

Clean Coasts for RAMSAR Lough site
61 Portaferry Road, Newtownards, Belfast, N.Ireland, BT23 8SQ
Northern Ireland Water

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: *Construction Phase Award*

Project overview

Construction of a new Wastewater Pumping Station (WwPS) on the shores of Strangford Lough. The new facility is designed to increase capacity, reduce environmental pollution incidents and improve water quality. GRAHAM's partnership with Live Here Love Here NI resulted in a beach clean on World Environment Day 2019.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

Strangford Lough, is a designated RAMSAR site with extensive areas of mud and saltflats, saltmarsh and has internationally renowned diversity of marine life, it's NI's most important coastal site for wintering waterfowl. 75% of the world's light bellied Brent Geese overwinter on the lough shore. In 2016, during World Population Census Day 22, 270 were counted on the lough. Whilst the replacement pumping station and associated pipework is not within any statutory designated nature conservation site Strangford Lough ASSI, Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC) are approximately 50 metres from the southern end of the project.

What were the reasons behind this project ?

The development site is hydrologically connected with the Lough as the storm overflow from the WwPS flows into the Lough and construction works will be within 30m of the Newtownards Canal and the Lough. The importance of the surrounding area demands extra care be taken to ensure the protection on the aquatic environment and the local wildlife, primarily bird species. The WwPS has needs to be replaced and upgraded to ensure ongoing water protection.



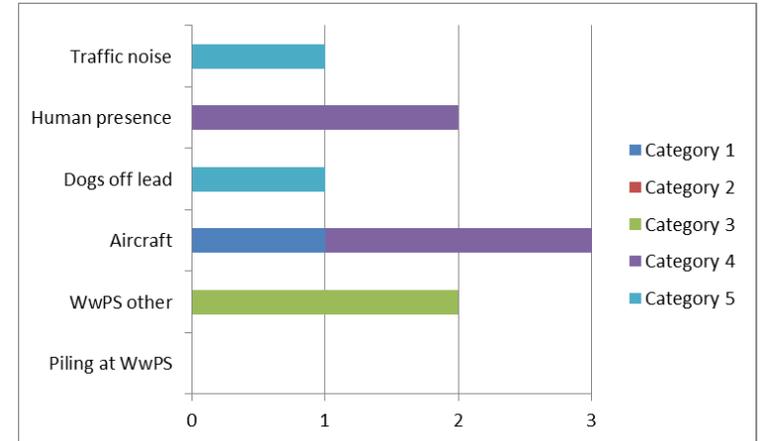
Site location on Strangford Lough



Clean Coasts Week

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

- Beach clean conducted on World Environment Day 2019, for the removal of waste material and litter such as any plastic items, car tyres, asbestos tiles, wipes, glass etc all removed from the mud flats
- Permission was granted in order to allow the event to take place on the Lough's shoreline. Due to it's RAMSAR status access to the Lough's shores are highly restrictive and ensuring all legalities were met ensured that we were in keeping with the protection of the site
- Habitats Regulation Assessment, Screening and Appropriate Assessments undertaken
- Ecological appraisal was also carried out due to the require removal of scrub and other vegetation for the new pumping station
- Bird disturbance monitoring was carried out prior and during works. The results indicated that birds were only disturbed by 2 WwPS events, during site set up; the erection of site fencing and loud communication during this. This disturbance was designated as category 3 as the birds quickly resettled and continued feeding and nesting unphased
- Numerous toolbox talks, delivered by the ecologist were designed to raise awareness of the of Ecology relevant to this site and instruct the team of the proper procedures to minimise disturbance
- One badger sett, not in use, was found near the site. The sett was destroyed under supervision of ecologists
- On land, scrub removal was completed by the end of February to avoid disturbing any nesting birds
- Two invasive Japanese knotweed thickets were removed from the site and appropriately disposed of
- Hoarding around the site, specifically facing the Lough was painted grey, rather than GRAHAM Fluorescent Green, to reduce any visual impacts on the local bird populations



Graph showing Type of disturbance events by category at WwPS



Clean Coasts Week litter picking



Light Bellied Brent Geese at Strangford Lough

Further information

Mitigation for environmental impacts have been important on this project due to the site’s location. The litter picking was run in collaboration with Live Here Love Here Northern Ireland as part of the Clean Coasts Week. With the awareness of waste, in particular plastic, entering our waterways and oceans, this sites location and purpose provided an ideal connection to the programme and an opportunity to extend GRAHAM’s belief of protecting our environment along with promoting development and progress. On the day, 20 volunteers from GRAHAM, our Sub Contractors, NI Water, AECOM, Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership and the local community attended to make a difference. This division within GRAHAM have already planned their next litter pick at another NI Water project in Newry on the shores of Carlingford Lough.

Project Team

- GRAHAM
- Northern Ireland Water
- Live Here Love Here – Keep NI Beautiful

What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

February 2019, Live Here Love Here invited us to their Community Awards. Mark Little, Contracts Manager and Richard Carolan, Project Manager, attended. The Keynote Speaker was Jo Ruxton from the Plastics Oceans Foundation. The next day Mark emailed Live Here Love Here “There was a great sense of pride and community spirit surrounding the awards and something we both are very keen to actively encourage within GRAHAM Construction.”

Both were motivated to act and inspired others within GRAHAM to do the same, determined to do more to tackle pollution as they continue to wo ture projects across NI.



Jo Ruxton, speaking at the LHLH event in February which motivated the team to take action.