improvements first-hand.

The group expressed unanimous support for the project.

DECISION: Project approved.

Restoring, Accessing & Interpreting Abbots Hall




Delivered by:	Essex Wildlife Trust
Bluespaces contribution:	£92,000
Total project cost:	£501,000.91
Bluespaces proposed:	9.2 km

- Access improvements including information signs/graphics, wayfinding/finger posts, panoramic viewpoint sign and benches at regular ~400 m intervals
- Restoration of existing ponds and creation of new ponds to increase water quality, naturalisation and visual appearance of water environment
- Ditch blocking and field drain breaking to increase wetland habitats, biodiversity and freshwater retention
- Points of interest including orchard and neolithic henge

Commented [SW3]: I think, where there is a stated conflict of interest, we need to name the group member, for transparency

Make our meeting effective

	<p>South: The Grange</p> <p>FWAG East will be leading a project to improve 6.1 km of bluespaces. A traditional orchard is being restored with a new wildflower plot around it and pruned materials will be stacked to create a habitat for invertebrates. A public workshop will also be held to teach these restoration techniques. Other local engagement will come from the Radwinter primary school through forest school visits. Benches will also be installed across the site to support learning, relaxation and accessibility to the site.</p> <p>There will also be installation of bat and bird boxes, including flycatcher, owl and kestrel. An attenuation and standalone wetland will be created to intercept overland flow and reduce downstream flooding, which affects village properties. Natural flood management features include three woody dams and three online ponds connected to the River Pant and its tributaries to slow high flows. Overall, the project is well-balanced in its range of improvements, aiming to enhance biodiversity, engage the community and deliver flood attenuation and drought resilience benefits.</p> <p>The project was seen as well-structured with costings laid out clearly. Potential delivery risks were made clear in terms of the planning application and FRAPS and how this has been mitigated.</p> <p>Further detail was provided that the EA funding of this project stems from a broader upper catchment strategy, which includes multiple on-stream ponds and attenuation features across other sites. This current project is a specific contribution within this wider strategic framework.</p> <p>The collaborative approach of this project was commended for highlighting the value of partnerships with FWAG, river trusts and others in delivering impactful countryside projects for local communities. Full support was expressed for the project's structure and community relevance.</p> <p>There was strong support for the project, particularly its alignment with work in the River Pant and the restoration plan for the River Blackwater. The value of timing was emphasised alongside the Essex LNRS and the strength of the farm cluster's involvement. Group members agreed that the project demonstrates how small-scale interventions can contribute meaningfully to wider catchment goals. Combined Essex remains a priority catchment with strong partner alignment and visible project outputs emerging.</p> <p>The group expressed unanimous support for the project.</p> <p>DECISION: Project approved.</p>	 <p>The Grange Natural Flood Management Project</p> <p>Delivered by: FWAG East</p> <p>Bluespaces contribution: £65,000</p> <p>Total project cost: £73,046.55</p> <p>Bluespaces proposed: 6.1 km</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local community engagement through on-site forest school visits and orchard restoration workshop Increased accessibility through bench and interpretation board installation Orchard restorative pruning, wildflower plot, stacked deadwood, bird and bat boxes, pond and wetland creation to provide new habitats Leaky dams and attenuation wetland to reduce high flows and downstream flooding, increasing riparian corridor resilience
6	AOB	

Make our meeting effective



A look ahead to possible upcoming projects was provided.

A site visit to Paper Mill Lock with Essex Waterways and a site visit to Tollesbury with Essex Wildlife Trust were confirmed for the South.

The Shoeburyness Pond Restoration project opportunity was highlighted as a positive outcome from the Local Actions campaign, an engagement initiative involving direct outreach to communities and stakeholders to discuss environmental goals and address questions.

The Bluespaces team was commended and thanked for progressing a substantial list of project opportunities with note given to the strength of the total delivery forecast and for quality of project documentation and summaries.

Biffa match-funding has not been secured for Shotley Grove, but alternative funding options are being explored.

Teesdale project is progressing toward a major HLF application with feasibility discussions underway via Tees Rivers Trust and the Tees Catchment Partnership. A second large-scale HLF proposal, led by Durham Wildlife Trust, is also in development, involving multiple partners across northern England with a focus on water vole restoration and associated benefits.

There are ongoing discussions with partners to assess overlaps and opportunities between Bluespaces and Branch Out funding streams.

Strong support for all projects in development was expressed, emphasising community need and innovation in water reuse and site accessibility.

Dates for the next meeting in either early December or mid-January were discussed and a deeper review of project readiness and a doodle poll will inform the final scheduling decision.

The meeting was then closed following thanks from group members for a productive session.

ACTION: Bluespaces team to discuss potential dates for next meeting and to send out to group members for an availability check via email or Doodle Poll.

Year 6 Candidate Projects Upcoming for Review

Area	Project Name	Lead Partner	Proposed Km (miles)
NW	Moodon Cote	Durham Wildlife Trust	1.7
	Shotley Grove	Tees Rivers Trust	1.4
	Juggal Hill	Weir Rivers Trust	2.7
	River Besson's Restoration of Hedgely Estate	Tweed Focus	6.6
	Demolition Tweed Phase 2	Tweed Focus	12
ESW	Teesdale Play and River Toss (Feasibility)	Tees Rivers Trust	-
	Mankyls Pennywort Removal	Teasdale21	2.6
	Shoeburyness Pond Restoration	Southern City Council	2
	Tollesbury	Essex Wildlife Trust	5.5
	Eye Town Moore	Woodland CIC	2.6
	The River Gipping	The River Gipping Trust	-
MWS	Paper Mill Locks	Essex Waterways	-
	The Roding Naze	Teasdale21	-
Total Km in Development			35.7
Total Km in Delivery Year 6 Forecast			45.2