

NetworkNews

Spring 2023

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European Union
European Regional
Development Fund



The Black Country Blue Network 2 (BCBN2) project is part funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with an investment of £1.6m and a total project value of £3.5m. Following the successful delivery of phase 1, BCBN2 commenced in September 2020 with a 3 year project in place to assist with the priority of preserving and protecting the environment.

The project aims to create a high-quality ecological network with a diverse range of habitats, centred on the area's historically important waterways and associated green spaces. This will be achieved through a programme of infrastructure and habitat improvements along canals and rivers and other key nature greenspaces linked into this blue network. The project will look to improve over 114 hectares of green space and rehabilitate over 4 hectares of land. Improvements will facilitate better visitor management and improved access for local communities.

The project is a partnership between the City of Wolverhampton Council, Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, Canal and River Trust and Severn Rivers Trust. Each delivery partner is delivering sub-projects which together make up the Black Country Blue Network.



Coseley Canal

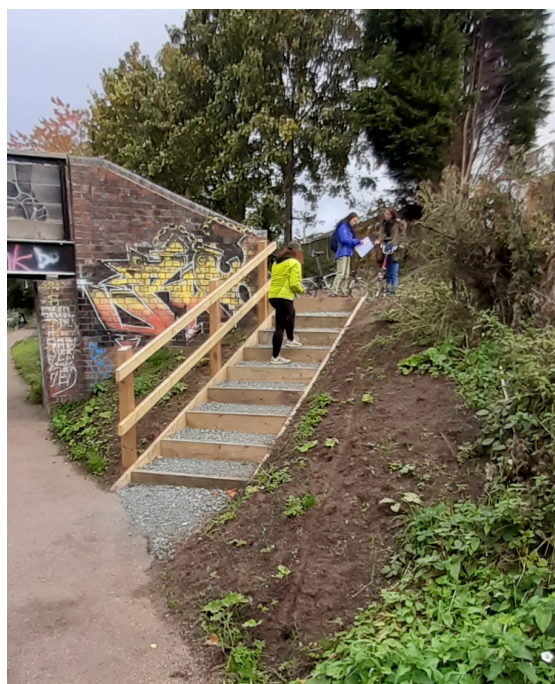
Work has now completed to improve access and biodiversity on the New Birmingham mainline Canal in Coseley. Just over 7.5 hectares of green / blue space has been improved through the project. Work has included thinning trees allow light for wildflowers to grow, planting new orchards which will provide habitat and food for wildlife and people, sowing wildflower seeds for pollinators and improving accessibility for the local community by upgrading access ramps and installing a new bench and signage.



Before



After



Black Country Blue Networks:

Delivery in an urban landscape.



Ten sites across Dudley in the West Midlands have been improved through the European Regional Development Funded, Black Country Blue Networks project. The urban nature of this catchment means the river Stour and its tributaries are very reactive to rainfall, rising and falling quickly. This can cause extensive flooding for hundreds of homes and leads to habitat loss within the riparian channel.

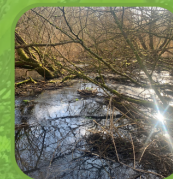
Severn Rivers Trust has delivered a range of interventions including in-channel Natural Flood Management (NFM) and landscape-scale habitat improvements. The main benefits of the work have included:

- Slowing the flow in reactive watercourses
- Improving in-channel habitat upstream and downstream of interventions
- Increased diversity and abundance of macroinvertebrates
- Restoring longitudinal connectivity of habitats.

PROJECT OUTPUTS...

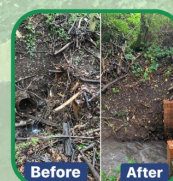
1.2_{ha}

of wet woodland has been created via a Stage 0 river restoration programme at Saltwells NNR. Surrounded by housing, the highly engineered river posed a significant flood risk to local residents. The project has increased flood storage, bypassed two barriers and created extensive wet woodland habitat.



40+

examples of "back tethered" chop and drop deployed as NFM features in highly urban watercourses. These interventions hold back water, create diverse in-channel habitat and help to keep culverts clear.



9

barriers have been removed, eased or bypassed, reconnecting the river, enabling functional sediment transfer and fish passage.



13

pools have been created, extended or enhanced as part of a mosaic of Great Crested Newt habitat. These act as vital steppingstones, linking valuable but fragmented habitats within this urban landscape. Additional benefits include improved flood resilience and community wellbeing.



150_m

of bankside reprofiling. Banks are stabilised with coir matting that is pre-planted with locally occurring native marginal species to enrich this depleted habitat. Working in the confines of the public right of way alongside the brook.



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Severn Rivers Trust created this poster highlighting the impact that BCBN2 has had on their sites. The poster was voted the best at the River Restoration Centre Conference with over 400 industry professionals voting.

Saltwells NNR Stage Zero Channel Restoration

Severn Rivers Trust (SRT) have recently undertaken an exciting project to install a soil bund across the Black Brook. The work was focused upstream of two weirs acting as complete barriers making movement up or downstream for fish impossible. Working closely with Dudley Council and Dynamic Rivers to develop a solution, a Stage Zero Channel restoration was selected. This type of restoration allows the brook to forge a new flow pathway from where it was blocked. At Saltwells this was achieved with some prudent flood modelling, given the urban nature of the site. These models predicted the adjacent floodplain would be its path of least resistance and the flow of the brook would re-joining its original confines 200m downstream. If you are to visit the site and look from the pedestrian bridge upstream you will now notice most of the flow is coming in from the right-hand channel as you look at it. Once more connected without barriers, allowing fish to utilise this wonderful nature reserve once more.

Ham Dingle

SRT have been working alongside Dudley Rangers Service over the last winter, contractors undertook a graduated thinning program upon the right-arm of the site. The aim of this work was to kickstart a varied age structure within the seminatural plantation, whilst supporting flood resilience by installing several trees within the channel to slow the flow of water within this small urban nature reserve. Additional work was undertaken including carving in some habitat for bats within the canopy of trees alongside the felling operations.

Netherton Park

150m of bankside reprofiling has helped open up and allow local people to see the Lyn Brook. Hidden by its steep bankside it is now visible. SRT staff worked over a number of days to plug plant the bankside of this brook to help enrich it for wildlife and people.

The Dingle and Ludgbridge brook

SRT have undertaken a series of slow the flow measures across these two sites. Multiple trees have been dropped into the channel to reduce the speed at which flood waters rush to the river Stour to achieve this. The project also removed a barrier from the Ludgbridge brook helping to restore its connectivity. Within the Dingle arm of the site a back water pool was created, this not only increased the storage of water in high flow events, but when fish return to this arm of the brook it will also offer shelter from weather events and provide a rich nursery habitat for rearing young.

Buck Pool

SRT have installed a number of Large Woody Debris features into the channel that shall help provide flood resilience but crucially shall also provide an abundance of food for small macro invertebrates that live within our watercourses. If you know the site some areas of the river have a heavily modified stream bed, this is a result of trying to reduce erosion in high flow. In an attempt to address the poor quality of habitat found at these points we have undertaken boulder inclusion onto the beds surface to alter the flow.

Barrow Hill

A collection of pools that have either been expanded or created to develop the site into a stepping stone heaven for wildlife, but especially focusing on the Great Crested Newt. The borders of the pools are to be planted with several different species of marginal wetland flora.

Castle Hill

The proposed works to Castle Hill are now mostly complete. The work has 4 existing entrance points secured with barriers. They are designed to allow pedestrian use but discourage vehicles from access, particularly motorcycles.

One main route through the site has been re-surfaced and any potentially dangerous dead and dying Ash trees have been removed. The route can now be used to go from Forest Road and Gervase Drive to the proposed Metro stop and the attractions that are clustered along the Tipton Road. Replacement trees and wild plants have been planted to gaps in the woodland.

Peggy's Meadow

The land has been returned to its historical use as grazing land. Long grass, scrubby growth and small trees have been removed and the area is fenced off with a traditional agricultural fence.

Peggy's Meadow is now back with new grassland. This provides a different but equally important habitat to the previous vegetation, and as a result will encourage different plants and wildflowers and increase the biodiversity of the area.



Sedgley Beacon

The new path from Wolverhampton Road now connects with existing footpaths, and grazing land has been re-configured to separate pedestrians from horses. These fields have been fenced in a traditional agricultural fence.

To reduce surface water run-off, some small seasonal ponds have been created to hold water and reduce pressure on the nearby brook.

Around the whole site works to turn existing grass to wildflower areas has been completed. Also, there has been a lot of thinning of woodland to allow access and to expose limestone features. Woodland areas have had additional planting of new trees, woodland plants and bulbs.

Cannon Drive

The area known locally as Teddy Bear Park is being transformed with trees lining the paths and a circle of trees will create a central focus to the site.

Six drifts of new wildflower seeding will create flowering meadow areas and these, together with a small orchard area of native fruit trees, will provide variety and additional habitats for wildlife.

Nearby Clayton Park will see improvements with wildflower seeding and underplanting to existing trees, increasing habitat value.

New signage and information and the installation of bird and bat boxes will complete the sites in the early summer.

Holloway Street

Existing routes through the site, which were muddy and therefore difficult for pedestrians, have had drainage improvements to divert water away. Three main routes have been widened, regraded and topped with a compacted gravel surface.

There is a new cleared area next to Round House Road which is sown with wildflower seeds. Small areas that hold water have been created or reinstated to benefit birds, amphibians and insects.

Finally, some additional trees and shrubs have been planted to assist the diversity of the site.

Turfs Hill

Works began in January to remove rubbish from fields and watercourses and to dismantle collapsing makeshift stables. This was followed by clearance of overgrown vegetation to restore hedges before introducing regular grass cutting that will help bring grazing land back to use. This will also encourage traditional meadow plants to re-establish.

New agricultural fencing and extensive tree planting of over 7,500 small trees on several sites is almost complete and this will create new hedges, ecological corridors, and woodland areas.

At High Arcal a new avenue of trees is being planted, complemented by drifts of wildflower seeding. Clearance of rubbish from the existing pond will further improve the habitat value of the public open space.

Ward Street Railway Cutting

Ward Street Railway Cutting has received full practical completion on both hard and soft works with minor rectifications on the hard works to be undertaken within the next few weeks, to include the installation of the interpretation boards (and macadam to their bases) and the remediation of the vehicular gate dropbolt ground sockets.

The mass bulb planting drifts have provided a superb spring show for the scheme and particularly visible from Millfields Road when passing the site.



Pendeford Park

The improved paths have been well-used over the winter by people on foot and bikes. Daffodils planted in autumn 2021 have again put a good show. Difficult growing conditions in the hot summer led to the need for some replacement tree and shrub planting. The main work through the colder months has been the selective removal of over-dominant non-native shrubs such as laurel and garden varieties of dogwood, to reduce competition with native shrub and ground flora in woodland areas. Overgrown hazels and willows have been coppiced alongside paths in a few places to allow more light to reach the woodland floor and improve path safety. Meadow areas were scarified and overseeded with yellow rattle in autumn 2022 which should encourage more diversity of wildflowers by subduing grass growth. Some seeding with woodland flora mix, and wildflower plug planting in a damp meadow area near Blaydon Road is yet to come, along with interpretation boards.



Fowlers Park

The main contract for Fowlers Park reached Practical Completion on 14/03/23 and the contract is now in the Defects Liability Period which will end on 14/03/24. A snagging list has been prepared and has been issued to the main contractor Jack Moody Landscape and Civil Engineering Limited and covers:

- Correcting the planting area at the Nine Elms Lane Entrance
- Confirming that Meadow Areas 15 and 24 have been seeded correctly
- Making good a surface water drain next to the pond.
- Replacing a fence to a temporary access point to the adjacent field
- Re-setting the foundations to an interpretation plaque
- Firming up and re-fixing a line of Rowan trees



- Replacing all of the failed ivy planting next to the path leading to Cannock Road
- Reducing a hump in the bed of the pond and removing some remaining water lilies
- Fixing some water safety signs in the correct location within the pond

Moorcroft Wood

Moorcroft Wood is the site of the former Moorcroft Old Colliery, the minerals mined here were used at the Moorcroft Iron Works, furnace slag from the works are found in the woodland and is an exceptionally rare feature and of very high historic significance. The slag heaps have been colonised by rare plants and ferns that prefer the acid rich environment. Over time the area has scrubbed over with trees and bramble.

The site was partially planted in 1904 with sycamore and false acacia trees, this woodland is forming a dense canopy and suppressing the once rich flora that was abundant on the site and there is little shrub understory or natural regeneration of the woodland. The works being carried out will restore these features and improve access into the woodland. The improvement covered 6.5 ha:

- Thinning of dense tree canopy and removal of fallen and dangerous trees to allow for woodland flora underplating and supplementary tree planting to diversify age structure
- Upgrading of the access path from Bull Lane
- Clearance of scrub from slag heap
- Restoration of the meadow



Walsall Canal

Amenity planting along this walkway had become overgrown and footways was worn away due to inappropriate use. The area also offered little value to wildlife along this important nature corridor. This project has improved access and created wildlife rich habitats.

The improvements covered 2 ha:

- Creation of wildflower meadow prolong the availability of nectar for invertebrates
- Thinning of woodland and under sowing with woodland flora to enhance biodiversity
- Upgrade of footpath and improved access points



Victoria Park

A linear site that was formerly a railway cutting and has steep grass banks. . Aspirations for the site have been to create a more naturalistic and informal feeling to the park and to manage some areas that are difficult to maintain due to the steepness of the grass slopes, and in a way that promotes biodiversity. This project has built upon the work that has already begun in the park to meet these aims. The area around the pool has become overgrown and neglected and blighted by flytipping and littering, this area has been opened up, cleansed and vegetation removed from the pool.

The improvements covered 0.75 ha:

Creation of wildflower meadow prolong the availability of nectar for invertebrates

- Thinning of woodland and under sowing with woodland flora to enhance biodiversity
- Upgrade of footpath and improved access points



Kings Hill Park

From Victorian splendour to wildlife wonder, at least that is our aspiration for the park – to create a more naturalistic and informal feeling to the park and to manage some areas that are difficult to maintain due to subsidence, in a way that promotes biodiversity.

This project has built upon the work that has already begun in the park to meet these aims.

The improvements covered 1.7 ha:

Thinning of tree plantations and underplanting with bluebells and wild garlic to introduce a woodland flora layer

- Creation of wildflower meadows and native bulb planting to prolong the availability of nectar for invertebrates
- Tree planting of differing tree species to those present to improve tree resilience



George Rose Park

George Rose Park was named after John George Rose who developed a work scheme for out of work people following WW I, this park was a result of one of these work schemes.

Much of the formal landscaping has been removed since then and aspirations for the site have been to create a more naturalistic and informal feeling to the park and to manage some areas in a more sustainable way, in a way that promotes biodiversity. This project has built upon the work that has already begun in the park to meet these aims. The improvements covered 1.2 ha:

- Planting a native hedgerow to create a linear habitat to benefit birds and mammals
- Creation of wildflower meadow to prolong the availability of nectar for invertebrates
- Tree planting of differing tree species to those present to improve tree resilience and to create a linear feature to improve bat habitat