

Natural Course newsletter – December 2020

Welcome to the last Natural Course newsletter of the year, where we are reflecting on some of our highlights and achievements from 2020.

The year started with Dave Marshall, Natural Course Programme Manager, delivering the keynote at the LIFE Platform meeting on waste water treatment in Barcelona, where he shared our experiences with European colleagues.

The following month, we sponsored the Natural Capital Group Annual Conference which brought together more than 170 delegates to discuss and plan nature-based projects across Greater Manchester - and it was great to see our team leading a number of interactive workshops and hosting a stand in the busy market place. Just before the pandemic hit the UK, we had a great meeting with the [Defra Permanent Secretary Tamara Finkelstein](#), where we were able to discuss the challenges faced across the North West to improve water quality.

We then had to adjust to the impact of Covid-19, following the Government advice and adapting our ways of working. Considering the challenges all of our organisations continue to face maintaining our business priorities during this difficult time, we are especially proud of what the Collaborative team have achieved with their Associates and delivery teams, and the great progress that the Project Management team have achieved remotely over the period. A few of our projects experienced some slippage over this period, however we are confident that we will deliver our objectives by the end of phase.

We had a number of 'on the ground' projects take place later in the year, including the transformation of a waterlogged area of greenspace into an urban wetland oasis at [Dales Brow in Swinton](#), Salford, by Community Forest Trust. Surface water from a nearby road is diverted on to site and held in a newly-constructed temporary wetland which overflows to a local stream during periods of very heavy rainfall. The site now helps to reduce surface water flooding along the road, remove contaminants associated with the highway before they enter the stream and to provide an amenity for the local community.

We also [removed a weir](#) at the Meeting of the Waters site on the River Tonge, Bolton, by Groundwork Greater Manchester. The project, designed to enable fish to pass more freely along the watercourse, was supported by a number of detailed ecological surveys including in-channel kick-sampling up and downstream of the weir and the installation of trail cameras to check whether otters were using the site (nothing spotted!).

In September, we welcomed (virtually) Fabio Leone, EASME Head of Sector for the LIFE and Eco-innovation unit, to a two-day Mission, and we're very pleased to report that the many presentations and discussions went without a digital hitch! We discussed the programme progress, and the developments made in monitoring and evaluation, as well as communication and engagement - all positively acknowledged by Fabio who congratulated the whole team on their excellent work.

Despite taking place in the same week as the mission, Natural Course still managed to have a high profile at the (digital) Greater Manchester Green Summit 2020, with members of our

Collaborative Team presenting sessions around catchment systems thinking, natural flood management, innovative green financing, and the integrated ecological network tool. The summit also saw the launch of the [Greater Manchester Natural Environment Engagement Toolkit](#) (digital resources created in partnership to encourage everyone across the city region to do their bit for the environment – you can watch the video here: <https://naturegreatermanchester.co.uk/>)

Our [Natural Capital](#) work continues to grow at pace, and after the successful conclusion of the DEFRA Urban Pioneer in Greater Manchester, the city region was selected as one of five Local Nature Recovery Strategy pilot areas. These initiatives are now supported by the Greater Manchester Environment Fund (GMEF), the UK's first regional environmental impact fund which delivers social, environmental and financial outcomes and seeks to recycle capital back into delivering Greater Manchester's vision for the natural and built environment over the long-term. Further development of the GMEF and a portfolio of capital projects will be supported by a £1.8M award from the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund, announced in December 2020.

2021 is already looking like an extremely busy year for Natural Course. In January, we start the planning of Phase 4 (by far the biggest and most ambitious of phase of the whole programme), which is due to launch in September 2021. Our Phase 3 projects are still delivering up until August 2021, and will require significant reporting of results and lessons learned, so plenty to keep us busy!

We would like to take this time to thank you for your continued support, and to wish you all a very happy festive season and a wonderful New Year.

For regular updates, please follow [@natural_course](#) on Twitter, connect with us on [LinkedIn](#) and keep an eye on our [website](#).