

South Cumbria Rivers Trust (SCRT) works in collaboration with the Environment Agency (EA) and Natural England (NE) to identify, scope and deliver work that benefits the special nature of the River Kent. The River Kent and its tributaries are designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

BOWSTON WEIR REMOVAL PROPOSAL UPDATE: Interest group meeting 2020



ISSUE DATE: Tuesday 24TH November 2020

South Cumbria Rivers Trust (SCRT) met with special interest groups on 16th November 2020, to gauge responses to our proposal to remove Bowston weir. This meeting was for interest groups that had not previously had the opportunity to discuss the proposal with SCRT. In line with our Local Community Engagement Plan, this document is a record of the meeting, contains questions raised at the meeting and our responses (in orange) to these questions. For GDPR purposes we have anonymised information to protect privacy.

Date: Monday 16th November 2020, online Zoom meeting.

Attendees: Representatives from South Cumbria Rivers Trust, Environment Agency (EA), Natural England, Lakeland Canoe Club/Cumbria Canoeists, South Lakeland Flood Action Group, Kent (Westmorland) Angling Association, Cumbria Wildlife Trust and the Biodiversity and Sustainability group- subgroup of Burneside Parish Council.

AGENDA:

Welcome by SCRT Director

Presentation from South Cumbria Rivers Trust Ltd—Background and progression in 2020.

Q & A session

End

Welcome by Director of SCRT

- *Online meeting etiquette explained*
- *Using the *presentation, interest group meeting 2020, background information about SCRT*
- *Background information about the Cumbria River Restoration Strategy (CRRS)*
- **Background to the Atkins report and Bowston weir removal proposal*

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- *Progression in 2020 explained.*

**The interest group presentation and background information can be found on the SCRT website here: <https://scrt.co.uk/what-we-do/current-projects/bowston/>*

Question and Answer session with all attendees

Biodiversity Group – *We can envisage that the planning application, which has just been lodged, will take longer than expected, due to COVID-19 implications. Do you see SLDC having issues and does that mean that the long-term achievements in the LCEP will be replaced due to these issues?*

SCRT reply: *The determination period for applications is normally approx. 3 months, however we do expect this to be longer due to COVID-19 impacts. There have been delays during the informal consultation process, due to SCRT staffing during COVID-19 but we are working through this plan as agreed. We will have a separate meeting with this representative to go through the LCEP issues.*

Lakeland Canoe Club – *We have been excluded from the consultation process thus far. It seems that we are being informed of the situation rather than being consulted on it. Also, the planning application has been lodged before consultation phase has ended. The lodging of these applications was premature and this meeting should have occurred before doing so.*

SCRT reply: *There is an appropriate time to consult with wider groups about barrier removals, which is not normally in the early days of an investigation. This point on this project was when the sluice gates failed in 2017 –This was the time we started the conversation with the weir owner as well as having an initial meeting with residents to gauge feelings for intervention. This is when we started preliminary investigations and we met with residents to ensure they knew what was happening as there were likely to be site investigations.*

When the proposal became more serious and the opportunity for further investigations and funding opportunities, SCRT created the proposal and subsequent Local Community Engagement Plan to inform stakeholders of the important information and developments. There were delays in progressing this proposal via the agreed LCEP due to COVID-19 restrictions and obtaining weir owner permission to progress the proposal to formal consultation.... (did not finish).

Lakeland Canoe Club – *It is inappropriate that the consultation phase was not completed and that we have not been consulted. This is a statement not a question.*

SCRT reply – *We acknowledge your statement.*

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Lakeland Canoe Club – This whole process seems to have been driven by engineering and not the amenity value.

SCRT reply – All aspects have been assessed as part of the options appraisal, which stated that full removal was the preferred option. We had meetings with stakeholders to understand the amenity value, cultural heritage. It is a protected site, habitat and geomorphology have been considered. The funding – has to be directed in that respect.

If the options appraisal came back as partial removal, we could have looked further into amenity value but at Bowston, we have very few places to go.

Lakeland Canoe Club – We have no problem with the weir removal option. In future, at each stage in the process, we should be consulted with instead of making decisions without consulting with us. You need to make sure your groups are informed and what might be your favoured options and had this meeting before the planning applications were processed.

SCRT reply- Unfortunately, we should have been having this conversation in April. Our funding has been extended until 2021 only. Due to planning/determination period through which we are expecting delays, we needed to get the applications in asap. COVID delays have meant that we would have consulted more with you, before these applications were due to go in.

Lakeland Canoe Club - Should the planning application be accepted, according to the design there are step features in the river. There is no additional information about these. Will they be safe for river users? We are happy if the removal of the weir creates a free navigation but only if these steps cause no risk to life or injury.

Geomorphologist (EA) – In the design, there are six features upstream, these are rib like features across the channel. These will be embedded into the riverbed, to stop erosional impacts of the weir removal. The natural sediment processes that will occur after the weir removal will naturally bed these in. The rivers itself will construct its own riffles.

Lakeland Canoe Club - But will there be a risk to navigation?

Geomorphologist (EA) - The bed upstream will alter, there will be bars to the bank and riffles, it will be more diverse, more cross-sectional variability, they will hold the bed on the long profile.

CRRS programme manager- It will be safer than it is now. The design features upstream are not radical, you will not notice them. They will ensure it is safer through the whole route, whereas it is difficult to navigate at this moment in time.

Lakeland Canoe Club - Everyone has to portage at the moment.

Kent Angling – From our point of view, we are happy about the removal of the weir.

SCRT reply- That is what we want to see happen. Just to go back to something that Lakeland Canoe Club said – We are trying to ensure this whole process is transparent, once we had technical input about what was the preferred option in line with its protected status we have to move quickly.

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We are now going into the formal consultation stage- everyone will have the opportunity to formally respond to the application (objections/support), through the SDLC planning portal.

Biodiversity group - They support anything that constitutes the re-naturalisation of the river and we are conscious of barriers.

In relation to Why Bowston weir, it is felt locally that it was chosen because there was an amenable weir owner and not because of ecological improvements. Also, will the removal of one barrier really affect migration? Further questions from Biodiversity group;

Question 1 - Budget – Is there any money earmarked for habitat mitigation?

Cumbria River Restoration Strategy (CRRS) programme manager – The removal of the weir is habitat mitigation.

SCRT reply – The budget is very tight and there is nothing allocated in the budget for additional habitat mitigation – apart from safety aspects. However, the weir removal is a major habitat improvement in itself.

Question 2 - If you walk from the weir upstream, after removal the level of the water will drop. There are currently 40 trees on the bank. What will be the likely impact on those species at the current water level? It would be a tragedy to lose these trees (are there any mitigation factors in place for these?)

SCRT reply - There has been a tree survey conducted, which assesses the trees on the riverbank.

Kent Angling - The Alder and Pine species are robust; the drop in river level will not cause them a problem on the bank. In normal circumstances they grow very well.

Question 3 - Look above the weir, there are three small islands, which we believe are perfect habitat for a number of species and there is a bit of wetland beyond it. Is there a potential to counteract the potential ecological losses from their removal- could a bund/dam be put in place to keep the islands and the flood water can flow into the wet meadow beyond? This will improve the ecological benefits of the removal.

CRRS programme manager - There will be no ecological losses. I have been involved with over 30 weir removals and I can say that the habitat improvements are phenomenal and there are additional habitat improvements/ecological improvements up to 1km upstream. I am happy to provide information about these for engagement purposes.

Fisheries department (EA) - The features you refer to, these islands, have formed due to deposition of silt. The failure of the sluice is an example of how the river would renaturalise. The features upstream will form a new area. The islands have stagnant water/silt– weirs on the Kent were historically drained, which would have let these materials wash through.

Biodiversity group- There is a mosaic of habitat in the immediate vicinity. There is also the aesthetic issue and visual receptors. I wonder if there is a compromise to be had in maintaining these islands if the weir is removed for residents and amenity value.

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Kent Angling - It is a significant weir. Yes, it is one removal but the weir is an issue for all species and in all flow conditions, upstream and downstream. It isn't just large Salmon that have the issue, it is significant barrier that has significant impacts for all species.

The removal must be a really good move for improving habitat and improving biodiversity.

CRRS programme manager (EA) – Why this weir? There is a preconception that because there is a ranked list of weirs that you have to work in order. This is just the start of weirs of the Kent and yes there was landowner opportunity, which we are looking for all the time. We were not going to turn down an opportunity like this because it isn't number one on the list. If we manage to take this weir out it will give us the momentum to focus and fund other weir removals/improvements on the Kent in the future; this is whole catchment approach. There is this view that fish passes assist with migration but no fish pass is good. The impacts of Bowston removal would be massive and going forward would help propel the CRRS on the Kent and look at further removals which will have cumulative benefits for species that are in decline.

Biodiversity group - It will be a task to persuade residents.

Lakeland Canoe Club – Agree with everything. Especially amenity value improvements and biodiversity for the Kent. It is the process however, that needs sorting out.

Kent Angling- Historically, there were only mature fish in the pool above the weir. It was thought that Kent Angling had bad practices and perhaps that was the case – before catch and release was brought in 80-90% of fish were killed. Now, 87-90% are being returned.

But this removal isn't just about fish migration, it is eel migration and number of other species. It is a significant barrier for migration.

Yes, there may be objections locally, but what is affecting these perceptions? It seems we are all in agreement about the benefits so what can we do to work together and help residents understand the benefits of this removal?

Biodiversity group – There is confusion locally and perceptions about this project as part of a larger programme. There is the need for active persuasion - there needs to be some additional effort put in to do this.

Fisheries department (EA) - reply to **Kent Angling**

From a fisheries point of view – this is not a place we have a lot of issues. There were two people caught illegally fishing at Bowston. As we know in low flows fish cannot migrate upstream and are therefore vulnerable to poaching.

Amenity point of view – The weir pool is a place where young anglers go and learn to fish.

Further discussion may be needed with local angling clubs about differing opinions to look at this from all sides. There is a Brown Trout pool upstream of the weir, so not all pools will not be lost.

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SCRT reply – Any/all stakeholders were invited to be added to the mailing list. We have not had many responses from fishing clubs/anglers in the local area.

Fisheries department (EA) - Perhaps there is more we can do to engage with those that have not come forward.

Kent Angling- I would be happy to talk with Burneside angling, with SCRT, about the removal.

SCRT reply – Happy to do so. Also offer to Biodiversity group – regardless if it is through CRRS or not, SCRT is very willing to assist the group with biodiversity on the Kent, if they require our assistance.

South Lakeland Flood Action Group – How will the work impact flooding on the area?

SCRT reply - Flood risk assessment completed- came back flood neutral.

CRRS programme manager (EA) - I am also going to bring in Geomorphologist from the EA here- What about sediment transport?

Geomorphology (EA) – It has been a decade since the weir sediment was drawn down. If removed, the materials will have a better gradient and there will be less obstruction. There are 14 weirs on the Kent and currently there is interruption with the sediment transport, but this removal would be the first step to better this movement and there will be approx. 1km of better gradient and the river will sculpt its own highs and lows. It will create better hydraulic environments, roughen the flow, better fish habitat. There will be a slight speeding up on the river downstream but locally it will reduce the flood level as there will be a compensatory bed readjustment/redistribution downstream. The removal would stop big blockages that occur behind the weir. Bowston is a big barrier and it has a big bed level, at least locally. There will be an improvement as there will be a hazard reduction of flood.

Biodiversity group - Storm Desmond there was a backup behind the bridge not the weir. There was 1 house that was flooded beyond the weir due to sewage area being flooded. There was no flooding elsewhere. The sediments/large pebbles will move, there will be a reduction of flood risk due to the regrading effect.

South Lakeland Flood Action Group – Is the flood risk assessment for all of Bowston or just the weir?

SCRT reply- It refers to Bowston weir only but does cover a longer stretch upstream and downstream to take into account the regrading effects.

Fisheries department (EA) -Redd counting- For monitoring purposes, happy to include Bowston in the Autumn redd counting plans 2021 if removal occurs.

Background- Cowan Head to Burneside dam, there are no redds reported here. The dam has effects on spawning. The islands, there are no redds from here to Cowan Head. There are very little from Bowston weir to the bridge. Below the bridge they were very good but the flooding after SD caused this to become boulder and now not so good.

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There are redds where the beck comes into the Kent below this. There are also Salmon redds on the right bank below near the bend in the river.

Geomorphologist (EA) - *I will also be monitoring the site over time after removal to monitor in channel habitats and understand how it is adjusting/developing.*

This information will be sent to stakeholders and it will also inform future weir removals/improvements.

It should be noted that all weirs and their effects are all different and behave differently.

CRRS programme manager (EA) - *Post weir removal – We will be conducting walk over surveys to assess the different types of habitats created, this will link with the work by EA Geomorphologist and information can be made available to the public.*

SCRT reply - *There is technical information on the SCRT website about the effects of weirs, including evidence and reports, this will be added to as and when further information becomes available.*

CRRS programme manager - *What about the timeline of work, has this been made available?*

SCRT reply - *The timelines have been updated in LCEP on the SCRT website.*

Lakeland Canoe Club - *We would like to be informed of timelines, to inform members that there may be longer portage for a while, if removal goes ahead. We also want to know about safety and navigation when the time comes.*

South Lakeland Flood Action Group - *Have the residents been informed that this meeting was happening?*

SCRT reply - *This interest group was a separate meeting to the residents meeting. It would have been unmanageable to have residents and interest groups all together this is why this approach has been adopted. It allows for a more concise format.*

South Lakeland Flood Action Group - *I still think resident representatives should have been invited.*

SCRT reply - *We acknowledge your comment. To confirm, the agreed approach in the Local Community Engagement Plan was to hold focus group meetings. This is one. A residents meeting was held at the end of February just before COVID restrictions. This meeting was due to be held in March/April 2020 but delayed for obvious reasons.*

Close meeting

Key points will be evaluated and noted as soon as possible.

Areas of concern will be evaluated and noted as soon as possible.

Further meeting/s for all parties.

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*Arrange local meeting with anglers with Kent Angling representative and SCRT if needed.
SCRT to arrange meeting with biodiversity representative to go over LCEP.*

Thank you for joining.

End.

CONTACT US

Please contact us at admin@scrt.co.uk if you have any questions and we will do our best to answer them as soon as possible.

All information and updates to date can be found on our our website: <https://scrt.co.uk/what-we-do/current-projects/bowston>