



Life R4EVER KENT



Event Summary – Project Restoration site visit for Natural England

Date: 27/11/2025

Location: Grassgarths Farm – Gowan catchment

Led by: South Cumbria Rivers Trust

Number in attendance: 12 guest practitioners

Purpose:

South Cumbria Rivers Trust completed a large scale restoration on Grassgarths Farm in 2025 through the LIFE R4ever Kent project. Overall, 648m of culverts were opened up, along with 2,410m² of scrapes created across the farm.

In November 2025 members of the South Cumbria Area Team at Natural England were invited to a project hosted site visit, to share learning and insights of the work undertaken on the farm. A total of 12 Natural England practitioners attended the visit hosted by Emma Wright with the assistance of Morgan Barrie and the landowner. The attending staff have various work areas and expertise, spanning farm advice, protected sites work, national nature reserves, freshwater sites and landscape recovery. The event presented a wonderful opportunity to share project work with a wide range of experts, and gain feedback from a variety of viewpoints within conservation.



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Following the restoration the wildlife moved in instantly, with Snipe, Starlings, frogs, dragonflies and invertebrates being seen in the first few weeks using the new watercourses. The benefits of the scrapes are to hold water during periods of heavy rain and to slowly let it into the ground over time, creating resilience and reducing flood peak downstream on the main stem of the Gowan. The depths in the scrapes vary to create pockets of deeper and shallower areas to provide different habitat for different animals. The scrapes will be in part ephemeral so will have periods of dry and wet which is important to have in the landscape as these are a rare feature. The new channel creates a new habitat within the landscape, a home for invertebrates, fish and birds.

Together the works increased habitat availability for species within the SAC catchment, as well as improving water quality and attenuation to improve the climate resilience of the SAC. The works complemented the projects C3 landowner engagement and catchment management aims as well as delivering direct C1 restoration.

Outcomes:

The SCRT Project Officer introduced the attendees to the site and its history, the planning of the works, their undertaking and the outcomes produced. This was also an opportunity to fully delve into the wider impacts off site of restoration works when working at an integrated catchment scale and how to benefit freshwater SACs. The landowner joined and provided his feedback and viewpoint, which was wonderfully positive.

The Natural England staff asked questions prompting interesting and varied discussions over the works and approach, and were impressed with the outcomes and positive engagement with the landowner. The visit provided a free and welcoming space for open conversations about issues with delivery or outcomes, intricacies of consenting and permitting and how these were managed along with discussions over alternative approaches along with the potential benefits and risks. This led to a valuable knowledge exchange and learning experience on both sides and a greater understanding of the restoration site, River Kent SAC and LIFE R4ever Kent project among Natural England staff who work in varied workstreams.



Written by: Morgan Barrie



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