

# 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 will be completed by the Water Environment Team with support from project partners and presented to the WEGG. Upon 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

Carrs Nature Reserve Access and Ecology

## Project Lead

Company/ Organisation	Named Lead	Position	
Durham County Council	Coralie Niven	Senior Parks & Countryside Ranger	

## Water Environment Improved

Year	Claimed	Proposed	Reason For Any Change
Year 2	1.1km	1.5km	<i>Amendment to reflect revised mapping and interpretation of user access on site</i>

## 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 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	July 2021	NA	NA
Water Environment Steering Group (Internal)	July 2021	July 2021	NA
Water Environment Governance Group (External)	July 2021	July 2021	November 2021

## Water Environment Project Timescales

Candidate Project Approved	Project Initiated	Project Completed
July 2021	July 2021*	September 2021

*\*This is a Branch Out project and delivery started earlier after Branch Out approval in August 2020*

## Project Summary and Highlights

### Summary

Durham County Council and NWG have delivered water environment improvements to 1.1km of publicly accessible water environments at Carrs Nature Reserve in Pity Me, Durham.

This project has improved public access and made wildlife and biodiversity improvements to Carrs Nature Reserve. The project has provided a new accessible path for 650m around the nature reserve (previously a mud and grass path). Viewing platforms have been built with space for mobility scooters and wheelchairs, and benches provided for visitors. New interpretation boards with maps have been installed within the site.

Habitat improvements have been delivered to benefit all species on site, including the protected Great Crested Newt, and these will allow visitors to view more wildlife without having to access more sensitive parts of the nature reserve. Improvements include creating new pond habitat, creating additional habitats from dug out materials through bunds around and in the marshy areas, and creating wildlife areas with cut tree waste. These habitat improvements will be viewable from other permissive paths around the site.

The existing Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) system on site has also been cleared of birch regeneration to ensure runoff water can reach the site and help it function effectively.

As this work was allocated funding through Branch Out before it was approved as a Water Environment Improvements project, the bulk of this was achieved by summer 2021 with habitat work carried out through the months of December, January, and February. The final touches for the project including the installation of interpretation at the site entrances were completed by August 2021. Project volunteers contributed to the project as anticipated, but due to covid restrictions, they were not able to make as big a contribution as originally intended.

Project highlights include:

- The creation of surfaced routes and new wetland areas
- Creation of new seating areas
- Appreciation of new provision by the local community



Some best practices observed during the project include:

- Ensuring works were carried out over winter months to have least impact on site amphibians and breeding birds
- Installation of accessible seating suitable for all visitors.

## Carrs Nature Reserve Access and Ecology Improvements



**Figure 1:** Revised Map of Accessible Water Environment at Carrs Nature Reserve (*Amendment to reflect revised mapping and interpretation of user access on site*)

## Project Outputs, Benefits & Evidence Against Criteria

Access, Facilities & Recreation	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved and new visitor signage and interpretation and access improvements to enhance engagement and education opportunities.</li> <li>Significantly improved access to the outdoors for the local community, particularly for disabled and mobility impaired residents and pushchair users.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A1: Increases access to, engagement with and enjoyment of the water environment</li> <li>➤ A2: Benefits health and wellbeing through:</li> <li>➤ A3: Influences positive environmental behaviors</li> </ul>
Outputs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New surfaced route provided around the outside of the site linking all three entrances to allow connected access. The new route has improved approx. 650 linear meters, with access for visitors helping with physical/mental health needs associated with Covid, whilst providing a designated path away from the more sensitive parts of the site to protect habitats.</li> <li>Two pond look-out points created with seating and space for wheelchair users to stop and enjoy the benefits offered by the site.</li> <li>Habitat improvements undertaken, delivered using local volunteers to carry out the work.</li> <li>An alternative route provided for residents to access neighbouring areas helping to reduce car travel and promote the ongoing benefits of walking and accessing the natural environment,</li> <li>Signs provided around the site promoting different flora and fauna and giving advice about safe behaviour on site to help protect wildlife.</li> </ul>	
Evidence	
	<p><b>Path improvements and completed seating area in front of new pond</b></p> 
<p><b>Path during works, early 2021</b></p>	



## Wildlife & Biodiversity

### Expected Project Outcomes

- Extended wetland/marsh areas achieved with the creation of scrapes, bunds, and 2 new ponds
- Protection of habitats through prevention of a key wetland area drying out.
- Expansion of habitats through linkage of parts of the nature reserve wetland areas to other currently dry areas
- Ponds and bunds will create additional habitat for Great Crested Newts.

### Benefits

- B1: Improves the quantity, quality and connectivity of habitats
- B2: Improves the conservation status and or abundance or distribution of species

### Outputs

- Two new large ponds created, covering an area of 0.19ha, a short distance from the path so that all visitors can view wildlife in a safe open-air location.
- Removal of trees which are contributing to the natural succession of the site causing it to dry out, opening up viewing areas, and creating more ecological niches in the landscape which is needed for local wildlife.
- Woody material removed from wetland and material excavated from ponds used to create bunds and additional habitat for Great Crested Newts.

### Evidence



**New pond to the east of the site**



**Seating area and pond to the west of the site**



**Habitat Piles created from SuDs clearance material**

<b>Water Quality</b>	
<b>Expected Project Outcomes</b>	<b>Benefits</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensuring that the established SuDS for the neighboring housing estate continue to operate effectively will help ensure pollutants from surface water drainage do not enter the pond and wetland areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ C1: Reduces pollutants entering waters from point or diffuse sources</li> </ul>
<b>Outputs</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Removal of trees, which contributed to the natural succession of the SuDS, causing it to dry out, now allowing these drainage systems to function more effectively.</li> </ul>	
<b>Evidence</b>	
	
<p><b>Habitat Piles created from SuDS clearance material, SuDS are located to the right of the image</b></p>	

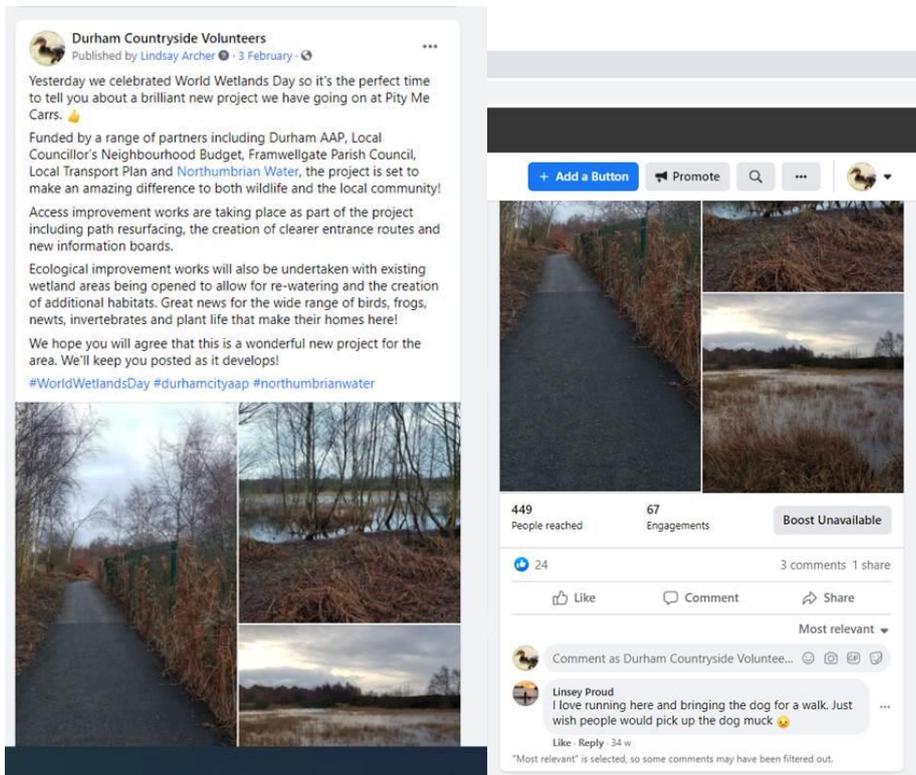
Additional & Secondary Benefits	
Expected Project Outcomes	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prevention of local flooding through effective sustainable drainage into the site.</li> <li>▪ Increasing popularity and local site value to residents for public enjoyment and socialising through wildlife watching, public engagement and education events.</li> <li>▪ Health and wellbeing benefit to NWG employees working at NWG's head office at Boldon House and customer office at Northumbria House, Pity Me, with the site identified as a location to visit through the lunchtime walks initiative.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ D1: Provides resilience and adaptation to climate change and/or reduces the risk of flooding</li> <li>➤ D2: Provides benefits to local communities, the local economy or NWG</li> </ul>
Outputs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved urban drainage through restoration of SuDS features.</li> <li>• Public engagement in environmental volunteering - over 100 members of the public have been involved in the project, this will increase further following improvements and increasing local population through local development.</li> <li>• Improvements in visitor experience to the site - enhancements to this site have already have a marked impact on the visitor experience, with significant health, welfare and educational benefits through people engaging with the water environment.</li> </ul>	
Evidence	

**Customer Testimonies & Media**

- Project is illustrated Durham Area Action Partnership Newsletter



- Project has been promoted on DCC's Countryside Service Facebook page:



- Local Councilor [Mark Wilkes](#) has provided blog updates on progress and developments throughout the project, for example:

[Nature reserve works to start next week](#)

[Carrs path works coming along great!](#)

[New Ponds created at The Carrs and path works well underway](#)

[Carrs Nature Reserve Works update](#)

## **Lead Partner Quotes & Testimonials**

**Coralie Niven, Senior Parks & Countryside Ranger, Durham County Council**

*“Improving habitats to benefit wildlife, local communities and all visitors has always been important but particularly over the last few years. With these recent improvements at Pity Me Carrs all visitors can access the site with greater ease whilst having the opportunity to sit and take time to listen, watch, and learn about the wildlife on their doorstep. It also shows that you don’t have to go far to find the benefits of our natural environment.”*