

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



Since our initial question and answer document in April, we have received feedback and further questions from local residents and the wider community regarding our Bowston weir removal proposal. We have provided answers to the frequently asked questions below for you;

ISSUE DATE: Friday, 26 July 2019

“WHY REMOVE BOWSTON WEIR?”

It has been remarked that our initial question and answer document regarding the Bowston weir removal did not provide a thorough explanation of why Bowston weir is being proposed for removal. The Cumbria River Restoration Strategy is a programme that delivers river restoration remedies across three SSSI/SAC Catchments in Cumbria. Studies have provided a foundation of knowledge regarding restoration and the benefits it can offer;

Jacobs Fluvial Audit 2010

In 2010 Natural England commissioned a fluvial audit of the River Kent catchment which produced targeted site-specific reach scale restoration action plans. The resulting restoration vision identified that, despite the largely rural nature of the catchment, the river Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) units are significantly affected by historic modifications to the river channel (for agricultural and industrial purposes) which have resulted in changes to the river habitats (Jacobs, 2010). Physical modifications, such as bank reinforcements, weirs and embankments and their associated impacts, have been identified as being key pressures, responsible for the Unfavourable Condition of river units. This report informed a number of project proposals that SCRT, EA and NE have since been involved in.

River Kent and Tributaries SSSI and River Kent SAC Report, Atkins 2015

Later, a further study, again commissioned by NE in 2015 focussed on 14 weir structures within the River Kent & Tributaries SSSI/SAC to identify the extent of disruption to the natural flow and sediment regime and therefore the natural ecological habitat of the River Kent catchment. It was hoped that this study would help initiate projects to yield real benefits towards SSSI units achieving Favourable Condition. This would be achieved by removal or remediation of weir modifications to improve river continuity. The study involved the geomorphological, ecological and engineering assessment of the 14 structures, including Bowston weir and considered a number of options for each. This assessment then ranked the weirs based on these scores to help guide further investigations. However, prioritisation at this level cannot assess everything that is required; it has to be a guide only that demands information gathered by observation and further assessment to hone such rankings. For example, establishing ownership of these weirs is not always straightforward. These are often very aged structures with records lost or incomplete. Even where ownership can be established it doesn't always lead to the necessary

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).

permissions to take investigations further. Therefore, a flexible approach to opportunities for all these weirs has to be adopted.

Further Study

Consequently, further detailed option appraisal work was then scheduled for Bowston, Helsington and Cowan Head weirs. Feasibility studies have been conducted at Bowston and Helsington weirs but the Cowan Head investigations have not yet taken place and there currently is no funding to advance these further. For now, Bowston weir is our focus and has advanced to a final design. The investigations into the weir removal proposal has been supported by the weir owners, James Cropper PLC but at the time of writing there is no agreement yet in place to take the proposal to the next stage.

“WHY JUST REMOVE THE ONE WEIR? REMOVING ONE WEIR WON’T HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT”.

There has to be a starting point and this proposal is not an isolated endeavour. It is the ambition of the River Restoration Strategy that all opportunities for weir removal identified by the 2015 report are investigated and similarly progressed to removal wherever possible. Achieving Favourable Condition in the longer term of the River Kent SAC/SSSI will depend on the removal of redundant structures such as Bowston Weir and this will be an important driver for securing funding. Funding opportunities in the current political climate have become much tighter. For now, removing this structure will start to contribute to the recovery to Favourable Condition and monitoring post removal will provide important data to determine benefits of removal. This in turn will provide evidence when future funding does become available to support further weir removals on the River Kent SSSI/SAC.

“THE PRICE FOR REMOVAL IS TOO HIGH”

The cost of removing any weir, especially one that requires a particularly sensitive approach on a SSSI/SAC riverine site will undoubtedly incur high costs. Species protection, disposal of deposits, bank protection, silt control, monitoring as well as contractor costs all contribute to the total. However, we have been successful in attracting funding support through The Water Environment Grant (WEG). This is European sourced funding and is perhaps a final opportunity to attract these funds for the benefit of UK rivers and wildlife.

“THERE WILL BE NO BENEFIT TO THE FISH, THE FISH PASSES ARE GOOD ENOUGH”

Where present, fish passes on old weirs are commonly old passes themselves. These passes were designed and constructed at a time when little thought was given to any species other than salmon and

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).

sea trout. Salmon and sea trout are of course uniquely adapted to the concentrated flows that these passes often provide. They can swim at high speed in short bursts and can leap clear of obstacles but even they can have difficulty negotiating these structures. However, there are of course other species, for example; lamprey, loach, bullhead etc. that unlike the fast and powerful migratory salmonids, are not so well adapted to negotiate these manmade obstacles. Whilst many live the entirety of their lives within the river, they still need access up and down its reaches to fulfil certain functions e.g. to feed, to spawn etc. These old fish passes are therefore very difficult for many of these species to negotiate and in some cases are completely impassable to them. The ideal way to provide optimum connectivity for all riverine species and to improve the natural form and function of the river is, where possible such as in the case of a redundant weir, to remove the fish pass completely along with the structure on which it sits.

“I DON’T FEEL LIKE MY VIEWS ARE BEING REPRESENTED. HOW DO I HAVE MY SAY?”

It is important to note that at present the Bowston weir removal proposal is currently a proposal only, i.e. we do not yet have an agreement with the owners to move this to a formal application.

Consequently, the earliest date we would now be able to remove the weir is June 2020.

Our intention is to be transparent and to keep you informed. You have the opportunity to raise concerns or ask further questions by contacting SCRT directly at admin@scrt.co.uk. We will respond to each message we receive.

If we gain the permissions we seek we will then make a South Lakeland District Council Planning Application. This is the formal stage and there will be a public notice. You will have an opportunity through this to lodge your own formal statement.

Independently of this SCRT will offer opportunities to talk with residents and interest groups to help understand the wider views within the community. In the meantime, we continue to endeavour to inform and update local residents, fishery interests, local and neighbouring parish councils and other interested parties of our proposals’ progress.

“IT IS AN ATTRACTIVE STRUCTURE THAT HAS BECOME PART OF THE HERITAGE OF THE AREA”

We fully appreciate that Bowston weir is important to a number of local residents and to some members of the communities in the surrounding area. Unfortunately, redundant structures like Bowston weir may require expensive maintenance or repair work in the long-term or else they are at risk of failing. Sudden failure of a weir carries its own risks, such as causing damage downstream and loss of wildlife. Removing the weir respectfully and in a controlled manner, with consideration for the environmental benefits, is preferred to seeing it become gradually weakened and then ultimately fail.

Also, if the weir removal proposal does move forward we would be very interested to hear views on what actions could be considered to mark the weir site for posterity.

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).

“HOW DO WE FIND OUT FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT PROPOSAL?”

We will be updating our website on a regular basis to add any news about the proposal, prior to any formal public consultation. After this, as per our local community engagement plan, information will be presented in various formats to inform local residents and the interest groups known to us.

“OTHER WEIRS ARE MORE AT RISK RIGHT NOW”

As discussed earlier, ownership of such structures cannot always be easily established or permission granted, to allow for the progression of necessary investigations; hence the need to adopt a flexible approach.

It is important to note that the structural integrity of any weir is firmly the responsibility of the structure owner/s.

“DO YOU HAVE EXAMPLES OF SIMILAR WEIR REMOVALS?”

For rivers which have been impacted by human modifications, weir removal can have great benefits for river condition and local wildlife; and may also have flood risk benefits.

Here are some great examples and guidance documents for your reference;

<https://environmentagency.blog.gov.uk/2018/02/27/weir-removal-leads-to-enhanced-salmon-habitat-in-just-one-month/>

<https://westcumbriarivertrust.org/projects/ennerdale-mill-weir-removal>

<https://www.therrc.co.uk/why-restore>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/weir-removal-lowering-and-modification-a-review-of-best-practice>

INFORMATION

Local Community Engagement Plan- SCRT are producing a Local Community Engagement Plan on the Bowston Weir Removal Proposal for publication in August that will indicate the aims and objectives of our plan in relation to public engagement.

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).

CONTACT US

Please contact at admin@scrt.co.uk if you have any further questions and/or feedback regarding the proposal. Any and all updates to the proposal can be found by visiting our website: <https://scrt.co.uk/what-we-do/current-projects/bowston>