



September / October 2023 Programme Manager's Report to:
Discover Brightwater Board; DWT Trustees;
National Lottery Heritage Fund

Wetland Habitat Creation Bishop's Fen and Ricknall Carrs

- Due to long-term sickness within DCC Planning department, a new planning officer has been allocated to our wetland planning applications. This has led to further delays and the determination by the Planning Committee has now been pushed back to early December. A number of minor queries raised by consultees are being addressed by the team, working with Litchfields, our planning consultants. An orientation site meeting with the DCC planner is scheduled for October.
- ITTs for both sites have been published and a number of responses have been returned. A document asking tenderers to revise their quotations and to phase elements of the construction to align with existing (and potential additional) funding has been issued to ensure that construction work can commence in the spring, once planning permission is in place, without scaling back our long-term ambitions for the sites.
- A request for additional funding support of £200k from the EA has had an initial positive response and we are awaiting the appropriate funding agreement documentation to be processed.
- A recent meeting was held between Theakston's and DWT and solicitors are drawing up the final draft of the licence agreement. Once planning permission is granted, any final amendments to this agreement will be made and then signed. This will then enable us to award the construction contracts and to submit our draft completion documentation and evaluation reports to NLHF as part of a formal request to extend the Brightwater delivery deadline beyond the current March 24 deadline.
- **Great North Fen - Ricknall Carrs – Preston and Morden Carrs** DWT have successfully leveraged in approximately £5million from a variety of sources including Natural England, DCC, Bannister Trust and others to acquire and manage additional land in this area as the next phase of The Great North Fen and to use for the purpose, initially, of providing credits for developers needing nitrate nutrient neutrality credits in the Tees catchment area and for the sale of Biodiversity Net Gain Credits.
- The Sedgewicks' neighbouring farm at Ricknall, following assessment funded by Brightwater, are placing a tranche of land into a Countryside Stewardship Scheme – this will contribute to the delivery of our targeted hectare of land in the

Brightwater area brought into such schemes and will generate elements of the match funding identified within the terms of the LCAP.

Access and Environment Projects

- **South Park Sensory Walk for Visually Impaired People** – Working with access charity Going 4 Independence and the Darlington Botanical Society and Field Club, and Darlington Borough Council, Groundwork are currently exploring using some of the current underspend to help design and deliver an appropriate route from the entrance of South Park to the existing sensory garden in the centre. We are in discussions with NHLF for permission to proceed with this project.

Archaeology & Heritage

- All main field works now complete together with final reports which are soon to be uploaded on to the Discover Brightwater website as part of DigVentures' work in creating the platform for the Eco-Museum

Village Atlas Projects

- The first drafts of all 8 Village Atlases have now been created. These vary from very detailed with academic elements to those with a less researched and more populist feel.
- A series of launch/promotional events is in planning over the next few months.

Darlington Heritage Trail

- DBC town centre manager is now leading on the production of the Darlington Heritage Trail and is able to consolidate the work and remaining funding from Brightwater (via Groundwork) together with Towns Fund monies to develop and complete this project using an app which the town is using for a range of uses including preparations for the 2025 200th celebrations of the Stockton to Darlington Railway. The initial 'beta' version of the app has now been developed.

Great North Fen

- Ricknall Carrs and Bishop's Fen will effectively be the first phase of The Great North Fen.
- DWT have been successful in obtaining funding and support to acquire additional land in the vicinity of Ricknall Carrs (see above)
- Discussions are ongoing with the Skerne Catchment partnership, The Rivers' Trust North East Water Catchment Hub at Durham University and NWG about Skerne Development post Brightwater. A Skerne Catchment Development Officer, Stephen Thompson from Durham Wildlife Trust has been seconded to NWG to further develop a catchment-based approach to improvements for the Skerne. Early work has included engagement with local landowners and tenants to explore the creation

of a 'Farming Cluster' for the Skerne. We are also exploring the possibility of making a bid to the EA's new Natural Flood Management funding scheme

Eco-Museum

- We are working with DigVentures to work on the development of their map-based platform with links to the various Brightwater digital assets. All work from the Village Atlases and the Deep Time project will be validated and merged with the DCC historic environment records and that the platform will be fully compatible with the Durham History Centre Project. This would be funded from underspend within the Groundwork staffing budget and others which have not been fully utilised due to absences following maternity leave and delays in recruiting staff to deliver the work.
- Following the end of Discover Brightwater the current agreement is that Durham Wildlife Trust will manage the Eco-Museum until such time that the new Durham History Centre is able to incorporate the Brightwater Eco-Museum materials within its digital archives.

Match Funding, Book balancing and Reporting

- The programme manager and finance officer continue to work ensure that all deliverables, outputs and outcomes are addressed. All match funding elements have been identified together with additional funds which have been leveraged in to pay for additional work outside of the LCAP and for supporting additional costs. The finance office is due to end his contract at the end of October 2023. Currently all claims, accruals and forecasts are being updated to enable colleagues at DWT to continue to manage and monitor the programme until completion. The Programme Manager, will continue to work part-time for DWT from November 1 2023, including overseeing the successful completion of the Discover Brightwater programme.
- We currently plan to have completed everything with the exception of the Wetlands projects by the end of March 24. Once planning permission has been granted for Bishop's Fen and Ricknall Carrs a formal request for a further extension will be made to NLHF (see above)
- – who have been kept informed of the current developments with regards to planning. Both the Eco-Museum and Great North Fen Legacy Projects will continue beyond this time.
- At present we have received (or are due to receive) more than sufficient match and additional funds to complete the delivery of our agreements and we are currently compiling a range of completion documents with appropriate evidence for funders.
- **Evaluation** Evaluation video interviews are being assembled from a number of stakeholders to form part of a video to outline the impact of Brightwater and some of the lessons learned. It planned that the Evaluation workshops postponed from May will now take place this autumn when suitable dates have been agreed between the evaluator, the programme team and key stakeholders.
- **Close Down and Celebrations** Due to the further delays in the planning process to the wetlands projects, we are aiming to have a penultimate **Board Meeting /Lunch at the**

County Hotel, Aycliffe Village on Wednesday 7th February 2024. This will provide an update on the closing stages of the programme including confirmation of the timescale for the completion of the remaining elements of Discover Brightwater including the opening of the Ricknall Carrs and Bishiop's Fen sites. A final celebration, including visits to the wetland sites, is proposed for the summer of 2024 as a close down event. The date to be confirmed nearer the time.