

Meeting Notes		Meeting: Bluespaces Governance Group	
Attendees: -Richard Powell, Jo Matthews, Helen Dangerfield, Clementine Moule, Rebecca O’Connell, Fiona Morris, Anna Gerring, Sian Whitehead, Sophie Negus, Emily Baldock, Alex Wills		Date: 02/03/2026	Location: MS Teams
Apologies: Jim Cokill, Matt Butcher, Zoe Frogbrook, Patrick Welsh, Clare Deasy		Distribution: Attendees and Apologies	
No.	Agenda Item and Notes		
1	<p>Welcome & Introductions – Welcome and introductions in the first BGG meeting of 2026.</p> <p>CM – went over the previous meetings actions with the group.</p> <p>Action: Separately distribute decisions explained on defining categorising ‘kms improved’ from previous meetings actions.</p>		
2	<p>Bluespaces Team Update –</p> <p>Plinth: Introduction to Plinth, the new online grant management tool NWG will be using going forward, this will contain the entire process from application to evidence and should smooth the process, being more efficient (First draft should hopefully be ready for End of March).</p> <p>Communications strategy currently being created through use of internal and external feedback we have received.</p> <p>Natural Capital Metrics Working Group had its first meeting in January 2026. This work uses EA Natural capital data as a baseline and allows Bluespaces, Branch out, Field to Tap, and other teams to align the data they collect. It has also allowed us to identify value data that we can use to extrapolate values like avoided healthcare cost, or avoided flood damage costs (by ecosystem type and size created).</p> <p>Internal Governance: NWGs internal governance has also being undergoing change, this is the reason for push the governance group meeting. The estimated guidance timeline for project application to project approval is now 4 months (maximum). Furthermore, with the new amp period the group has a new SharePoint which can be found here: AMP8 Bluespaces Governance Group.</p> <p>CM will now be managing the Branch Out as the scheme as it is so closely aligned with Bluespaces it will be more efficient to merge management, comms, governance and metrics. Questions and statements around this were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will Bluespaces and Branch Out remain discrete funding sources? Answer: Yes • What level of projects will come from Branch Out for approval? Answer: Projects over 50k similar to Bluespaces • As Branch out operates in funding windows will projects be ready for Bluespaces meetings based on internal guidance? Answer: Projects will come as and when ready. • As the Branch Out undertaking money comes from enforcement from the EA, they have a conflict of interest and will not be able to approve these types of projects. 		

BLUESPACES GOVERNANCE GROUP PROGRAMME OVERVIEW



Year 6 Programme Summary

Area	Project	Status	Km
NW	James Steel Park Nature Trail (Year 5 project)	Signed-off	1.2*
	Lumley Park Burn & Riverside Restoration	In delivery	8.8
	Flowing Forward – Bluespaces Gaunless	In delivery	15
	Deerness	In delivery	10.6
	Cut Throat Dene Phase 2	Awaiting additional information	5
	River Breamish Restoration at Hedgeley Estate (Feasibility)	In delivery	-
	Connecting Wooler with Nature Recovery	Bluespaces Governance Review	-
NW Sub Total			40.6
ESW	Starston Beck (Year 5 project)	Signed-off	3.2*
	Fiddlers Hill Wetland Improvements	Evidence Review	3.7 4
	High House Farm Wildlife Enhancements	In delivery	2
	Blue Steps along the Saffron Trail (Feasibility)	In delivery	-
	Restoring, Accessing and Interpreting Abbots Hall	Approved, awaiting partner contract	9.2
	The Grange Natural Flood Management Project	Approved, awaiting partner contract	6.1
	Mardylke Improvement and Engagement Project	Review	2.6
Upper River Clipping Revival	Review	6.5	
ESW Sub Total			33.6
NWG	NWG Total		74.2

Currently **8.4 km** in Year 6 delivered forecast

36.4 km in delivery

+20.3 km awaiting additional information or contract from partner

One feasibility for review today

4 km for evidence review today

9.1 km for candidate review today

Approving a Candidate Project or a Feasibility/Maintenance Project >£50k



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Action: CM/AW to send further methodology on Branch Out funding, along with a ToRs document and the updated Bluespaces ToRs.

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Fiddlers Hill Candidate Evidence –

Richard Powell & Helen Dangerfield declared an interest in regard to this project.

This project resulted in 4km of bluespaces enhanced up from the originally estimated 3.7 km and consisted of wetland work, restoration and installation of bird/bat boxes as well as interpretation and community engagement. The project had strong positive engagement with a local school with children wanting to re-visit the site in future. The wetland creation that occurred as a result of this project lead to successful flood mitigation on a local road.

All emails/messages from group members who were not present at this meeting were supportive and positive of this project.

Minor discussion on the increase of kms of bluespaces the projected improved, all members were positive and supportive of the project.

Action: Evidence signed off/approved.

Fiddler's Hill Wetland Improvements

Delivered by:	Essex & Suffolk Rivers Trust
Bluespaces contribution:	£40,000
Total project cost:	£238,000
Bluespaces improved:	4 km



Fiddler's Hill



Highlights

- Creation of wetland through fenland and scrapes that retain floodwater and redistribute water to the meadow, fens, channels and ponds for natural flood management
- Restoration of old and installation of new bird and bat boxes and creation of hibernacula
- Community engagement with the local primary school - including classroom activities and a field visit.
- Trees and interpretation board to be installed this year

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Connection Wooler Feasibility proposal –

Rebecca O’Connell declared an interest in this project

This feasibility project would be in regard to surveys, design plans and preparatory work for a programme of 10 interlinked projects within the Wooler catchment. Key points can be seen in the slide to the right. This application comes with the expectation that the partner will come back for a candidate project covering approximately 23.6kms. This project is connected to a larger Wooler project which Bluespaces will only contribute toward. Plans for delivery aim to align with NWG capital delivery in the lower catchment.

A discussion on whether this project should be approved occurred key points raised were:

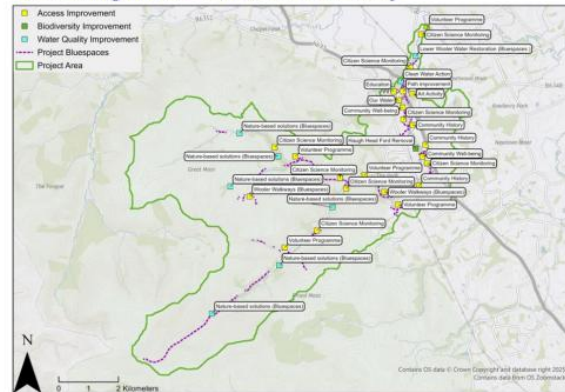
- Could Permits/Consents be included in this application if NHLF doesn’t go through so that the candidate project could be discrete and not rely on NHLF funding for consents/permits?
- A Bluespaces project (feasibility/candidate) will still go ahead even if NHLF is not received for the larger programme of projects, and there are plan B options for attaining a potential funding hole left by NHLF, but it would take time to attain the funding.
- The Bluespaces feasibility funding is here to lead the charge to signal to other funders that we think this project is worth doing, this leads to a larger inherent risk to NWG as larger funders. As the Governance Group pushed so hard to get feasibility funding, because it is such a great enabler and there is a gap in this type of funding, we should not make this funding conditional on a project attaining other funding as this limits the value of the funding.
- Potential to approve the project initially, but re visit and re assess the project timeline and outputs scope with the group for possible amendments if the NHLF bid isn’t attained.

Action: Approved/signed off (if NHLF doesn’t go ahead the project outputs and timeline will be re-visited in an interim Bluespaces Governance Group). NHLF outcome to be shared with the group.

Action: Share internal feasibility evaluation tool scores, as well as questions and answers from internal reviewers for future feasibility proposals.

Connecting Wooler with Nature Recovery (Feasibility)

Connecting Wooler with Nature Recovery



Total length of Bluespaces: 23.6 km

Delivered by:	Tweed Forum
Bluespaces contribution:	£160,900
Total project cost:	£754,799
Bluespaces proposed:	23.6 km

Surveys, design plans and other preparatory work for delivery of programme of ten complementary projects within the Wooler catchment:

- Landscape-scale floodplain restoration
- Access improvements
- Community engagement, improving wellbeing and reducing social isolation
- Education, heritage and art events and activities
- Clean water action (in collaboration with NWG’s capital works in lower catchment)

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Mardyke Candidate proposal –

An INNS removal and community engagement focused project delivered by Thames 21. The goal is the eradication of Pennywort. Permits to use herbicide have been approved. The project will be funded up until 2030 to allow for longer term monitoring/INNS removal and community engagement. The site is close to a Scout troop who will be engaged with the INNS work and will also allow better use of the river. The hopes of this is to give the Scouts a sense of stewardship of the river and allow them to see the works.

Discussion on this project brought up the following points:

- Due to INNS being a strong focus of this project Branch out will part fund this project as well, this has been confirmed by the Branch Out judging panel
- The Mardyke is an area that needs gradual work and engagement, this project provides much needed community value to a deprived area.
- Would it be possible to engage the Scouts earlier in the project, not just in the final year? Answer: Yes, while the plan is to engage the Scouts after the work is completed Thames 21 are open to engage the community including the Scout troupe earlier in the project.
- The project is centred on a small area which is particularly choked up, with the aims of fully clearing this section of river to impact this specific community. Thames 21 also care for the upper stretches of the river and took into consideration wider impacts of Pennywort and decided on a targeted approach based on the resources available.
- The EA project using Weevils (*Listronotus elongatus*) was highlighted as a potential opportunity for the project and future projects. This has been explored by the South Essex Catchment Partnership, and it was decided as not appropriate for this specific location.
- Bluespaces have been in discussion with the partner to broaden the scope of the project and its social impact, interpretation was added to the proposal however the partner did not want to delay or dilute the project through scope creep. It was highlighted that this area will benefit from just a series of small actions sparking connection with the water environment first, as opposed to larger projects - this may be the case for other similar sites. Thames 21 are still open to, and enthusiastic to apply for other Bluespaces projects.
- General consensus of the project was very positive across the group.

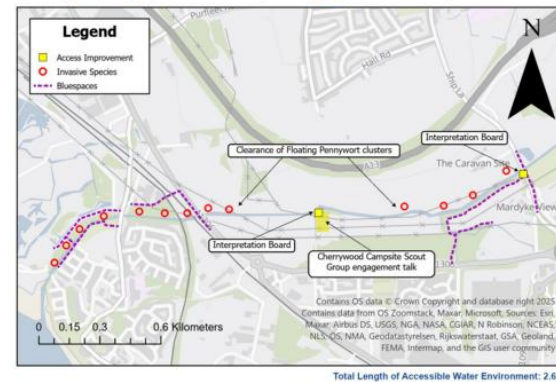
Action: Signed off/approved.

**BLUESPACES GOVERNANCE GROUP
PROJECT REVIEWS**



Mardyke Improvement and Engagement Project

Mardyke Improvement and Engagement Project



Delivered by:	Thames 21
Bluespaces contribution:	£28,000
Total project cost:	£66,931
Bluespaces improved:	2.6 km

Highlights

- Removal of Floating Pennywort INNS aiming for complete eradication using baseline data and contributing to INNS Mapper.
- Design and installation of interpretation boards informing the public on reporting INNS sightings and project work
- Community action with local scout group at Cherrywood Campsite (resident group that use the water environment for watersports activities) including educational INNS visits

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Upper Gipping Revival –

Helen Dangerfield declared an interest in this project.

This project focuses upstream of a previous bluespaces project tackling the problem of Himalayan Balsam from the source. It would remove this Himalayan Balsam along 6.5 km of bluespaces and improve pathways, steps and access routes through installation of interpretation boards and a bench. This project will result in a reduction in riverbank erosion and silt build up during winter as well as better access to the riverbanks. The project includes community and volunteer engagement giving a sense of ownership and stewardship of the area.

The group was very supportive of the project.

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- There were questions around partnership and catchment-based working, and whether the project is considering INNS within the whole catchment, as Himalayan Balsam is pervasive and persistent
- The River Gipping Trust and key local partners are in communication with many local stakeholders to form a group and catchment pan.
- There is a partnership project on the Gipping to put together a plan concerning the entire River Gipping and INNS control, to make sure projects like these are not reach by reach but contribute to larger scale environmental improvement.
- Any Bluespaces or Branch Out project concerning INNS, partners are now required to add any data collected on INNS onto the INNS mapper, this was suggested by our internal INNS specialist.

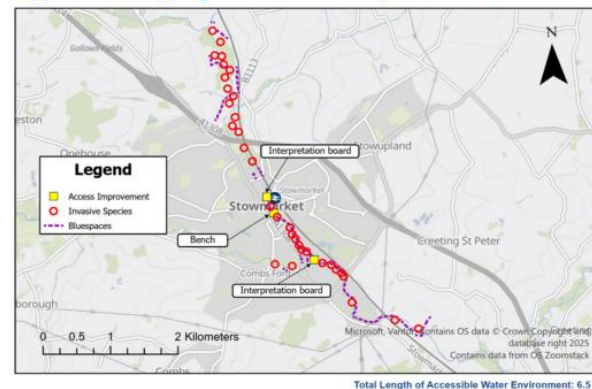
Action: Signed off/approved.

**BLUESPACES GOVERNANCE GROUP
PROJECT REVIEWS**



Upper River Gipping Revival: Restoring the River Walk

Upper River Gipping Revival: Restoring the River Walk



Delivered by:	River Gipping Trust
Bluespaces contribution:	£50,777.45
Total project cost:	£129,368.45
Bluespaces improved:	6.5 km

Highlights

- Removal of Himalayan Balsam, an INNS species along key areas.
- Improved access with path creation/adjustment and addition of a bench.
- Interpretation boards and community action with volunteer coordination for some of the work as part of delivering improvements to the area.
- This project work follows from a previously funded Bluespaces project in Year 5.

Projects In Development

BLUESPACES GOVERNANCE GROUP
PROJECTS IN DEVELOPMENT



Year 7 Candidate & Feasibility Projects Upcoming for Review

Area	Project Name	Lead Partner	Proposed Km (provisional)
NW	River Breamish Restoration at Hedgeley Estate	Tweed Forum	9.1
	The Wansbeck Way	Groundwork North East & Cumbria	29.6
	River Tees (Feasibility)	Tees Rivers Trust	tbc
	Destination Tweed (Phase 2)	Tweed Forum	27
	Delivering the John Muir Award	OASES	tbc
ESW	Chelmer & Blackwater Social Engagement and Improvement	Essex Waterways	24.8
	Enhancing Access to Beccles Rowing Club	Beccles Rowing Club	8.7
	Bottengoms Farm (Feasibility)	Essex Wildlife Trust	tbc
	Lauriston Farm	Lauriston Farm Landowner	5.2
	Ironworks Meadow (Maintenance)	Chelmer Blackwater CIC	tbc
Frog Reintroduction and Habitat Restoration	Celtic Rewilding	tbc	
NWG	Total Km In Development		104.4

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AOB

Action: Send out email with AOB's for the next meeting and thoughts on the annual in person meeting.

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