



PROJECT EVALUATION

REVITALISING OUR ESTUARIES JUNE 2023



AT A GLANCE

Revitalising our Estuaries (RoE) was a rapid 18-month project that has delivered a programme of nature restoration and community engagement across the six major river estuaries in northeast England. The project was supported by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) through their Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF).

Revitalising our Estuaries was delivered from September 2021 to March 2023, with a three-month extension granted to ensure completion of approved purposes through to the end of June 2023.

The aims of the project were to:



Restore and improve 464 hectares of estuary habitat and riparian corridors connected to six estuaries covering the northeast coastline, creating six innovative channel or bankside estuary habitats through Nature-based Solutions



Connect people to nature by direct engagement with 6,000 local residents through educational visits, events, volunteering and citizen science activities and provide opportunities for 85,000 with improved access to nature



Focus on increasing skills and employment opportunities for 38 young people in the region supported by four staff within Groundwork NE and Cumbria, increasing the resilience of the host organisation

The six estuaries and coastal areas covered by the project were:

- **Wansbeck:** Ashington and Choppington area
- **Blyth:** Port of Blyth and Bedlington Country Park
- **Tyne:** Newcastle Quayside, Gateshead and South Tyneside
- **Wear:** Sunderland (north bank)
- **Tees:** Hartlepool, Stockton, Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland
- **Esk:** Whitby



NATURE BASED SOLUTIONS

RoE has led the way in pioneering Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for habitat enhancement and restoration, impacting over **467 hectares of landscape**. NbS are actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural or modified ecosystems, providing social and environmental benefits.

The project has improved nature across six coastal estuary areas. This has been delivered through the completion of a habitat management project which was a key outcome from the consultation undertaken (mention when) with partners and landowners. Over £300,000 match funding from the Environment Agency, the Caterpillar Foundation, NE1 Limited, South Tyneside Council, Northern Directions, Northumbrian Water and Organon have enabled these improvements to take place.

Some outputs and outcomes of the project include the installation of **100 vertipools**, **700 metres of estuary edge restoration**, **three floating ecosystems**, including a world first at Newcastle Quayside, **50 pod pools**, **76 fish refugia** and **three safe bird nesting areas**.

Key outputs and outcomes include:



324 ha of estuary habitat restoration
Improving 317 ha of sand dune habitat
Creating 7.65 ha of intertidal habitat



143 ha of riparian corridor and urban green space improvements
with 1.3 ha of invasive species controlled



10 tonnes of carbon sequestration
from Nature-based Solutions and tree planting



1,071 trees planted
to improve hedgerows and biodiversity



Photo: Groundwork / Floating Ecosystem - Tyne Estuary

EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

RoE has clearly demonstrated the rewarding opportunities to create jobs in the environment sector and support which has positively impacted on the wider economy. Groundwork created roles to increase capacity and facilitate the delivery of the project. This opportunity was made possible with match funding from Kickstart, Northern Directions and Caterpillar Foundation.

37 Kickstart placement trainees successfully gained experience within sector and developed new skills, preparing them for future employment. Upon completion of their placements 14 progressed into further employment opportunities and of the 14, six were retained within Groundwork NE & Cumbria.

The positive impact of the project is evidenced through many of the trainees expressing their thanks and gratitude to Groundwork for the caring and supportive approach adopted through the mentoring offered with the different role. This was of importance to a number of the trainees that had hidden disabilities or who had encountered personal challenges during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Evidence suggests that the work experience and training offered through RoE has increased the motivation of trainees to secure long term employment and create a better life for themselves and their families.

Key outputs and outcomes include:



41 full or part-time jobs created
including 37 Kickstart trainees



560 training opportunities
delivered



215 accredited and 349 unaccredited
training qualifications provided
from 21 different courses

My placement has given me more direction by having opportunities to try out different roles. It has helped me focus on what I want to do in the future.

RoE- Research and Monitoring Assistant



Photo: Groundwork / North ER Team

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement has played a pivotal role in ensuring project success. An objective of the project was to connect community and nature together and share the benefits that this can offer to support mental and physical health and wellbeing. The community engagement element has been delivered through offering a series of events and education activities and supported the generation of volunteers.

We have been able to further evidence the positive impacts and benefits of community through volunteering opportunities, some securing direct employment. As well as local communities the project has gathered positive feedback from schools who have influenced and shaped the project through the educational activities.

Key outputs and outcomes include:



Connected 365,224 people to nature through in person, press and social media activity



Directly engaged with 3,721 people



Delivered 39 public events



Engaged 25 community groups and 8 corporate groups



Recruited 113 informal volunteers



14 schools participated in education activity with 832 children and adults engaged



4.7 km of footpath improvements to improve access to nature



Photo: Groundwork / Butterfly Walk, Tyne - Hebburn Riverside Park

REFLECTIONS

WHAT WENT WELL?

- ✓ The employment opportunities offered to 37 young trainees was a real achievement.
- ✓ Sourcing additional match funding to support the final two cohorts of young trainees to continue the Kickstart programme.
- ✓ Pushing boundaries to create unique and innovative approaches to nature based solutions. The fish refuges on the Blyth “look like real pieces of art but have an ecological function as well.”
- ✓ The local mayor attended The Esk Estuaries Event in February 2023 which attracted over 400 people.
- ✓ The project has showcased the positive benefits and outcomes from true partnership working and community engagement.

“The wide variety of marine conservation work that we have been able to work on and being involved in prototype nature conservation projects.”

- Project trainee





REFLECTIONS

CHALLENGES

The project was initially compressed in to an 18-month timetable starting in September 2021 and finishing in March 2023. Recruitment of supervisors and landowner consents proved more difficult than anticipated and delayed the start of practical delivery.

The Kickstart job titles could have been more simplistic so that the applicants clearly understood what the role involved. Advice from the recruitment team and DWP was to rename them to 'River Rangers' or 'Project Assistants' to increase the number of applicants received.

The six months placements could have been longer; after inductions and training there wasn't much time left to allow the trainees to put their gained skills in to practice. A period of 9 to 12 months would be better to give them sufficient practical experience.

The large geographic spread of the project meant it was difficult for the Project Manager and Assistants to have a regular presence at all sites. The Kickstart Project Assistants were recruited via the Middlesbrough office and it was difficult for them to support work in the central and northern areas.

"Usually with Lottery funded projects you get a development phase to plan and recruit in advance of delivery. This was not included in GRCF and made obtaining consents within the timescales very tight."

Hellen Hornby, RoE Project Manager

WHAT'S NEXT?

The outputs and outcomes to date from the RoE project has demonstrated that the project has had a significant impact on the environment through nature recovery, the local community, connecting people with nature and the economy, creating local jobs and trainee opportunities.

PROJECT LEGACY

Through Groundwork's ongoing partnership with the Environment Agency's Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund (NEIRF) £100k has been secured. NEIRF supports the government's goals in the 25-year environment plan and aims to stimulate private investment and market-based mechanisms that improve and safeguard the natural environment by helping projects get ready for investment.

SHORT TERM DELIVERY

The project has raised Groundwork's profile in this area of work and generated an interest from local businesses, foundations and government bodies. In the short term we have secured additional funding to support further RoE delivery and other NbS delivery on projects taking place at Wansbeck, Tyne, Wear and Esk estuaries. With this delivery we have retained a team of four Estuary Rangers and one Supervisor.

LONG TERM

The NEIRF support will continue the work started through the Green Recovery Challenge Fund and develop a method to value Biodiversity Net Gain, carbon sequestration and water quality benefits across three of the estuarine Nature-based Solutions.

We envision that the appetite for NbS linked to Biodiversity Net Gain, carbon sequestration, water quality and social impacts of our work will attract investment from the private sector and enable Groundwork to deliver further schemes of this type. However, our model does heavily rely on Government funding for trainee projects and has demonstrated without this RoE would not have been possible.

FUTURE PIPELINE OPPORTUNITIES

Groundwork is submitting a NLHF bid which will provide wider community engagement around our estuarine NbS. We are also looking to apply to other grant bodies and explore corporate sponsorship.





REVITALISING OUR ESTUARIES INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO

Groundwork NE & Cumbria would like to thank all the organisations who have supported Revitalising our Estuaries. This includes funders, partners and members of the local communities who, without which, Revitalising our Estuaries would not be possible. We look forward to extending our Nature-based Solutions portfolio and continuing to foster and develop these relationships further.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ANY OF OUR INITIATIVES CONTACT:

GNEC.DEVELOPMENT@GROUNDWORK.ORG.UK

Green Recovery Challenge Fund



This project is funded by the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund. The fund was developed by Defra and its Arm's-Length Bodies. It is being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England, the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission.

Northern Directions



South Tyneside Council



Visit: www.groundwork.org.uk/north-east-and-cumbria

Email: north.east@groundwork.org.uk

Telephone: 01388 662 666



@GWKNEC



@GWKNEC | @RevitalisingOurEstuaries



@Groundwork In The North



@gwknec | @revitalisingourestuaries



Groundwork North East & Cumbria



Groundwork NE & Cumbria is a company limited by guarantee and registered in England.

Company Registration Number: 2702815 Charity Registration No: 1017706

Published June 2023