



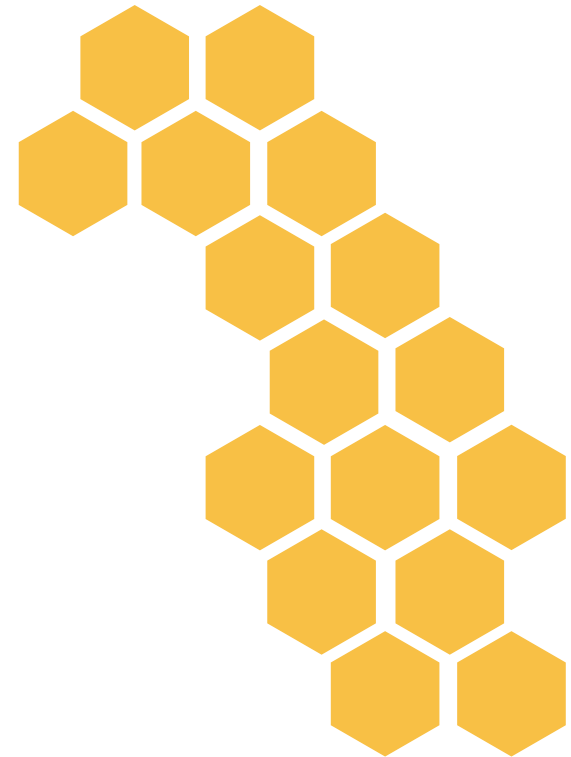
Project Evaluation 2022-23

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Williams**
EVALUATION CONSULTANT



Contents

Introduction	1
Evaluation Methodology	2
Project Achievements	6
Beelines North East At A Glance	20
Evaluation Observations	21
Learning & Recommendations	27
Beelines Legacy	29
Glossary	
Appendix: Evaluation Toolkit	



Introduction

Beelines NE was an eighteen-month initiative (October 2021-March 2023), delivered in partnership by Urban Green Newcastle (UGN) and Northumberland Wildlife Trust (NWT) in the city of Newcastle, which aimed to improve habitat, engage new audiences and establish best practice which can be embedded into greenspace management. Above all, the project sought to '*bring the buzz back to the city and its surroundings*', establishing an urban landscape where nature is in recovery and where parks support both nature and people.

Beelines NE was supported by a grant of £697,800 from the Green Recovery Challenge Fund to:

- Improve nature conservation and restoration
- Create nature-based solutions for climate change
- Connect people with nature

A short extension period was agreed to allow for completion of project outputs to May 2023.

This report is a qualitative evaluation of the the project by independent consultant, Katherine Williams, who was commissioned in February 2022.

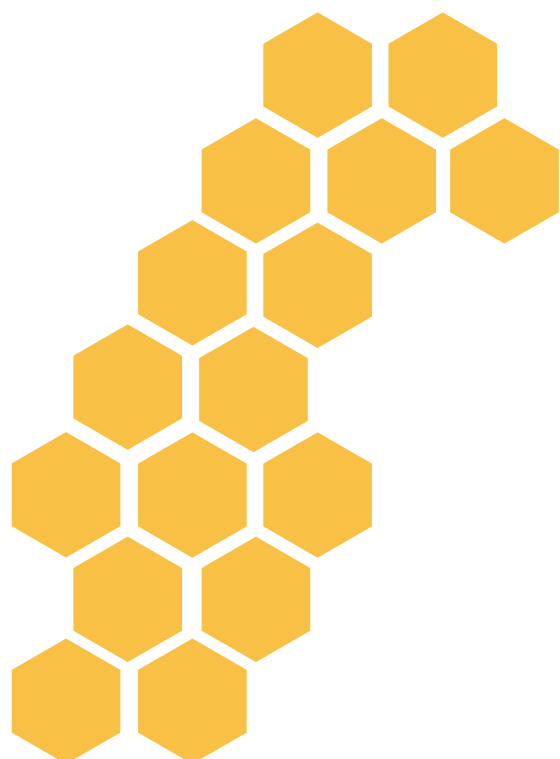
Evaluation Methodology

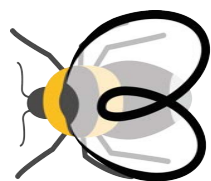
The evaluation process set out an Evaluation Framework at the start of the evaluation period, in agreement with the project team. This included a Theory of Change (below), assumptions, risks and an evaluation timescale. Ultimately, the evaluation sought to establish the change achieved by Beelines NE over the funded project period. In particular, given the short timescale of the project, the evaluation would look for evidence of best practice and learning that would continue to deliver impact beyond the scope of the project.

The Evaluation Framework reviewed the stated project success measures in order to evidence that the project had achieved the intended outcomes (change). Agreed success measures for this project are:

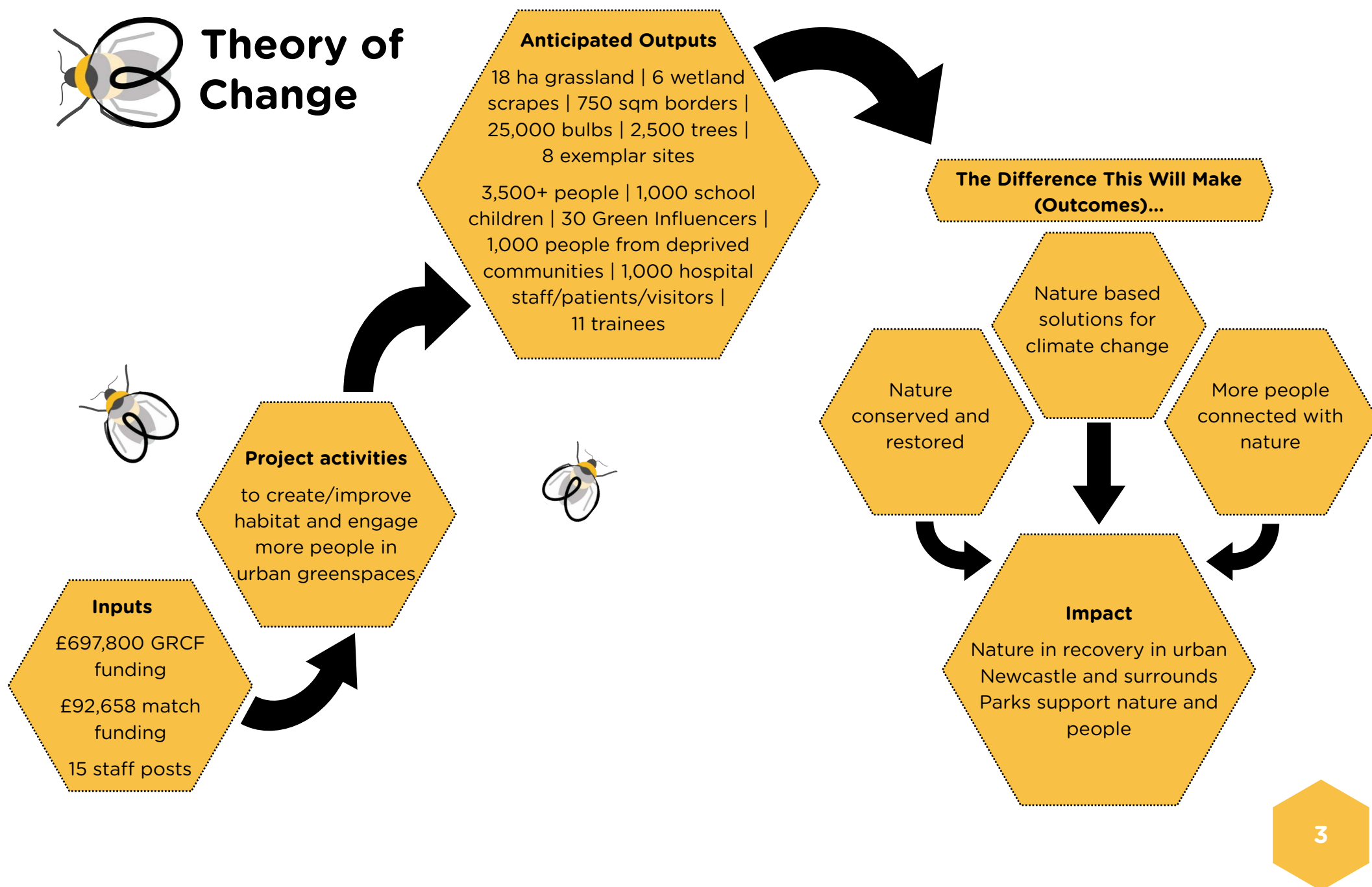
1. A diverse and connected network of pollinator habitat has been established (albeit in early stages)
2. Carbon sequestration and natural flood resilience is improved
3. Project participants and park users are engaged positively in nature (which research shows will contribute to nature connectedness)
4. People benefit from improved physical and mental wellbeing
5. More people are taking action/contributing to change

With a project such as Beelines which is limited in its duration it is not possible to measure long term change or impact. It was decided, therefore, to collect evidence which is known to





Theory of Change



contribute to success rather than to look for established outcomes. For example, the project has not measured carbon sequestration but it has planted trees, changed mowing regimes and created new habitat which is known to store carbon.

The Evaluation Consultant also advised that measuring a change in nature connectedness at one off events or school programmes was also unlikely to be successful. Instead, the evaluation recommended that the project draw on research to evidence activities which are known to increase connection to nature. In particular, research by the Nature Connectedness Research Group¹ has demonstrated that regular opportunities to engage with nature, in particular promoting the pathways to nature connectedness, are vital to establish a positive relationship with the natural world. The research defines pathways to nature connectedness as (i) tuning into nature through the **senses**, (ii) feeling alive through the **emotions and feelings** nature brings, (iii) noticing nature's **beauty**, (iv) nature bringing **meaning** to our lives, and (v) caring and taking action for nature (**compassion**).

An evaluation toolkit was provided including feedback forms, visitor questionnaires and simple activities to record nature engagement, all designed to collect evidence of positive engagement with nature as a measure to demonstrate nature connectedness. It was also suggested that the ENACT Impact Measure (RSPB²), could be adopted for some activities.

¹ <https://www.derby.ac.uk/research/centres-groups/nature-connectedness-research-group/> (last accessed 22/03/23)

² RSPB (2021), *ENACT - A new tool to evaluate how nature activities build people's connection to nature*. <https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/science/posts/enact--a-new-tool-to-evaluate-how-nature-activities-build-people-s-connection-to-nature> (last accessed 19/10/22)

The evaluation brings together evidence and data collected by the staff team across all project activity. Regular meetings have taken place between the Evaluation Consultant and staff members (both as a team and individually). An evaluation toolkit was provided with resources targeted at different project activities (appended). The evaluation has also sought feedback from staff, trainees and partners.

This final report presents the findings and observations of the Evaluation Consultant against outcomes expressed in the project application documents and success indicators agreed at the start of the evaluation period. It also explores the assumptions made at the start of the project. Beelines NE has also provided an opportunity for UGN to test evaluation and monitoring tools and the report also reviews this. Recommendations made in this report are based on the actual observations and professional experience of the Evaluation Consultant.

An Interim Evaluation Report was produced in September 2022.



Project Achievements

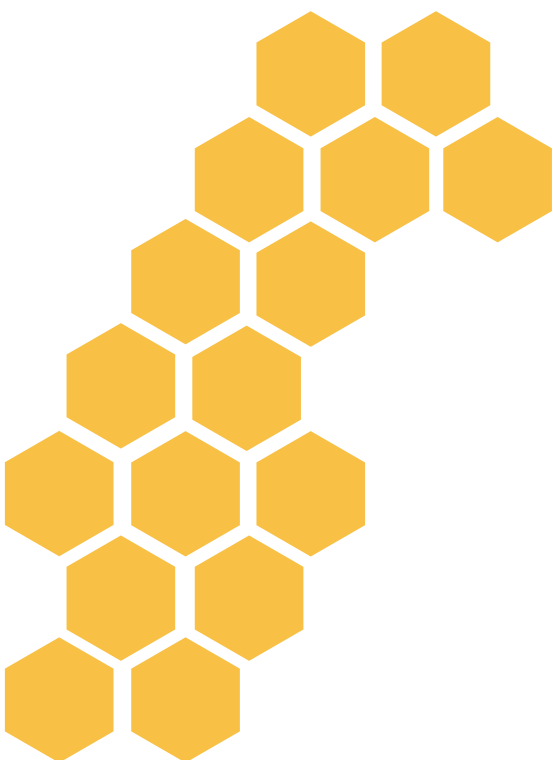
Over an eighteen month period, Beelines NE has carried out activities which have begun to transform the urban landscape across Newcastle, North Tyneside, and SE Northumberland, and have provided new opportunities for more people to engage with nature. Project achievements are set out below against the agreed success indicators.

1. A diverse and connected network of pollinator habitat is established (albeit in early stages)
























































































Working across 41 urban parks, nature reserves and other greenspaces³, Beelines NE has created a network of pollinator habitat, laying foundations for a cityscape where nature is in recovery. This includes 12 hectares of new meadow created⁴, 6 hectares of grassland restored (new mowing regime), 3,700 trees planted, 1,800 sq metres of pollinator-friendly formal






³ 32 UGN sites - Armstrong Park, Big Waters Country Park, Brandling Park, City Stadium, Denton Dene, Elswick Park, Exhibition Park, Gosforth Central Park, Harbottle Park, Havannah & Three Hills Nature Reserve, Heaton Park, Hodgkin Park, Iris Brickfield, Jesmond Dene, Jesmond Vale, Kingston Park West, Leazes Park, North Kenton Park, Nuns Moor Park, Ouseburn Park, Paddy Freeman's Park, Percy Pit & Walbottle Brickworks, Quarry Park, St Lawrence Park, Sugley Dene, Summerhill Park, The Spinney, Tyne Riverside Country Park, Walbottle & Throckley Dene, Walker Park, Walker Riverside Park, Westerhope Park; 3 NWT nature reserves - Northumberlandia, St Nicholas Park, Weetslade; 4 parks in North Tyneside - Rising Sun Country Park, Chirton Dene Park, Marden Quarry, Northumberland Park; 2 parks in Northumberland - Meggie's Burn, Plessey Woods Country Park

⁴ New meadow planted with Upper Coquet Meadow Mix from B&K Wharf Farming: yellow rattle, oxeye daisy, eyebright, ribwort plantain, wild red clover, common sorrel, lesser trefoil, pignut, lady's bedstraw, yarrow, selfheal, meadow buttercup, bulbous buttercup, sweet vernal grass, crested dogtail, red fescue, common bent, meadow fescue



Sites with new/enhanced pollinator habitat:

Armstrong Park (UGN)  	Northumberlandia (NWT)    
Big Waters Country Park (UGN)  	Northumberland Park (UGN)  
Brandling Park (UGN) 	Nuns Moor Park (UGN)  
City Stadium (UGN) 	Ouseburn Park (UGN) 
Chirton Dene Park (NTC)  	Paddy Freeman's Park (UGN)  
Denton Dene (UGN) 	Percy Pit & Walbottle Brickworks (UGN)  
Elswick Park (UGN)   	Plessey Woods Country Park (NCC)   
Exhibition Park (UGN)    	Quarry Park (UGN)  
Gosforth Central Park (UGN)  	Rising Sun Country Park  
Harbottle Park (UGN) 	St Lawrence Park (UGN)  
Havannah & Three Hills (UGN)   	St Nicholas Park (NWT)    
Heaton Park (UGN)    	Sugley Dene (UGN)  
Hodgkin Park (UGN)  	Summerhill Park (UGN)  
Iris Brickfield (UGN)  	The Spinney (UGN) 
Jesmond Dene (UGN)  	Tyne Riverside Country Park (UGN) 
Jesmond Vale (UGN) 	Walbottle & Throckley Dene (UGN) 
Kingston Park West (UGN)   	Walker Park (UGN)   
Leazes Park (UGN)    	Walker Riverside Park (UGN) 
Marden Quarry (NCC)  	Weetslade (NWT)   
Meggie's Burn (NCC)  	Westerhope (UGN)
North Kenton Park (UGN)   	

 Wildflower meadow created (new seed mix and/or reduced mowing regime);
 Pollinator-friendly formal borders;  Wildflower bulbs planted
 Tree planting;  Ponds/wetlands created or enhanced

borders (often replacing neglected or less wildlife friendly borders) and almost 42,000 bulbs⁵. Ponds and wetland scrapes have been restored or created (including new salt marsh at Weetslade), with marginal and wetland plants diversifying the pollinator planting. A new grazing regime at Tyne Riverside Country Park will bring a further 12 hectares of grassland into management for nature.

Eight exemplar sites⁶ have been established where best practice in managing sites for pollinators is demonstrated across a range of different habitats and site settings.

As reported in the interim evaluation, it is unlikely that the project will observe any significant change in biodiversity due to the short delivery timescale. However, project staff have started to see the benefits of wildflower planting and restoration with planted species such as yellow rattle, wild primrose and native bulbs already starting to show this spring and, at some sites, the natural seed bank has started to recover.

Planting plans for formal borders have been developed based on best practice from RHS Wisley, Bristol City Council and Northumbria University. Flowering plants have been selected to support a wide range of pollinators with nectar availability for most of the year. They are low maintenance and self-seeding or easy to propagate so that they can be moved to other parks in the future as they become established. Different sites have allowed for new

⁵ Native bulbs planted: wood anemone, wild daffodil, snowdrop, bluebell, crocus, wild aconite

⁶ Northumberlandia Landscape Sculpture, Tyne Riverside Country Park, Heaton Park, Walker Riverside, Percy Pit (brownfield land), The Waggonways bridleways (North Tyneside), Leazes Park and Paddy Freeman's Park

opportunities such as creating a Scottish-themed border for the Robbie Burns statue in Walker Park or trialling no dig, organic, edible gardens which are not only good for pollinators but will also benefit the community and sequester carbon through the no-dig techniques.

Planting plans can be compared to baseline surveys and site reports to demonstrate that floral diversity has improved. Sites have been surveyed by Northumbria University; this report is separate to the project evaluation.

Management Plans have been written and adopted for each site which set out annual maintenance and monitoring tasks to ensure new planting and pollinator habitat establishes across the city. They also include recommendations for future works including opportunities to establish more native ground flora and understory on woodland sites, continued monitoring and development of meadow/grassland and potential to further enhance areas of standing open water and marshy grassland. A Management Handbook has also been produced which will provide best practice guidelines to manage sites for pollinators specifically and nature more generally.

2. Increased carbon sequestration and improved natural flood resilience

As indicated in the interim evaluation, it is likely that the 3,700 new trees and 18+ hectares of new grassland/wetland habitat will create potential to sequester carbon as they grow and establish. In a recent research report to assess potential for different habitats to store and



sequester carbon, Natural England (2021)⁷ indicates that woodland, wetland and semi-natural grassland all have potential to store carbon. Of these, woodland is the most effective and the creation of new native broadleaved woodlands, as well as hedgerows and other tree planting (outside of woodland areas), is recommended, with the caveat that trees must be grown in the right place.

The report also cautions that while grasslands can store appreciable amounts of carbon in their vegetation and soils, removal of grass by cutting or grazing represents the removal of carbon from the system and this has not been quantified for Beelines NE. However, it is reasonable to assume that the change in grassland management from frequent mowing to an annual cut will reduce carbon emissions from use of mowers and other machinery.

New wetland habitat has been created including new and restored ponds and wetland scrapes. The impact of these during prolonged or heavy rainfall has yet to be seen fully but the recovered wetland at Weetslade has already had an impact this winter (image left shows before (inset) and after restoration). This is an ecologically important site where the former coal workings have created unique salt marsh conditions which have potential to sequester carbon as well as holding water. At St Nicholas Park the project

⁷ Natural England (2021), *Carbon storage and sequestration by habitat: a review of the evidence* (second edition)

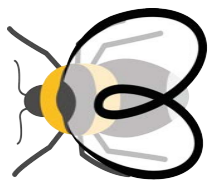
has removed the old leaky pond liner and reprofiled/lined the pond with clay. This is already holding water and will hopefully be more resilient to vandalism and damage. Other pond/wetland habitat has been created/restored at Plessey Woods, Percy Pit and Iris Brickfield Park. As stated in the interim evaluation, wetland restoration has not been targeted at sites or areas which are prone to flooding or in need of improved surface water management.

The primary purpose of Beelines NE has been to create/improve pollinator habitat. It is assumed that this will contribute to a “greener” urban landscape by creating better functioning ecosystems which will naturally sequester carbon and slow the flow of surface water.

It is also noted that, as far as possible, Beelines NE has tried to limit carbon outputs by using an electric vehicle and purchasing locally sourced seed, compost and other materials.

3. Project participants and park users are engaged positively in nature (which research shows will contribute to nature connectedness)

The project has reported almost 9,000 attendances at events and educational sessions. The number of new participants is not recorded and it is known that some individuals have attended several events. From the information provided, the evaluation estimates that at least 4,000 individual people have taken part in activities including children, young people, families and people living in areas of deprivation. Most events have targeted children under 5 and aged 5-11. Sixteen different schools and six youth or community groups have been



Supporting Five Pathways to Nature Connection

Exploring
feelings &
emotions
about
nature



Having
compassion
for nature



Finding
beauty
in nature



Giving
nature
meaning



Providing
contact
with nature



engaged, as well as groups of patients, staff and visitors from NHS hospitals. More than 100 young people have been engaged as Green Influencers.

The project reports that 40% of engagement activities took place in areas of high deprivation. Demographic reporting shows that 18% of participants at public events were from non-white backgrounds and 4% had a disability (this is representative of the city population where 82% of people are White British). Demographic data has not been collected for school sessions or volunteering activities.

People who have taken part in the project have had opportunities to engage positively with nature and have participated in activities which support the Five Pathways To Nature Connection: contact (senses), emotions, beauty, meaning, compassion. Both formal education sessions and less structured drop in events have provided opportunities for participants to explore/appreciate nature in city/urban green spaces, to learn more about pollinators and their habitats, and to do their bit to create nature-friendly habitats. Art and creative activities have been used to celebrate nature and to support children and adults to develop positive relationships with local wildlife. Bioblitzes and citizen science activities have taken noticing nature a step further to contribute to biodiversity monitoring and recording in the city.

This is supported by feedback collected using the ENACT tool⁸ which aims to evidence that people have connected to nature. This was not introduced until after the first summer of

⁸ RSPB (2021), *ENACT - A new tool to evaluate how nature activities build people's connection to nature*. <https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/science/posts/enact---a-new-tool-to-evaluate-how-nature-activities-build-people-s-connection-to-nature> (last accessed 19/10/22)

events. The project collected 32 responses from five different activities between November 2022 and February 2023 (two public drop in events, two volunteering events and one session with patients and staff at St Nicholas Hospital). Of these, 100% of respondents said they had used different senses to explore nature with 69% saying they had done this “quite a bit” or “a great deal.” The same number of respondents said that the place where they attended the activity had meaning to them. 82% of respondents said the activity had made them more concerned about the problems facing nature with just over half (53%) saying this was “quite a bit” or “a great deal.”

Fourteen out of fifteen participants at the Springbank Pavilion project said they felt connected with nature (further information below).

The schools’ education programme delivered curriculum-linked activities to KS1 and KS2 groups with a focus on plants, pollinators and their conservation. The Beelines NE Education Officer has reflected that the most successful engagements were those where schools engaged in regular (rather than one off) sessions; here the children were able to develop their understanding, build relationships with project staff and benefit from a deeper connection to nature. For example, West Walker Primary School took part in a regular programme of activities.

As reported in the Interim Evaluation, three of the school groups engaged completed “Bee Friendly” feedback worksheets which record change in children’s perceptions of bees, flies, butterflies, beetles, moths and hover flies. Of the children who completed these worksheets,

59% felt better about different pollinators by the end of the session, compared to 19% who felt worse. Overall, this suggests that sessions are raising awareness but that perceptions of some insects are ingrained. From the data provided, it is not possible to interrogate what made some children feel worse about insects. Anecdotally, it may be that knowing more about insects they don't like has confirmed rather than alleviated their ideas. It may be that further sessions are needed to change some attitudes. It is also possible that some children misunderstood the question or didn't remember what they said the first time. The most disliked insects are flies, followed by moths and beetles. Butterflies are the pollinator which most children feel happy about.

Children also shared what they had learnt from the sessions. This included "there are lots of different types of bee," "bees help to make/grow vegetables," "bees have white bottoms," "only females sting," "only females do any work," "they suck up nectar and pollen with their tongue," "the bees put pollen on their legs," "the queen bee is bigger," "spiders are not insects," "bees wiggle their bums to talk," "bees eat pollen and nectar," and "when a fly buzzes it is a vibration."

The project also aspired to encourage park users to engage with nature even on unsupported visits. Although feedback from park users has not been collected other than at Beelines NE



events, there is some anecdotal evidence for this. Staff have reported that families have said they will try to notice nature together, inspired by Beelines activities.

"I have observed X becoming more comfortable when spending time in the outdoors and particularly nature. He appears more regulated, relaxed and overall, his mental health is balanced. He has become more conversational during time on the ward and the team feel it is the time he has spent out in the community/nature reserve which may be attributed to his communication skills and regulation levels. The outcome for the young person's attendance within the group has had a very positive impact on his mental health, due to him having meaningful occupations through his day, opportunities to engage with peers and accessing the community to enjoy fresh air and exercise."

**Occupational Therapist at St Nicholas Hospital
on supporting a young inpatient to attend
weekly volunteer gardening sessions**

As reported in the interim evaluation, the PR campaign during "No Mow May" aimed to engage more people in learning about the changes to mowing regimes and the benefits to pollinators. New "Sold" signs in parks promoted "a buzzing new development with onsite dining" and media stories were shared in local press and TV news. The on-site signs, in particular, attracted the attention of local people and, although not all feedback on this was positive, on the whole it appears that they achieved their goal of getting more people thinking and talking about the value of their local green space.

4. People benefit from improved wellbeing

As reported in the interim evaluation, the Nature Connectedness Research Group has demonstrated that activities that support nature connectedness are good for our wellbeing: "We found that people who are more connected to nature tend to have greater eudaimonic well-being - meaning they are functioning well - and in particular have higher levels of self-reported personal growth." The evaluation assumes, therefore, that activities that support engagement with nature also support wellbeing.

Although not used throughout the project, the ENACT feedback forms have provided some evidence that Beelines NE activities have supported wellbeing. 100% of 32 respondents also said that the activity had made them feel calm and relaxed with 88% saying this was “quite a bit” or “a great deal.” 97% said the activity had taken their mind off stresses or problems.

Beelines NE has also supported and added value to a new partnership between UGN and the Newcastle Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. This has developed and delivered creative workshops at the newly refurbished Springbank Pavilion in Leazes Park, within easy reach of the Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI) and the Great North Children’s Hospital. The Springbank Pavilion programme evaluation⁹ collected responses from 15 participants (including one NHS patient, one family/carer of NHS patient and two NHS staff members). More than half of the participants had not visited the park within the last six months. All participants said that the activity made them feel better and healthier and that it took their mind off other stresses.

Beelines NE also delivered a bespoke programme of nature-based activities for patients, staff and visitors at Leazes Park/Springbank Pavilion and on the Bede Acute Admission Ward at St Nicholas hospital. This included creative activities on the ward and nature-based activities at St Nicholas Park. A small number of patients joined the NWT volunteer group supported by hospital staff. NWT project staff have reported feedback from NHS therapists on the Bede Ward that these sessions have really motivated patients. NHS staff have also commented that they didn’t know they could use the space at St Nicholas Park and, since the Beelines

⁹ Helen Parker (2022) Springbank Pavilion Mid-Way Evaluation Report



activities started, NWT staff have observed hospital staff and patients using the site independently.

Volunteers have shared with project staff how activities have provided a social network and support system and given them a break from stresses or challenges at home.

5. More people taking action/contributing to change

More than 3,000 volunteer hours have been recorded supporting tasks including meadow management (877 hours), formal border maintenance (777 hours), bulb planting (216 hours), pond/wetland creation (302 hours), education and events (398 hours), general site management (649 hours), wildflower/pollinator surveying (185 hours) and tree planting (hours not provided). 150 volunteers had not volunteered with UGN or NWT previously.

Young people from the Newcastle Football

Foundation took part in volunteering activities which provided conservation sector experience and enabled them to gain a John Muir Award. More than 100

young people were supported by NWT to become Green Influencers: developing and delivering their own project ideas which benefit nature in the city.

UGN social media promotes volunteering opportunities and celebrates volunteer achievements (see example post, left).

Three Kickstarter placements have been hosted by Beelines NE with a further nine trainees supported in partnership with the Skill Mill. These have provided new opportunities for young people to develop skills and learn about careers in the environmental sector. Two month-long student interns have also been provided to support university courses with workplace experience in marketing and community engagement.

Beelines NE trainees have been involved in a range of tasks including park maintenance, practical conservation, working with volunteers and supporting events. They have provided positive feedback, saying that their placements have helped them to develop skills and confidence and reflecting on the sense of achievement gained from completing a task and making a difference. Negative feedback was that the placements were not long enough. For example, *"I've really enjoyed it, but I wish the placement could have gone on a bit longer, like a year would have been a good amount of time, 8 months has just flown by,"* and *"Six months is very quick, I still don't know everybody's name or what everybody does."*

Beelines NE also sustained 10 existing jobs and created 5 new jobs. Project staff have also reported that the project has supported their own career progression, allowing them to gain valuable experience to take to new roles within the sector.

Beelines At A Glance



Evaluation Observations

Project assumptions (right) were expressed in the Evaluation Framework at the start of the evaluation period, informed by application documents and a staff workshop.

As discussed above, the primary aim for Beelines NE was to improve habitat for pollinators as part of a wider vision for nature recovery in urban Newcastle. Based on best practice guidance and research within the sector, it is reasonable to assume that this will also improve sequestration of carbon and flood resilience but this has not been measured or recorded (other than anecdotal photographs of improved water retention at wetland sites).

Likewise, although wider biodiversity benefits are yet to be seen or recorded, it is reasonable to assume that improving habitat for pollinators will establish a more resilient food web and functioning ecosystem which will support a wider range of birds, mammals, other invertebrates and amphibians.

Project assumptions:

1. Improved grassland management/meadow creation will also improve soil quality, reduce erosion and increase carbon sequestration
2. Habitat improvement for pollinators will also benefit other species
3. Sites have huge importance for local people
4. These greenspaces have significant value for mental and physical wellbeing
5. Benefits of improving urban parks will be vast - not just for wildlife
6. If people have positive experiences in parks and natural open spaces, they will be more connected to nature and more likely to take action for nature
7. Providing nature experiences for children is important

The value of urban greenspace for local communities is well evidenced nationally. For example, Historic England, 2022¹⁰ reports that many parks “were designed specifically as places to enjoy, driven by a wish to create ‘lungs of the city’ and address community health and sanitation today.” This is true of many of the historic parks in Newcastle and Beelines NE has provided some evidence that parks in Newcastle remain important to local residents. This can be seen in feedback forms as well as anecdotal reports from project staff and rangers who are talking to park users on a regular basis.

In particular, Beelines NE has demonstrated the potential for Newcastle’s greenspaces to be better used to support health and wellbeing, either through formal partnerships and structured activities (e.g. working with NHS hospital wards) or simply by running inclusive volunteering activities that provide space for people to be active, connect to like-minded people, spend time outdoors making a positive contribution to their community and escape any stresses or challenges they experience in everyday life.

Project staff have reported that investment in the parks has, to some extent, had a noticeable impact on the way local communities engage with and use their open spaces. In particular, improved maintenance of overgrown or neglected shrubby areas, together with regular monitoring checks from UGN rangers, has reduced antisocial behaviour, drug use and rough sleeping in some parks in the West End side of the city. However, on the same sites, formal

¹⁰ Historic England (2022) *Public Parks and Greenspaces Matter*

planting has been subject to vandalism and providing planting schemes which would not be immediately damaged or stolen has been an ongoing challenge for project staff.

Beelines NE has allowed UGN and NWT to begin to explore the potential of city parks to not only support a healthy and resilient urban landscape where nature is in recovery but also to bring people closer to nature in a way that increases ownership, influences attitudes and behaviours, and helps to mitigate some of the wider societal needs (mental health crisis, cost of living crisis etc). The activities delivered by the project have provided new opportunities which support the five pathways to nature connectedness. Research by the Nature Connectedness Research Group (cited above) presents robust evidence that people who are better connected nature are more likely to take action for nature.

However, it must also be recognised that, despite the potential to provide wellbeing benefits for all, access to urban greenspace across the country remains inequitable. In 2021, Council for Protection of Rural England (CPRE) found that “despite the clear and well documented benefits of engagement with the countryside, it is evident that these benefits are not enjoyed by everyone equally. Data shows that ethnic minorities have on average 11 times less access to greenspace.”¹¹ This places additional emphasis on the need to engage a wider range of people and to seek opportunities to remove barriers to access.

Beelines NE has focussed its events and education programme on children and families, whilst adults have been engaged through volunteering opportunities and health and

¹¹ CPRE (2021) *Access to Nature in the English Countryside*



wellbeing activities. As presented in the Interim Evaluation, the rationale for this was to align with UGN strategy to increase education capacity in city greenspaces despite some concerns that this would exclude other members of the community being highlighted through public consultation.



Short-term interventions such as Beelines NE provide challenges both for delivery and measuring impact and leave little flexibility to adapt to external changes. For example, during 2022 (England's joint warmest summer on record and driest since 1976¹²), planting had to go ahead despite extremely dry conditions when it might otherwise have been postponed, and some activities which rely on positive relationships (e.g. with volunteers, young people or members of the public) are only just reaching their full potential as project funding ends.

This is highlighted in the *Beelines NE Communications and Research Insights* report (2021)¹³:
“Everyone that we talked to said they saw the project as a positive thing for the region, provided it had longevity and made the impact it aims to.”

¹² Met Office, 01/09/2022, <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/press-office/news/weather-and-climate/2022/joint-hottest-summer-on-record-for-england> last accessed 10/04/2023

¹³ Karol Marketing (2021) *Beelines NE Communications and Research Insights*

As described in the interim evaluation, in such a short timescale, the emphasis must be on establishing and embedding best practice and change in delivery approaches which will continue to improve and establish pollinator habitat, engage audiences and inspire action beyond March 2023. Green Recovery Challenge Fund investment has enabled UGN to develop, test and embed working practices. The project has consolidated effective partnerships and raised public profile. Much credit must go to the Beelines NE staff team who have delivered so much in a short period of time. Although project staff have largely moved onto other roles due to a lack of funding to sustain their posts, they have effectively worked together to establish a solid foundation for the future.

Beelines NE has enabled UGN to deliver some aspirations which it has held since it became custodian of Newcastle Parks. This has established best practice and enabled new ways of working to be tested and developed. It has also provided the opportunity to trial different evaluation techniques and perhaps the most important learning from this is not the data which has been recorded but the methodologies and tools which have been adopted by the project and which can be used in future to

“Beelines North East has been a fantastic demonstration of partnership working to inspire people about nature. Managing various greenspaces, Urban Green Newcastle is uniquely placed to reach out to the local community and boost nature connection in the city. NHSN has enjoyed supporting this work at events during 2022 and seeing the positive work done to improve urban spaces for wildlife. It has been great to see the project develop and, especially, to see communities traditionally excluded from natural history engaged in such a positive way. Bringing together local conservation organisations and community groups, the project has laid the foundations for future partnership work that will surely make more of an impact than any organisations could do in isolation. We hope to keep working with Urban Green Newcastle and Northumberland Wildlife Trust in the future.”

**Clare Freeman, Director,
Natural History Society of Northumbria**

evaluate UGN activities. Whilst evaluation feedback was collected only at a handful of UGN events, the tools have provided some useful data and, more importantly, have tested ways of collecting feedback to produce replicable methodologies for future activities.

The Interim Evaluation reported inconsistencies in the way equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) data had been recorded up to September 2022. This has been improved for more recent events to provide more reliable information which avoids making assumptions about participants' background.

Perhaps the lasting legacy of the Beelines NE project will be the successful working relationship between formal partner organisations NWT and UGN as well as with other organisations which include delivery partners, contractors and suppliers. This provides significant potential for future activity to work with local people to create a wilder City where nature is in recovery and communities are connected to nature in the urban landscape.

Learning & Recommendations

Beelines NE has delivered significant investment in Newcastle's greenspaces over a short period of time. Its success will be in the legacy it leaves and whether this can be sustained in the coming years. The evaluation therefore makes the following recommendations:

1. Further funding must be secured to continue what Beelines NE has started - both to manage greenspaces sustainably and to connect people to nature in the city.
2. Every effort must be made to retain the best practice, relationships and learning that Beelines NE has achieved - there is a risk that this could be lost in the interim period between Beelines NE and any future project.
3. Future projects need not only focus on children and families. Nature talks, walks and interactive activities can equally be targeted at adults to engage new audiences and influence a wider range of people. Beelines NE has already developed some good practice in adult engagement through its wellbeing activities and future projects could also learn from initiatives such as Wild At Heart in Sheffield and Rotherham¹⁴.
4. There may be opportunities to further develop the partnership with NHS hospitals and, potentially, to also extend this to involve social prescribing partners. Beelines NE has

¹⁴ <https://www.wildsheffield.com/discover/your-community/wild-at-heart/>



demonstrated the potential of urban greenspace to support wellbeing but there is so much more that could be achieved, working with the health sector. Natural England's Health and Environment Lead Adviser (North East) may be able to provide further advice.

5. Initiatives such as Beelines NE have an important role to play in ensuring access for all to high-quality urban greenspace at the heart of communities. Engaging with nature in the city not only supports wellbeing but also could act as a first step to feeling able to access nature experiences in more rural areas, or to engaging in a career or other opportunities in the environment sector. Future activity could place more focus on understanding and breaking down the barriers to accessing urban greenspace; asking, why is access to nature inequitable and how can we change this in Newcastle?

6. There are opportunities to build on the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms adopted by Beelines NE. In particular, embedding tools such as the ENACT survey forms into all activity delivery will provide robust evidence for nature connectedness and adopting widespread EDI monitoring will provide more information about participant demographics. Beelines NE only collected feedback at a handful of UGN events and much more data is needed from across the partnership to robustly evidence the benefits of and need for future activities.

7. Finally, ecological monitoring should continue as new habitat establishes so that the impact of planting and capital works can really be understood.



Beelines Impact

In addition to the legacy that the evaluation has identified above, the work of Beelines NE will have a lasting impact through:

- The partnership established has been particularly strong, and UGN, NWT and NHSN are actively working together on joint initiatives, new funding bids, and sharing skills and resources.
- Beelines resources are still available on partner websites, and being used for ongoing events and activities across the city.
- Beelines is embedded within other initiatives which are being developed to become ongoing at a national scale (eg: National Trust's Blossom Together initiative, which was part of the Beelines delivery in Exhibition Park and is set to become an annual event going forwards).
- The St Nicholas Park gardening group, developed in conjunction with St Nicholas hospital, has continued and become a permanent volunteer gardening group, led by NWT.
- Site plans are now embedded into greenspace management going forwards, and have been used to permanently change the mowing regime across Newcastle's parks. The Site Management Handbook, and recommendations for each site, are providing an invaluable resource going forwards, and informing ongoing funding applications for further habitat improvement.
- No Mow May was extended across all city parks in May 2023, and following consultation with UGN's community engagement panel (Urban Green Connect), is set to become a permanent approach across the city, with Newcastle City Council keen to become involved with their green spaces in 2024.

- The collaboration between UGN and the Newcastle Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has flourished, resulting in another season of creative workshops for 2023, based at the Springbank Pavilion in Leazes Park.
- The insect pollinator and floral sampling, carried out by Northumbria University to establish a baseline at the four UGN exemplar sites, is being continued in 2023 with plans to extend further through student projects, and/or through new partnership projects (if funding applications are successful).
- The support for Green Finance is being continued through ongoing funding, with extensive work being carried out on developing appropriate models to unlock sustainable finance going forwards.
- More conservation grazing is being explored across UGN sites, with applications for funding being submitted.
- All 10 of the existing jobs which were sustained through Beelines NE and 3 of the 5 new jobs created have continued after project funding ended.

Barbara Hooper (Urban Green Newcastle Director, Parks & Allotments), July 2023

Glossary

GRCF	Green Recovery Challenge Fund
NCC	Northumberland County Council
NTC	North Tyneside Council
NWT	Northumberland Wildlife Trust
UGN	Urban Green Newcastle



Image credits: All images have been supplied by UGN Beelines NE with the exception of page 10: Weetslade Nature Reserve wetland before and after restoration (Rob Drummond, NWT) and page 18: example of a Facebook post.

Appendix: Evaluation Toolkit

1. Three good things in nature postcard
2. Bee friendly worksheet for schools
3. Activity feedback form (ENACT)

Three good things in *nature*

Tell us what you have noticed in the park today




NORTH EAST

Green Recovery Challenge Fund

 Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

 The National Lottery Heritage Fund

 Environment Agency

 NATURAL ENGLAND

Bee friendly worksheet



How do you feel about different insects? Use these symbols to show how each insect makes you feel 😊 😐 😞



Bee



Fly



Butterfly



Beetle



Moth



Hover fly

Now you have learnt more about insects and pollinators...



Have you changed how you feel?

	I feel the same (✓)	I feel different 😊 😐 😞
Bee		
Fly		
Butterfly		
Beetle		
Moth		
Hover fly		

Why do you feel like this?

Write down one AMAZING fact you have learnt about pollinators

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Green Recovery Challenge Fund



Activity feedback form



Name of activity

How much did you enjoy this activity (please tick one only)?

☐ Not at all ☐ Not very much ☐ Quite a lot ☐ A lot

Please tell us more about your experience with this activity. There are no right or wrong answers; please respond as you really feel.

	Not at all	A little	Some-what	Quite a bit	A great deal
I learned something new about nature					
I used different senses to experience nature (sight, sound, smell, touch)					
I was able to enjoy wildlife without disturbing it					
It made me feel calm and relaxed					
It made me feel excited and amazed					
It made me more concerned about the problems facing nature					
It took my mind off stresses or problems					
It was interesting and informative					
It was well organised					
This place means something to me					
The Beelines staff/volunteers were knowledgeable					

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Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

The National Lottery Heritage Fund



Environment Agency



If you would like to, please use the space below to give more feedback about the activity. You can write or draw something to tell us about the activities you took part in.

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Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

The National Lottery Heritage Fund



Environment Agency



Green Recovery Challenge Fund

This independent evaluation is by Katherine Williams, Consultant, on behalf of Urban Green Newcastle.

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Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

The
National Lottery
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Environment
Agency

