

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

Ebchester Riverside Access

Project Lead

Company/ Organisation	Named Lead	Position
National Trust	Jodie Peachey	Lead Ranger

Water Environment Improved (NWG use only)

Year	Claimed	Proposed	Reason For Any Change
Year 3	1 km	1 km	N/A

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	January 2022	N/A	N/A
Water Environment Steering Group (Internal)	January 2022	January 2022	N/A
Water Environment Governance Group (External)	January 2022	January 2022	January 2025*

*Evidence Pack reviewed May 2024 by WEGG, but sign off carried over to Year 5 due to the need to provide a lead partner testimonial and some customer evidence

Project Timescales

Candidate Project Approved	Project Initiated	Project Completed
January 2022	January 2022	December 2023

Project Summary and Highlights

Summary

The National Trust and the Ebchester Boathouse Development Partnership have used NWG Bluespaces funding to deliver improvements to 1 km of water environment at Ebchester West Wood and Ebchester Boathouse, alongside the River Derwent in County Durham.

The site includes a woodland walk with views of the river, and river access for walkers and river users. The footpath through the length of Ebchester West Wood is very narrow and on a steep cross-slope, and has suffered from runoff and erosion, impacting wildlife and woodland habitats and visitor enjoyment of the site. Use of the river for recreation has increased significantly since the Ebchester Boathouse Development Partnership was established in 2011, particularly during 2021, and swimming and paddle boarding have become very popular. A simple landing stage was recently constructed to allow rowing sculls, canoes and kayaks to be launched safely, but access to the landing stage along the riverbank was previously muddy, slippery and dangerous.

This project has delivered interventions to the woodland area, and provided a board walk and jetty along the riverbank to provide safe access along the river and enhance users' enjoyment of the water environment.

Sport England funding will also be used to further improve visitor facilities in 2024, through rebuild of a small toilet and shower facility at Ebchester Boathouse as part of a longer-term restoration ambition for the building over the coming years.

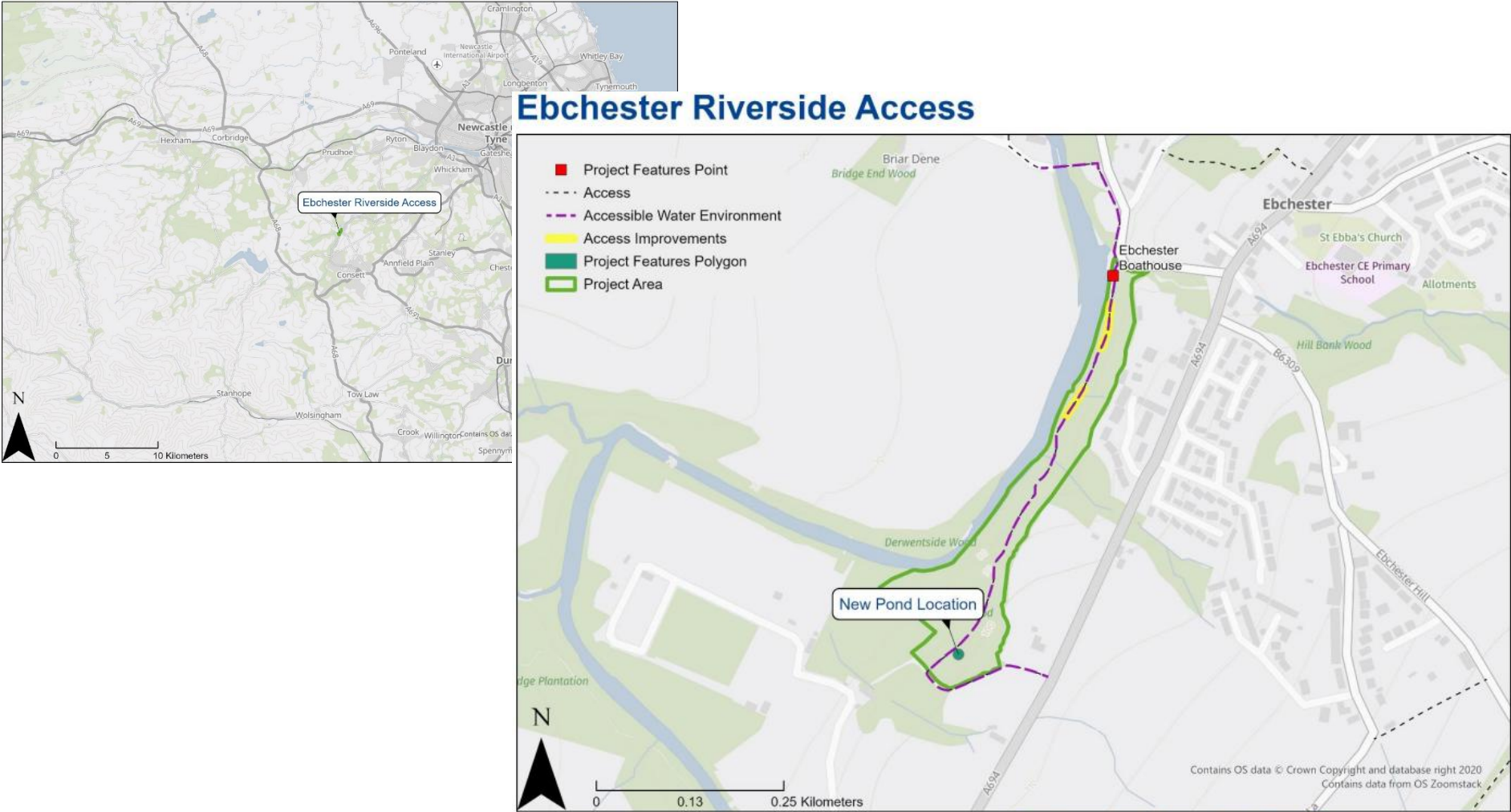
The Bluespaces improvements delivered through this project complement the improved recreational facilities at the Boathouse, creating an improved water environment that customers can access safely while also delivering wildlife and biodiversity benefits.

Highlights

- Work has been undertaken to improve the narrow and steep cross-slope woodland path, with edging and revetment replaced and maintained.
- A new boardwalk jetty has been installed by the boathouse to allow safer access to the waterside for sports activities and general recreation.
- A pond has been created at the southern end of the woodland which has provided new habitat for wildlife and provides drainage to alleviate flooding to the track making access safer and easier in wet weather and reducing runoff and erosion into the river.



Maps



Total Length of Bluespaces: 1km

Bluespaces improved in the Ebchester Riverside Access project

Project Outputs, Benefits & Evidence Against Criteria

Access, Facilities & Recreation

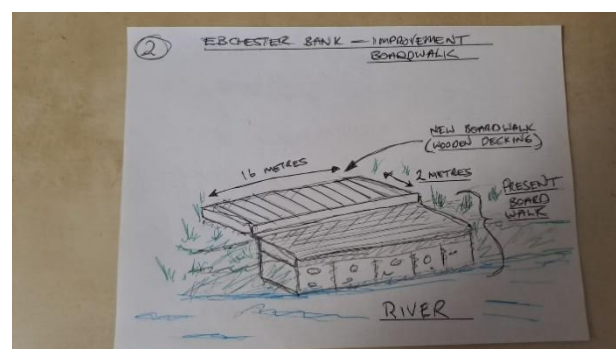
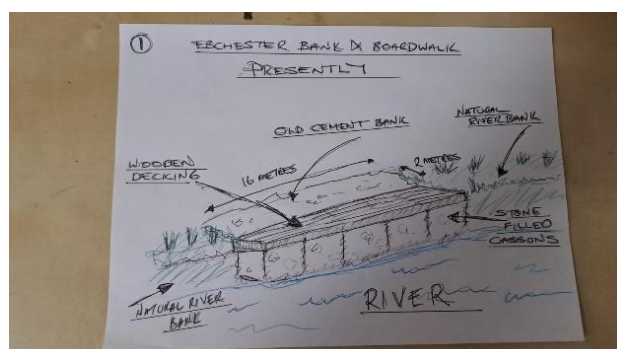
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
- Improved and safer access for visitors and local residents through the woodland, providing sounds and views of the river and tributary streams, and improving health and wellbeing through engagement with nature and greater enjoyment of the water environment - Safe access provided along the riverbank to the landing jetty, also facilitating access into the water, and providing health and wellbeing benefits for users from physical activity	➤ A1: Increases access to, engagement with and enjoyment of the water environment ➤ A2: Benefits health and wellbeing
Outputs	
- Access through the woodland via the existing footpath overlooking the River Derwent which was previously in a poor state and not accessible in wet weather has been improved by National Trust volunteers - Improvements to the jetty area have been completed, including the installation of 2 new platforms to create wide steps on the riverbank which provide safe access.	
Evidence	



National Trust volunteers



Materials purchased for improvements



Riverside boardwalk design



Path revetment before works



Path improvements after works



Water access before and after improvements

Wildlife & Biodiversity

Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
1. Installation of a woodland pond in the glade at the southern end of the woods will create a new habitat within the woodland, improving the diversity of plants and invertebrates 2. Improved footpath access will prevent erosion of the riverbank habitat	➤ B1: Improves the quantity, quality and connectivity of habitats

Outputs

1. A pond has been created adjacent to the footpath, creating a new habitat within the woodland, and deadwood has been left in the area, creating extra opportunities for wildlife.
2. Access improvements have been made across the site along with ongoing footpath maintenance, which will protect the riverbank habitat by keeping the public to designated footpaths.

Evidence



Pond site before excavation



Pond excavation in summer 2022



Pond in April 2023, with dead wood on site to provide new habitat

Water Quality	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
1. Access improvements at the boathouse and through the woodland will protect the riverbank from erosion from foot traffic and water users, reducing sedimentation into the watercourse	➤ C1: Reduces pollutants entering waters from point or diffuse sources
Outputs	
1. Improvements made to the woodland path have reduced runoff and erosion into the river from the steep banks, and improvements to the jetty and riverside boardwalk will take foot traffic off the riverbank, reducing soil erosion and sediment transfer through foot trampling and runoff of mud and loose soil into the river.	
Evidence	
	
Water access improvements before/ after	
	
Soil eroding from woodland paths before improvements, and newly vegetated banks following path work	

Additional & Secondary Benefits	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
1. Installation of a woodland pond in the glade at the southern end of the woods will capture rainfall drainage and slow run-off into the river. 2. Local community will benefit from opportunities to undertake physical activity in an enhanced local environment, resulting in improved health and well-being. 3. Project supports the current partnership activity between Ebchester Boathouse Partnership, Sports England and the National Trust.	➤ D1: Provides resilience and adaptation to climate change and/or reduces the risk of flooding ➤ 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. A new pond has been created in a wet part of the site that will provide natural flood management benefits through collection of runoff drained from the site. 2. Volunteering opportunities and events have been offered through the project, delivering opportunities to the local community for exercise and engagement with the water environment. 3. A 25 year tenancy agreement has been formalised between National Trust and the Ebchester Village Trust for the continued use and upkeep of the boathouse. A contractor is in place to make the improvements planned. There has been a delay in delivering this activity due to the lease negotiations with the National Trust but this has been resolved and the agreement will be signed in June 2024. Following this work will commence on the boathouse to improve visitor facilities.	
Evidence	
See above	

Customer Testimonies & Media

“The development of the boardwalk at Ebchester Boathouse has been extremely beneficial for the users of the boathouse and the river in general. During summer months particularly, there are a lot of youth groups that use the river for kayaking, canoeing and paddleboarding. All year round, visitors to the river come in increasing numbers.

Access to the river, until the development of the extended boardwalk, was problematic. Mud covered the area, and the small existing boardwalk wasn't large enough. The development of the extended boardwalk means that we have safe access to the water and a space that accommodates the larger groups. The project has supported the wider community, providing a space for people to enjoy the peace and tranquillity that the river at Ebchester provides.

Our grateful thanks go to the funders and to the volunteers and individuals that support the boathouse. You have made significant improvements at Ebchester.”

Geoff Marshall, Ebchester Village Trust

Lead Partner Quotes & Testimonials

“The Bluespaces funding has made it possible for us to create a new woodland pond, which has boosted habitat niches and biodiversity in Ebchester Wood. By holding water in the pond, the amount of rain run-off over the land has reduced, preventing soil erosion and stopping silt entering the river. Better and safer access to the river at the Boathouse has also meant more people can make use of the river here for rowing, canoeing and kayaking. Facilitating access improvements along the riverside walk and into the river itself has meant more people can enjoy getting closer to nature and appreciate the wildlife and beauty of the river corridor, achieving a key part of the National Trust’s strategy and purpose.”

Helen McDonald, Former Project Lead, National Trust

Other Supporting Evidence

[Ebchester Boathouse Development Partnership | Ebchester.org](#)

[Ebchester Village Trust](#)

Westwood and Ebchester Boathouse Context

Ebchester West Wood and Boathouse cover an area of 4 hectares along the River Derwent at Ebchester in County Durham. The woodland forms part of the River Derwent wildlife corridor, including semi-natural ancient woodland, many veteran trees, nesting birds, otter and roe deer. The National Trust team based at Gibside manage Ebchester West Wood with nature conservation and visitor access as the top priorities for the site. There is a public footpath that runs along the river through the woods that is used daily by local people and visitors to the Derwent Valley. As the land at Ebchester is free for anyone to access, the National Trust has no income from this site. It is managed on a minimal budget.

At the north west tip of the woodland the River Derwent has a calm section of water, formerly a Mill Pond, which is ideal for many types of boating activities. There has been a boathouse at Ebchester since 1870 when the Ebchester Amateur Rowing Club was formed. The club was wound-up in 1974 when social habits changed. The Ebchester Boathouse Partnership was formed in 2011 to encourage greater use of the river by improving or rebuilding the boathouse, bringing in water and electricity supplies for the first time, and improving access to the river. However, progress has been frustrated by rising costs associated with a culvert which crosses the site.