

Water Environment Improvements Project Evidence Form

Assurance

Information provided in this form will be used by the Bluespaces Team and the Bluespaces Governance Group to confirm that the project has delivered benefits above and beyond NWG;s baseline and regulatory obligations to improve the water environment accessible to customers across at least two out of three aspects. The form presents evidence of project completion and outputs achieved to support formal approval of the length of bluespaces improved for the Water Industry Natural Environment Programme (WINEP).

Assurance Level	Project Approval Date*	Completed Project Sign-Off Date*
Bluespaces Governance Group (External)	February 2024	

**To be completed by Bluespaces Team*

Project Information

Project Name

James Steel Park Nature Trail

Project Lead

Company/ Organisation	Named Lead	Position
Washington Wildlife Group	Nick Jobson	Chairman, Washington Wildlife Group

Bluespaces Improved

Year	Proposed	Delivered*	Reason For Any Change
2024/25	1.2 km	1.2 km	n/a

**To be completed by Bluespaces Team*

Project Timescales

Candidate Project Approved	Project Initiated	Project Completed
February 2024	March 2024	August 2025

Project Summary and Highlights

Summary

Washington Wildlife Group (WWG) and NWG have delivered water environment improvements to 1.2 km of Bluespaces through the James Steel Nature Trail project. WWG are an established local wildlife group formed of volunteers in the Washington community and have been actively engaged in the Durham Wildlife Trust 'Nextdoor Nature' project. The Group's main focus of activity is wildlife recording, collecting data from several sites around Washington, including James Steel Park, which is managed by Sunderland City Council (SCC). Through data collected over several years, the site has now been recognised as being important for wildlife, particularly for bat feeding activity.

This project has supported establishment of The James Steel Park Nature Trail, providing a 1.2 km waymarked circular route that uses existing access from the main car park and around Corgi Pond at the centre of the site. Access through overgrown sections of the route has been improved by scrub management, while grassland management by SCC has created a network of paths through areas of rough grassland. The trail comprises interpretation signage and way markers that highlight the wildlife that can be found on the site, as well as the site's history and natural heritage, thus serving to educate local people on the wildlife on their doorstep and improve engagement and use of the park. Funding has also been used to construct and install bird boxes on site, improving habitat opportunities for these species. Bat boxes have also been purchased and will be installed with help from Durham Wildlife Trust Reserves Team.

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



Waymarker sign by path leading to Corgi Pond


James Steel Park



Total length of Bluespaces: 1.2 km

Figure 1: Bluespaces improved at James Steel Park

Project Outputs, Benefits & Evidence Against Criteria

Access, Facilities & Recreation	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Footpath surface improvements will take place on sections of the trail that are less easily accessible. This will encourage people to utilise and enjoy the trail more. 2. Interpretation signage and species ID waymarkers will raise awareness of the biodiversity within the park and promote the central role of the pond habitat. The boards will also encourage local people to take a more active, long-term interest in the wellbeing/ protection of the local wildlife. 3. Through this project and WWG activity alongside DWT's Nextdoor Nature, local people will be encouraged to participate in local wildlife groups and utilise the nature trail for purposes of improved mental well-being and exercise, local people will contribute to site enhancement tasks such as litter picking on-site. 	<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. Two sections of the route, each c. 100m, take visitors off the tarmac surface and through areas of rough grassland. On both of these sections, Sunderland City Council have created mown paths, not only clearly showing the route during periods of tall vegetation growth, but also creating an easily accessible route through the grassland habitat for visitors to enjoy. Overgrown vegetation beside one of these sections, which runs beside the pond, has been cleared to improve accessibility. 2. An interpretation board has been installed at the start of the route, and informative waymarker posts have been installed at each of five points along the route. 3. Design and proposed siting of the board and waymarker posts was developed and agreed by WWG volunteers. These volunteers already visit the site on a regular basis, recording all wildlife sightings on a group WhatsApp page, prior to submission to the North East's Environmental Records Information Centre (ERIC). The site is regularly used by local anglers who, together with members of WWG, remove any litter they encounter while on site. James Steel Park is also included in Washington Clean & Green's programme of community action, with volunteers from the local community getting involved in litter picks and other environmental improvement activities across the region. 	
Evidence	
	
<p>Overgrown pond-side path (image taken in January with minimal vegetation growth) and same path cleared of overgrown vegetation (image taken in August)</p>	



Managed paths through rough grassland areas



Interpretation design for start of nature trail, and sign in-situ, with members of WWG



Waymarker designs, and some of the waymarkers in-situ

Wildlife & Biodiversity

Expected Project Outcomes

1. The group will build and install bat boxes on the trees around the entrance of the park to support roosting bats. Species that have already been recorded using the site, particularly the pond for feeding, include Daubenton's, Noctule and pipstrelle species.

Benefits

B1: Improves the quantity, quality and connectivity of habitats

Outputs

1. Eight bird boxes were installed in woodland adjacent to the main access track and these will be augmented with a further six. Additionally, eight bat boxes have been purchased and will be erected with the assistance of Durham Wildlife Trust Reserves Team.

Evidence



Wooded area along the first section of trail (left) where next boxes were erected (right)

Water Quality	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<p>1. The project site will be monitored for any pollution issues and litter will be removed from the surrounding area, preventing it from impacting the water environment, particularly around Corgi Pond and the River Wear. This will be performed by existing Washington Clean and Green teams, facilitated by the Washington Wildlife Group.</p>	<p>➤ C3: Improves state and function of water, including naturalisation, visual appearance, litter and odour</p>
Outputs	
<p>1. The site is used regularly by anglers, who maintain a watch for any issues, and also clear any litter that appears. WWG members also visit the site and contribute to this ongoing site surveillance. Washington Clean & Green conducted a litter pick and path clearance in September 2024, as part of their ongoing programme of community action. Further sessions will be included in their forward programme.</p>	
Evidence	
<p>Link to Washington Clean & Green Facebook page - https://www.facebook.com/WashingtonCleanandGreen/ Post on 4 September 2024 reported on volunteer day, which included litter picking, at James Steel Park.</p>	
Additional & Secondary Benefits	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<p>1. The project and activities of WWG and Nextdoor Nature will nurture a feeling of ownership within the local community aiming to reduce anti-social behaviour in the area and knowledge/respect for local wildlife. Incidents of deliberate abuse of the bluespace will be monitored and reported upon. This project will also help to raise awareness of the importance of the site, as it does not currently have nature reserve status.</p>	<p>➤ D2: Provides benefits to local communities, the local economy or NWG</p>
Outputs	
<p>1. WWG have reported a 'wonderful and enthusiastic response' from the local community, with many positive comments received. On three separate visits made by one group member, they met people exploring the new trail, prompted by the waymarker signs. There has been much positive feedback on Facebook, and a letter of appreciation has been received from the local Residents' Association. Walkers have also been observed picking up litter from the park and around the pond, demonstrating a sense of value of the site. It is clear that people are enjoying the benefits of walking the trail, and there is a widespread desire to keep the paths clear.</p> <p>Making use of the new wildlife trail pathways, members of WWG enjoyed a batwalk on 18th July, using bat detectors recently purchased by the group; this event will be repeated next year, and will be opened up to members of the general public.</p>	
Evidence	
<p>See Customer testimonies and media, p.9</p>	

Customer Testimonies & Media

“Great news! Well done to everyone involved!”

“Brilliant, about time, good!”

“A very pleasant walk around the lake” (photos of the waymarker signage included in the post)

Comments and facebook posts from Fatfield Residents Group

Hello Peter,

I have been admiring the new signage that has been erected with the James Steel Park in the vicinity of the lake known locally as Corgie Pond.

My wife and I were absolutely delighted to see the markers 1 to 5 signs and the information shared on each sign. What a wonderful idea.

Over 20 years ago large signs were placed at the entrances to the park with maps and available walk but over time the maps have faded and the metal supports have rusted. The information on those signs has faded so much so that they cannot be clearly read and historic graffiti does not help.

I am a Facebook member of Fatfield Residents Association and a former Chairman of that group.

Previously we tried to get new signage installed around our treasured park by liaising with our three local councillors without success so you can imagine how pleased I was to see the new signs suddenly appear. I do hope they are respected and maintained, if necessary, in the future. I have also noted positive comments from people from Fatfield regarding the new additions.

On the 6th September local resident Ian Atkinson posted on the Facebook page “A very pleasant walk around the lake off Shepherds Way car park and along the river,” with pictures of the new markers.

I would like to thank yourself and others responsible for this initiative, it has certainly been well received by myself and my neighbours.

Message received by WWG Secretary from a local resident

[Signs of success at James Steel Park | Durham](#)

Link to blog on Durham Wildlife Trust website

Lead Partner Quotes & Testimonials

"The James Steel Park Nature Trail is up and running and should be a great resource for local people, proving that there is a rich variety of wildlife in the local park, and not just in designated nature reserves. In addition there is no charge when you follow the Trail so a real incentive for people to spend more time and look more closely at what is on their doorstep.

The creation of the trail is a great example of collaborative working for a worthwhile goal, involving not only Washington Wildlife Group but also Northumbria Water, Durham Wildlife Trust and Sunderland Council".

Nick Jobson, Chair, Washington Wildlife Group

"With regards to the James Steel Nature Trail, I can provide a Licence to Washington Wildlife Group to install and maintain thereafter Information Boards and Trail Markers at James Steel Park. Future maintenance may include removing graffiti from the boards"; "That's great work"

David McGregor, Valuation Technician, Sunderland City Council

Project Delivery Statistics

Please insert any relevant statistics from your project that have been collected.

*Please provide more information on the following page.

	Activity	Data	Grid Reference (if applicable)
Engagement	Number of volunteer tasks	3	
	Number of volunteer hours	146	
Access	New or upgraded paths (m)	200m	
	Number of new furniture installed (e.g., seating, signage)	6	
Biodiversity	Number of habitat features installed (e.g. nest boxes)	22	