**Thursday 30th June 2022**

**PRESS RELEASE: Groundwork Installs World’s First High Tide Floating Ecosystem at Newcastle Quayside**

Through its flagship [Revitalising our Estuaries](https://www.groundwork.org.uk/projects/revitalising-our-estuaries/) programme; community and environmental charity Groundwork NE & Cumbria has spearheaded the development of a first of its kind ‘floating nature island’ to be installed on Newcastle Quayside in July. The new 1,000 sq ft ecosystem, which equates to approximately 8 car parking spaces, is designed by Biomatrix Water, and will recreate habitat lost in industrialisation and urban development, improve water quality and green this section of the riverbank, fighting the dual climate and biodiversity crisis. Its innovative design accommodates the huge tidal and flow variations of the River Tyne. As a beautiful addition to the Quayside it will deliver nature-based solutions and Biodiversity Net Gain in Newcastle.

The installation will begin week commencing Monday 11th July 2022 with stakeholder and community events taking place throughout the week.

The new floating nature island will be a vital hub for wildlife such as invertebrates, pollinators, birds, molluscs and fish in an area where natural habitat is under threat from sea level rise. Halophyte (salt tolerant) plant species typical of this estuarine environment will provide a food source for wildlife and opportunities for birds to nest. The ecosystem will also shelter juvenile and migrating fish. Underneath the structure, the roots and fish refugia will create a mini reef system.

The nature island will be monitored by Groundwork NE & Cumbria and the University of Newcastle alongside Trinity College, Dublin who will work in partnership to support ongoing monitoring including ecological, social and economic impact assessment.

The project has community involvement at its heart as the nature island will be built and planted by local volunteers, community groups and schools. Volunteers from Northern Directions—a Groundwork led youth employment programme—will lend a hand, spreading the benefits to people as well as nature. Other community involvement includes educational visits for local schools and citizen science projects using technology such as underwater cameras. The programme also supports employment for young people through the government’s Kickstart Scheme, offering new opportunities to enter green jobs.

Supported by the Environment Agency’s WEIF programme, NE1, Northumbrian Water, the Green Recovery Challenge Fund and the Caterpillar Foundation; Revitalising our Estuaries (RoE) is a new programme of river estuary restoration, working in partnership using nature-based solutions it will improve sites across all six estuaries in the North East for local people and businesses whilst employing and providing training for 38 local young people.

**PRESS CALL**

Date: Thursday 14th July 2022

Time: 14:00 – 16:00

Location: Newcastle Quayside, in front of Millennium Bridge, near the Pitcher & Piano bar.

* Meet Hellen Hornby, RoE Project Manager from Groundwork NE & Cumbria.
* Meet Nick Schreiner, International Technical Manager from Biomatrix Water.
* Meet Robert Carr from the Environment Agency (Available from 15:00).

Hellen Hornby, RoE Project Manager at Groundwork explained:

“Although small this ecosystem is the first of many in a vision to green the Quayside and the wider Tyne Estuary. With existing nature-based solutions installed at Royal Quays Marina, Hebburn in South Tyneside and more to follow in Gateshead and South Tyneside these pockets of nature will collectively provide vital food, resting and shelter for a wide range of important river estuary species.”

Nick Schreiner, International Technical Manager at Biomatrix Water, said:

“The floating ecosystem will be the first such installation on a major waterway like the Tyne incorporating a wetland substrate that mimics the natural estuarine environment including clay, silt, and woody debris. This wetland system includes a diverse selection of native aquatic plant species. Its unique engineering supports a high buoyancy and a dynamic tidal anchoring system. This ensures that the ecosystem habitat will be protected from the high current, large debris, and the five metre tidal range experienced on the Tyne.”

Rob Carr, Environment Agency’s Strategic Partnership Senior Advisor, said:

“The ecological health of our rivers must improve. The pressures from human activity continue at pace, impacting on water quality, habitat and wildlife, yet never before has our connection with the natural environment been so important.

“Newcastle Quayside Floating Ecosystem in the Tyne estuary, which is a ribbon of life that runs through Tyneside, will bring green to the grey urban environment and provide an opportunity for nature to thrive both above and below water. The Environment Agency is pleased to support the Tyne Estuary Partnership projects, which will improve our environment and bring the natural benefits we can all enjoy.”

Gaby Mckay-Jones, RoE Research and Monitoring Project Assistant at Groundwork, explained:

“Groundwork, through the Kickstart Scheme, has given me the opportunity to get a full time ‘green’ job that builds on my degree and progresses my career. The RoE project has allowed me to develop skills that includes the monitoring of nature-based solutions (NBS) that lead to necessary ecological and social changes to our environment. The floating ecosystem is an exciting and unique intervention, my role gives me the opportunity to monitor how this NBS will impact on, not only, the biodiversity gain of the Tyne but also the change in the public's connection to nature.”

Paul Ennals, Chair of NEECCo, expressed:

“I’m thrilled to see this world leading naturebased solution being installed in Newcastle; improving our water quality, air quality, fighting climate change and returning nature to the banks of the Tyne once more; inspiring pride of place.”

Stephen Thompson, Northumbrian Water Environment Coordinator, commented:

“We are really excited to see the floating ecosystem in place in such a prominent location and to watch as wildlife adopts it as part of their habitat. We are backing the project as part of our ongoing commitment to go above and beyond to deliver and support improvements to accessible areas around water, through our bluespaces initiative. Working in partnership like this, we can help deliver so many more benefits across the region than would be possible on our own, giving even greater enjoyment for those who visit these spaces.”

Tariq Albassam, Director of Operations at Newcastle NE1 Ltd, who are partners in the project, said:

“Maximising the opportunities that the River Tyne and the Quayside presents is one of our top strategic priorities at NE1, and we are delighted to have played a part in this pioneering eco-project that will help create new habitats for wildlife in and on the water and bring nature to the city.

We know from our consumer research that greening the city is always a priority, and this is an important first step in softening the boundary between the Quay wall and the river, as well as establishing a precedent and demonstrating our ambition for improvements in the area.”

For more information please contact Hellen Hornby, RoE Project Manager at Groundwork: hellen.hornby@groundwork.org.uk, tel: 07458 223 757

Press on the day may contact Stacey Bristow, Groundwork NE & Yorkshire Social Media Officer, for any enquiries tel: 07908 323 753.

For more information about the Revitalising our Estuaries project please visit: [www.groundwork.org.uk/projects/revitalising-our-estuaries](http://www.groundwork.org.uk/projects/revitalising-our-estuaries)

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**NOTES TO EDITORS**

RoE is funded by the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund (GRCF) and the Caterpillar Foundation. The GRCF fund was developed by Defra and its Arm's-Lengths Bodies. It is being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England, the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission.

Groundwork NE & Cumbria will employ a total of 38 young people as part of an exciting new project called Revitalising Our Estuaries (RoE). Supported by the Green Recovery Challenge Fund and the Caterpillar Foundation, the partnership will respond to ongoing environmental issues by delivering improvements to six river estuaries across the North East coastline.

The project focuses on Wansbeck and Blyth in the north, centrally the Tyne and Wear and finally in the south, the Tees and Esk. The project will deliver high profile habitat protection and creation schemes to maintain natural diversity.

RoE has created new green jobs, from River Estuary Rangers to senior office roles. There are three River Estuary Ranger teams each consisting of a Supervisor and five River Estuary Ranger Trainees who will gain valuable qualifications in landscaping and outdoor environment management. Project Assistants support the wider development and implementation of the project, including landscape design, marketing, monitoring and community engagement.

RoE has delivered various events for the local neighbourhood including days out for local schools and community groups – operating guided tours around the estuaries, teaching children and adults the importance of these environments. Practical Conservation based volunteer days for members of the public or corporate groups and also major events linked to the installation of the ecological enhancements will take place.

In the Northern region we are restoring an area of saltmarsh and mudflat on the Wansbeck that has been trampled and fragmented by vehicles and people. Mudflat and saltmarsh is a priority habitat, vital in the battle against climate change as it captures and stores carbon dioxide; it is also is home to unusual plant and animal species. On the Blyth, we are working closely with the Environment Agency and the Port of Blyth to install fish refugia under Commissioners Quay and vertipools on the East Pier, these man-made structures provide habitat in areas where there is little natural space for wildlife.

In addition to the specific nature-based solutions proposed for the Blyth and Wansbeck the Estuary Rangers will be working along the river banks and in adjacent green spaces planting native wildflowers, treating invasive plants and delivering footpath improvements. We will work closely with the Northumberland County Council, Choppington Parish Council, Friends of Ridley Park and the Ashington Town Council in order to improve riparian corridor in these areas.

On the Tyne as well as the 1000 sq ft floating ecosystem in the Newcastle additional funding from the Caterpillar Foundation will see another area of saltmarsh and mudflat created in a heavily engineered section of the river. A little further south on the River Wear more vertipools and fish refugia are to be created along with bird roosting and nesting habitat utilising redundant river ‘dolphins’!

In addition to the nature-based solutions proposed for the Tyne and Wear, the Estuary Rangers will be working along the river banks and in adjacent green spaces planting native wildflowers, treating invasive plants and delivering footpath improvements; working closely with the Environment Agency, Newcastle City Council, Gateshead County Council, South Tyneside Council, Newcastle Urban Green, Sunderland City Council, Sunderland University, Sunderland and the Tyne Port Authority and Sunderland Marine Activity Centre to improve riparian corridor in these areas.

Partnering with Local Authorities and private landowners on the Tees, we are delivering improvements to Seaton Common and the South Gare by removing invasive species, providing habitat for birds such as little terns and improving footpaths along the English Coastal Path.

On the Esk in Whitby, working with the Environment Agency through their Beach Esk and Conrete Coast projects, we are delivering nature based solutions including saltmarsh creation and the instatllation of pod pools and living sea walls. Delivered in partnership with Whitby Port Authority, Whitehall Landing Management Company and Scarborough Borough Council these features will be installed between the Harbour and the A171 in Whitby.

**ABOUT GROUNDWORK NORTH EAST & CUMBRIA**

Groundwork is the community charity with a green heart that operates across the North East and Cumbria to transform places and lives in some of the most disadvantaged communities. Activity focuses on positive sustainable change in places of need across the region.

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**ABOUT GROUNDWORK UK**

Groundwork is a federation of charities mobilising practical community action on poverty and the environment across the UK. For information about national programmes, partnerships, campaigns and activity please contact Groundwork UK.

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**ABOUT BIOMATRIX**

Biomatrix designs, develops, engineers, manufactures, installs and maintains modular systems for habitats, ecological enhancement, water treatment, biodiversity and amenity. Based in Moray, Scotland, we have worked throughout the world providing products and services to meet the growing demand for ecological water technology that is both functional, attractive and sustainable. The founding partners have over twenty years' experience in ecological engineering for waterway restoration and wastewater treatment. The first river/lake restoration floating island was launched in 1991.

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