



Water Environment Scheme

Guidelines and Supporting Information

**For Northumbrian Water and
Essex & Suffolk Water Partners**

September 2021

INTRODUCTION TO THE WATER ENVIRONMENT SCHEME

Northumbrian Water Group (NWG) incorporates Northumbrian Water (NW) and Essex & Suffolk Water (ESW). Our customers have asked us to work in partnership to improve the water environment, focusing on a wide range of improvements in areas where they can access and enjoy water and its wildlife, and the associated health and wellbeing benefits. A new scheme has been developed to be delivered within NWG's 2020-25 plan, to allow us to address this challenge and do more to protect and improve the water environment in our regions.

The Water Environment Team has identified over 6000km of accessible streams and rivers, lakes and reservoirs, wetlands, coasts and beaches in the North East, and over 5000km of accessible water environments in Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk, including canals, which are open to the public to enjoy via public rights of way or other public access.

NWG's new Water Environment Scheme allows us to develop and deliver projects with our partners to improve a number of these areas, including at popular tourist locations and sites of value to local communities. The scheme focuses on packages of improvements across access and recreational facilities, wildlife and biodiversity, and water quality.

For examples of the type of improvements that could be delivered through water environment projects, see [here](#).

ACCESSIBLE WATER ENVIRONMENT

Water environment is the environment covering or close to all surface water within our regions. This includes streams, rivers, ditches, lakes, reservoirs, ponds, wetlands, fens, bogs, marshes, reedbeds, canals, coasts and beaches.

NWG defines accessible water environment (sometimes referred to as bluespace) as the area around water that is freely accessible to the public via road, footpath, bridleway or other public right of way, or accessible via a free point of access, including a country park, beach or other public area.

At least **one** of the following factors should apply to class public access close to water as accessible water environment:

1. Immediate **vicinity** of water (within 100m)
2. **Visibility** of water and water associated wildlife
3. **Sound** of water and water associated wildlife
4. **Touch and interaction opportunities** with water

NWG has carried out high level analysis to map accessible water environment in our regions. This dataset has been made available to partners via the [NWG Water Environment Improvements Mapping Portal](#). We would like to work with partners to understand where the water environment is accessible and which areas of our regions are eligible for scheme activity.

PROJECT CRITERIA

The Water Environment Scheme applies a strategic approach to working in partnership to improve the water environment in our regions. The aim is to support, drive and deliver cost-effective projects with the greatest benefits for customers and the environment. Candidate Projects will be prioritised on benefits, costs and deliverability, with strategic support and the locations of projects and involvement of partners also considered within the 5-year programme.

In order to be eligible for the scheme, projects must impact on or be in the vicinity of **accessible water environment**.

Projects must also include interventions which cover **2 out of 3 of the core aspects** of water environment improvements – Access, facilities & recreation, wildlife & biodiversity, and water quality (A, B and C in Table 1). At least 1 benefit indicator in 2 core aspects must be addressed.

Table 1 shows the 12 Water Environment Indicators which NWG will use to assess the benefits of water environment projects. These indicators are linked to those used in the government's [25-year plan for the environment](#). Projects meeting a high number of indicators will be prioritised for development into Candidate Projects. These projects will deliver the greatest benefits for NWG's customers and the environment and are more likely to be approved than projects with fewer indicators.

Table 1. NWG's Water Environment Indicators

Aspect of Improvement	Benefit Indicator	
Access, Facilities & Recreation (A)	A1	Increases access to, engagement with and enjoyment of the water environment
	A2	Benefits health and wellbeing
	A3	Influences positive environmental behaviours
Wildlife & Biodiversity (B)	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)
Water Quality (C)	C1	Reduces pollutants entering waters from point or diffuse sources
	C2	Contributes towards improved status or no deterioration of rivers or bathing waters or protecting drinking water
	C3	Improves state and function of water, including naturalisation, visual appearance, litter and odour
Additional Key Benefits (D)	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

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

The Water Environment Scheme will be delivered in partnership with organisations and community groups from the public, private, voluntary and education sectors in our NW and ESW operating areas. This area of interest covers 10 management catchments:

- Till & Tweed, Northumberland Rivers, Tyne, Wear and Tees in the North East
- Broadland Rivers, East Suffolk, Combined Essex, South Essex, and Roding, Beam & Ingrebourne in East Anglia and the South East.

The full area the scheme covers is shown [here](#).

We have expanded NWG's area of interest for this scheme to include complete management catchments in the ESW area. This allows us to take a regional approach to partnership working and offers potential to improve the water environment in areas which may not be our key focus, but which are important to our customers.

FUNDING AVAILABLE

NWG has identified annual funding to support the Water Environment Scheme. We anticipate investment of around £1m over the five years of our 2020-25 business plan to achieve around 250km water environment improvements in our regions.

From 2022-25, NWG intends to invest £0.7m in the new Water Environment Scheme, of which £525,000 will be made available to support partnership projects, £175,000 each year, to be split across our NW and ESW areas and partners.

Our target is to achieve at least 58km water environment improvements each year from 2022-25, over the remaining 3 years of our plan.

There is no upper or lower limit for funding for projects. The level of funding NWG will offer is dependent on the level of km of accessible water environment which could be improved through the project and the benefits delivered for our customers and the environment. This is likely to be seed or match funding but could also cover the total project cost if the project is deliverable with NWG's contribution only.

Funding is unrestricted and can be used to fund physical improvements along with salary costs and overheads. Contributions need to be linked to delivery on the ground to support km of water environment improved.

As a guide, the average level of investment for projects already developed is £10,000 for a 3km project, but NWG is interested in both smaller and larger projects and will assess these and determine funding contributions on the benefits projects can deliver.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS, DELIVERY AND TIMESCALES

The process for logging project opportunities and ideas and developing these into Candidate Projects for inclusion in our plan is set out [here](#). Partners can engage via the [NWG Water Environment Improvements Mapping Portal](#) or by email (see below). If NWG consider a project to be eligible we will contact partners and ask for completion of a development form.

As this is a strategic scheme working across a multi-year plan, there are no formal submission deadlines. Projects will be developed for inclusion within NWG's annual plans, linked to annual funding limits. NWG's Water Environment Coordinators will work with partners to develop and support projects and aim to respond to partners as soon as possible after new information is received.

Delivery timescales for scheme projects will be linked to NWG's annual plans, based on April-March financial years. Multi-year projects may be supported.

Funding awarded under this scheme is in relation to a regulatory deliverable for which NWG is required to report to an external governance group. Feedback and evidence of delivery of the improvements should be provided to NWG by successful partners upon project completion or 8 weeks prior to the delivery date.

FURTHER INFORMATION

More information on the scheme and our approach can be found [here](#).

Partners can also contact NWG directly with any questions:

Water Environment Team: waterenvironmentimprovements@nwl.co.uk.