

Water Environment Improvements Project Evidence Form

Scope & Purpose

This form is to be used by the Water Environment External Governance Group (WEGG) to review, validate and formally approve the length of water environment improved for each project. The form has been completed by the Water Environment Team with support from project partners for presentation to the WEGG. After formal WEGG approval, the km water environment improved will be recorded against the ODI and projects marked as completed on the Water Environment Scorecard and Mapping Portals.

Project Name

Catch My Drift

Project Lead

Company/ Organisation	Named Lead	Position	
Northumberland Wildlife Trust	Sophie Webster	Catch My Drift Project Officer	

Water Environment Improved

Year	Claimed	Proposed	Reason For Any Change
Year	4.8	4.8	NA

Project 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 the evidence of project completion and the outputs achieved to request project sign-off by the WEGG.

Level	Project Acceptance Date	Project Approval Date	Completed Project Sign Off Date
Project Team	November 2020 May 2021	NA	NA
Water Environment Steering Group (Internal)	November 2020 May 2021	May 2021	NA
Water Environment Governance Group (External)	May 2021	May 2021	May 2022

Water Environment Project Timescales

Candidate Project Approved	Project Initiated	Project Completed
July 2021	2020*	April 2022*

*This water environment improvement project is part of a wider three-year Catch My Drift project (2020-23)

Project Summary and Highlights

Support for Northumberland Wildlife Trust's (NWT) Catch My Drift project has improved 4.8 km of publicly accessible water environment at the 185-hectare East Chevington Nature Reserve in Northumberland, through biodiversity enhancements and project activities which have helped reconnect people with nature. This bluespaces project is part of a larger three-year project and has provided match funding for the larger project to help initiate the wider improvements to be delivered in full by 2023.

Through the project, 12 ha of wildflower meadow has been created. Reedbeds have been enhanced and innovative 'reed islands' have been developed. Woodland management has created glades and rides, whilst the planting of bluebell and wild garlic bulbs will help increase the woodland flora diversity. Newly planted shrub species such as Dog Rose and Hazel will provide a diverse food source within the enhanced woodland areas. During the project, Northumberland Wildlife Trust has delivered a programme of events and activities to help people connect with nature and learn more about wildlife

Improvements to 3 hides and their access routes are due to be fully completed by the end of 2022 which will give all visitors an opportunity to experience nature at the site.

Highlights include:

- 12 hectares of wildflower meadows have been hand sown by volunteers on the western edge of the North Lake as well additional improvements to a smaller meadow to the north where green hay was spread in 2019, leading to a total of 22 ha of meadow creation through the project. Initial surveys in the meadows have shown an improvement in species diversity showing secondary species such as Red Clover and Sheep's Sorrel.
- Experimentation with reed rhizome transplanting to create islands, a recommended technique shared from the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, has proven successful and efforts will be continued yearly to increase the area of reedbed on the North Lake. Scrub has also been removed from the South Lake reedbed to halt ecological succession.
- This project has enabled NWT to reach out and host many events, working towards reaching the overall project goal of 750 people engaged over three years. Support from the local community and volunteers has been excellent.

Catch My Drift



Total Length of Bluespaces: 4.8 km

Figure 1: Map of bluespaces improvements delivered

Project Outputs, Benefits & Evidence Against Criteria

Access, Facilities & Recreation	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access improvements for visitors including changing kissing gates to normal swing gates and replacing stiles, and improvement of existing paths, including re-surfacing where needed 2. Renovation of 3 hides to create a more inclusive wildlife watching experience, with disabled access, more varied height seating and panoramic windows 3. New interpretation boards providing information on the site and wildlife 4. Opportunities for volunteer engagement and education through Wildlife Trust volunteer-led surveying and other activities with visitors and local communities such as guided walks and wildflower planting, activities for all age ranges and abilities 	<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. Paths leading visitors through the woodlands on site have been widened and opened up to allow more light in, which will create a more pleasant walking experience through the woodlands, as well as benefiting wildlife. The main track from Hadston village has been opened up by removal of overshadowing and crowded trees as well as cutting back hedges, which will help users who have wheelchairs or pushchairs. The delay in hide renovation (<i>see below</i>) has deferred some access works including the resurfacing of the connecting paths. Works still in progress will be completed by the end of 2022. 2. Due to unavoidable delays the renovation of the three hides is expected to be completed by the end of 2022 with construction starting in July/August. Work so far has included finalising the drawings and details as well as sending out a UK-wide tender for contractors to undertake the work. These hides will be more accessible to visitors and offer a new unique wildlife watching experience. 3. The delay in hide renovation (<i>see above</i>) has also led to the delayed installation of Interpretation boards and signage. Designs are being drawn up. 4. From July 2021 to February 2022, 142 volunteer activities have been delivered totaling 1,842 hours. Activities have included woodland thinning, reed transplanting, wildflower sowing and planting, ecological surveys and training in reptile and butterfly monitoring as well as fungi ID courses. Additional events held in the same period for visitors and local communities have included wildlife walks, wildflower plug planting, family bird box making events, a school visit for the John Muir award, and local group talks to advertise the project. Two guided walk events have also been held for people who used to live on the old Drift village on the site before it was demolished. In total there have been 21 individual events, engaging 265 people from the local community and wider Northumberland along with visitors to the area. 	

Evidence



Volunteer plug planting event on the two newly created meadows



Bluebell planting with the public to create a more diverse woodland flora



Opened up pathways to create a wider track



Computer image of one of the new hide renovations which include a wider more level path, wider doorway and lower, wider viewing points for those in wheelchairs



The current hide

Wildlife & Biodiversity	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Habitat management of the reedbed and water margin, including expansion of reedbed habitat, a reed cutting rotation, adding scrapes, pools and islands, replacing wooden sluices to control water levels, and creation of new channels to create more 'edge' habitat for priority species 2. Creation of 10 ha wildflower meadow adjacent to the reedbeds and lake 3. Establishment of new ponds, deadwood corridors and hibernacula in surrounding woodland areas to improve habitat connectivity 4. Woodland management to improving diversity and quality through tree thinning and native species planting 5. Invasive Non-Native Species issues on site will be addressed including targeting Signal Crayfish, New Zealand Pygmyweed, Curly Waterweed and Crocosmia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ B1: Improves the quantity, quality and connectivity of habitats ➤ B2: Improves the conservation status and or abundance or distribution of species ➤ B3: Reduces risk or impact of invasive non-native species (INNS)
Outputs	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Over summer 2021 reed turfs were used to plant "reed islands" in an effort to get the reeds to spread out quicker and increasing site reedbed coverage. As the islands develop more edge habitat will be created which is favored by birds for nesting and feeding and can increase the density of some nesting reedbed passerines including Bearded Tits. This experiment has proven to work, and planting will be continued for the remainder of the project. A new cutting regime has been implemented opening up more viewing areas through the reeds. Additional water management such as the re-excavation of an old drainage ditch and the creation of a large scrape in the vicinity of the hides has also created great views for wildlife watchers, whilst benefiting wading birds and amphibians such as Great Crested Newts. 2. 12 ha of wildflower meadow have been sown on the west side of the North Lake. Seed mix applied includes Yellow Rattle and Eyebright, two parasitic plants for grass which will help reduce the sward height and allow faster meadow development. Meadows sown in 2020 were also surveyed in the summer of 2021 and showed an increase in positive indicator species. These meadows will improve the current grassland resource on site and create large blocks of un-fragmented meadows to tackle pollinator decline, the meadows will also increase species diversity in plants, invertebrates with knock-on positive effects to birds and bats. 3. Dead wood corridors have been created across the whole reserve as a by-product of woodland management and these have linked several blocks of woodland. NWT have already recorded new populations of Common Lizards in these areas. In spring 2021 an increase in birds in these areas either feeding or looking for nesting sites has been recorded. The summer months will allow a greater understanding of the positive impacts of these corridors as species become more active and surveys start up. Due to contactor shortages, there have been delays in the creation of two new ponds which have been marked out on the site. These ponds will be created later in 2022 after the Great Crested Newt breeding season. 4. Several areas of woodland have been thinned since October 2021. This work has focused on thinning out conifer trees which make up the majority of the site's woodland species where they created a cramped, dark woodland with little ecological value. By thinning out these species, light has been allowed to reach the woodland floor which has subsequently then been planted with Bluebell and Wild Garlic bulbs to help increase the woodland flora diversity. Shrub species have also been planted which provide a diverse food source such as Dog Rose, Hazel as well as Downy Birch and Goat Willow. Certain areas of woodland have been cleared into glades and rides which provide great hunting areas for dragonflies, sunning areas for butterflies and reptiles as well as more open areas for bird flight as proven by the recording of Sparrow Hawk presence in one of these areas. 5. With the help of volunteers, all invasive Crocosmia has been removed from the site and these areas will be continued to be monitored for regrowth. The New Zealand Pygmy Weed, and Curly Waterweed are restricted to a singular pond which is an important breeding pond for Great Crested Newts and a viable means of control is being discussed with the EA. A WEIF funded officer has been looking into Signal crayfish within the catchment and this will be addressed as part of the wider ongoing Catch My Drift project. 	

Evidence



Newly created reed islands made from turfs dug during the ditch restoration




Re-exavated drainage ditch and wet mud scrape to enhance and create micro habitats but also provide different viewing areas for wildlife watchers (a month after this work was completed a Water Rail was spotted)



Volunteer sowing wildflower meadow



Common Lizard found in newly coppiced willow hedge

Water Quality	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creation of wildflower meadow will help reduce nutrient runoff in surface waters on site 2. Engagement with landowners to reduce pollutants in farm run-off upstream 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ C1: Reduces pollutants entering waters from point or diffuse sources
Outputs	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 12 ha of wildflower meadow has been sown over the last year on the west side of the North Lake. These fields were previously used for silage and had excess nutrients added. Taking these fields back to traditional wildflower meadows and hay production has stopped the addition of more nutrients that would run off into the North Lake. There are also two fields which will act as a buffer for an adjacent arable field. The wildflowers also cover the ground and decrease runoff and soil erosion. 2. Engagement with landowners has been undertaken through the project, with mixed responses from farmers. Most recognise the need for reducing pollution but feel under pressure to provide food security as a result of Brexit. Most are in stewardship schemes or have buffers around headlands but there is scope for more to be done through the wider project. 	
Evidence	
	
<p>Developing meadows from 2020 which are helping buffer drainage into both the North and South Lakes</p>	

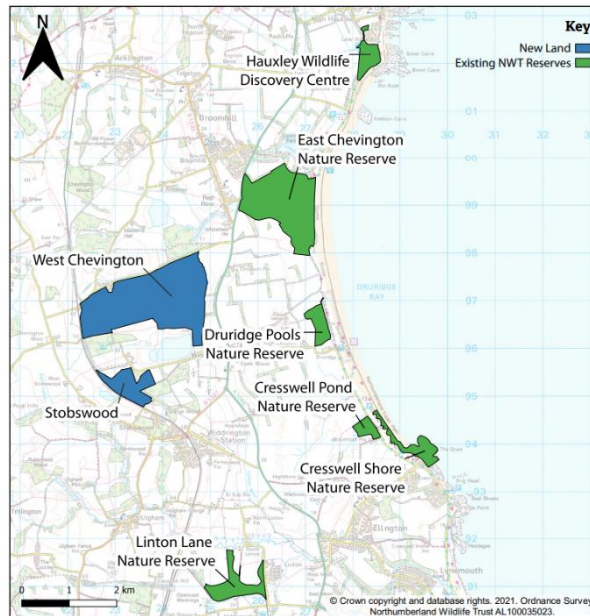
Additional & Secondary Benefits

Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wetland maintenance and woodland improvements will enhance carbon capture and storage 2. Improvements to the site will create a wildlife and bird watching hotspot, supporting tourism and the local economy 3. Project is part of a strategic plan for improving habitat connectivity and creating a mosaic of habitats along Druridge Bay and the Northumberland coast 4. Reedbed in the North East is an uncommon habitat, and as the largest reedbed in Northumberland this site has a key role in the Northumberland Nature Recovery Network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 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. NWT has written up a management plan for the future to manage the site under its new conditions, including water control to encourage reedbed growth which is a great habitat for carbon capture. Newly acquired NWT land to the west of East Chevington will include a large amount of tree planting that will filter down and benefit into the Catch My Drift project area, as well as creating a further joined up landscape across Druridge bay.
2. The legacy of this project aims to create a renowned bird watching reserve and wider area. By the end of the wider Catch My Drift project it is anticipated there will be an increase in visitors to the site. During this project there has already been an increase in new visitors due to 'stay-cations', these visitors have been engaging with NWT onsite and during our events. Newly acquired NWT land to the west of East Chevington will greatly improve Druridge Bay's reach and publicity.
3. As seen on the map below, there are significant new areas of land owned by the NWT close to Druridge bay. Work is planned as part of a bigger picture of connecting these reserves to create a mosaic of habitats that will allow wildlife to move up and down the bay habitats.
4. Constant management and observations of reedbed development will be monitored onsite by NWT, as well as improvements considered at other sites, using East Chevington as a case study.

Evidence



Map of Druridge Bay with the newly acquired land at West Chevington and Stobswood

Customer Testimonies & Media

Visitor event feedback:

“My two boys and my nephew are still talking about their morning. They all thoroughly enjoyed it, (me too!) thank you all. Ralphie would especially like to say thank you to Joel.” Bird box and bug hotel making

“A great session which was run brilliantly. Very engaging staff on hand to help.” Family pond dipping

“Our trainee guide Joel was very knowledgeable regarding birds which made it far more interesting.” Guided wildlife watching walk

“The staff involved were great, knowledgeable and helpful. We didn't see a murmuration but saw a Marsh Harrier and now know where to look for murmurations. Many thanks to Sophie, Joel and the other staff and volunteers.” Starling Murmuration Walk

Nature reserve project in Northumberland gets backing from water company

A three-year initiative that is working to improve the habitat quality and complexity at East Chevington Nature Reserve has received a £10,000 boost.

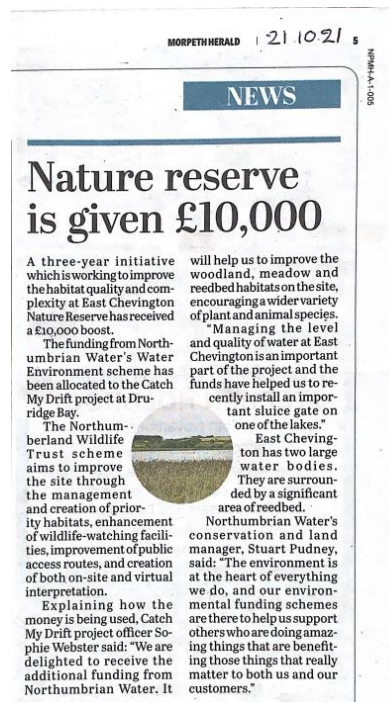
By Andrew Coulson
Friday, 10th October 2023, 6:09 pm



View of East Chevington Nature Reserve. Pictures by Steven Morris.

The funding from Northumbrian Water's Water Environment scheme has been allocated to the Catch My Drift project at Druridge Bay.

The [Northumberland Wildlife Trust](#) scheme aims to improve the site through the management and creation of priority habitats, enhancement



Article on the Northumberland Gazette Website

Article in the Morpeth Herald



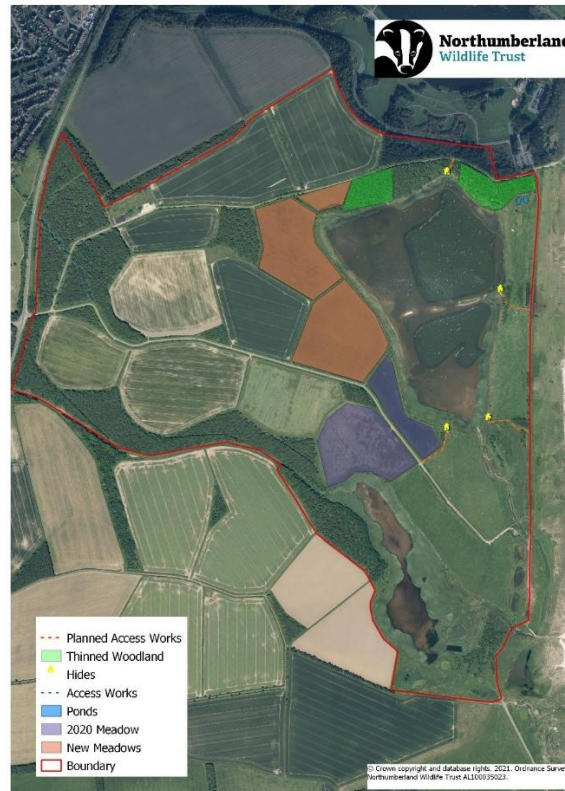
Article in the Northumberland Gazette

Lead Partner Quotes & Testimonials

Sophie Webster, Catch My Drift Project Officer

“Thanks to this grant we were able to run numerous events to get people engaged with the project and the site which has led to many returned visits. Without this grant we would not have been able to achieve so much in such a short time. The cash boost provided allowed us to sow even more seed on our wildflower meadows, work with the local community and visitors to plant Bluebells and Wild Garlic in our woodlands and enabled us to run even more volunteer activities. We are sad that we haven’t been able to undertake access works or hide renovations but due to reasons out of control this was delayed. However, we are back on track and aim to have the hides and their access routes completed by the end of the year. Grants and partnerships like this one are vital for both small- and large-scale conservation efforts and as hopefully proven in this report create opportunities for communities to benefit as well as wildlife from these projects.”

Other Supporting Evidence



NWT Site Project Map