

South Cumbria Rivers Trust (SCRT) work 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 – residents meeting 2020



ISSUE DATE: Monday 2nd November 2020

South Cumbria Rivers Trust (SCRT) met with Bowston residents on 27th February 2020, to gauge responses to our proposal to remove Bowston weir. 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.

Please accept our apology for the delay in publishing this document.

Date: Thursday 27th February 2020, St Oswald's church meeting room, Burneside.

Attendees: Two representatives from South Cumbria Rivers Trust and twenty-eight local residents including representatives from Burneside Parish Council, South Lakeland District Council and Kendal Angling Association.

AGENDA:

Welcome by resident/co-organiser

Presentation from South Cumbria Rivers Trust Ltd— "Why Bowston weir?"

Resident/Professor presentation— "Why Bowston weir?"

Questions and comments from attendees

End

Welcome by local resident who organised the event with SCRT.

- Resident not in favour of the Bowston weir removal proposal.***
- The weir is an attractive and desirable asset much valued by local residents, walkers and kayakers alike.***
- The weir is a relic of the area's industrial past. There has been a weir standing at Bowston since 1874.***
- Pictures displayed of the pool upstream of the weir and its associated wildlife.***

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- *The sluice gates of Bowston weir were damaged (in 2017) - photographs used to convey how the river might look if the weir were to be removed. (NB: The picture taken of the damaged sluice gates were during low summer flows).*
- *The possible owner of Cowan Head weir was mentioned. They may also be the owner of the development site at the Cowan Head weir.*

Introduction from SCRT

- *Put the weir removal proposal within the context of a highly valued river system both in national (SSSI) and international (SAC) terms and the detriment caused to the ecology and natural river processes of this special river by historic human modifications including the redundant weir structure at Bowston.*
- *Recap on the Local Community Engagement Plan- co-written between SCRT and the Bowston residents to reinforce our commitment to be seen to be transparent and to offer opportunities for all to have their say and to contribute wherever possible to agreed outcomes.*
- *Reinforced SCRT's position as an environmental charity to meet its own aims and objectives to conserve, protect and rehabilitate where necessary the aquatic environments of south Cumbria and how the River Restoration Strategy and the proposals to remove weirs wherever possible fits these aims.*
- *Update on the current status of the project progress and SCRT concerns re the dwindling time to deliver during 2020 and the associated possibility of loss of funds.*
- *SCRT Director, subsequently presented the viewpoint of SCRT and rationale for selecting Bowston for weir removal, using the SCRT presentation 'Why Bowston weir?' This was planned in response to this repeated challenge from the community, where previous explanations have not fully addressed the question.*
- *The presentation explained that Bowston is not a random selection but follows a strategic and prioritised order commencing with the Jacobs walkover survey in 2010 and later the Atkins weir report; reports can be found on the SCRT website— <https://scrt.co.uk/what-we-do/current-projects/bowston/>*

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Introduction from **resident** and visiting **Professor** to the University of Edinburgh, School of Engineering.

- Presented using a presentation also entitled “Why Bowston weir” in support of those residents who do not support the removal proposal. He put forward questions to SCRT and proposals for why the weir should be maintained.

Questions/Challenges to the proposal—

- Burneside Weir is not targeted for removal
- SCRT reply: Correct. Burneside weir is not a redundant structure. It continues to supply water to the paper mill and wasn’t considered for assessment.

- If an abstraction licence is in place does this prevent SCRT from acting?

SCRT reply: No – it depends if the abstraction licence is being used.

- If the weir owners say no to removal, do SCRT then walk away?

SCRT reply: We would have to, yes. However, we would keep revisiting weirs on the Kent catchment, especially if we find there has been a change of ownership and/or circumstances which would allow for the possibility of removal.

- There were then slides referring to connectivity and how the Bowston Weir removal would only impact and improve 2km. Leading to the recurrent question of ‘Why Bowston?’.

SCRT reply: The proposal to remove Bowston weir and the decision chain that has been followed to reach this point is covered in SCRT’s earlier presentation “Why Bowston weir”. The full presentation can be viewed on request. While its removal may be considered to offer limited improvements to natural river processes, habitat and free migration of species, these improvements nevertheless would be realised through its removal thereby providing immediate benefit to local wildlife. For the future, the Cumbria River Restoration Strategy will be working towards other weir removals on the river system and as these become realised the cumulative gains become increasingly significant.

- The removal of Stramongate weir might offer considerably more benefit than the removal of Bowston weir.

SCRT reply: The assessment of Stramongate weir (please see the earlier link to the Atkins report “River Kent & Tributaries SSSI/SAC Final Report”) found that the technical feasibility of removing this weir was low. This is due to infrastructure (road bridge, bankside buildings upstream and a pipeline crossing) at risk through river bed adjustment following its removal.

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Questions and Discussion from the floor.

Resident Question: *The removal of the weir will create new river habitat but what about the loss of the backwater habitat now present?*

SCRT reply: *The backwater habitat currently created by the weir is unnaturally created by the weir and is only available to those species that can access it. It is also an impediment to the downstream migration of salmon and sea trout smolts on their journey out to sea; they are particularly vulnerable to predation caused by delays in migration at weir structures. The weir removal will provide an increased diversity of flow types and associated species it can support and the upstream and downstream migration barrier for all species will be removed.*

Resident (& SLDC Councillor) statement

- *Believed all weirs to be a community asset and that they had a big role to play in carbon reductions by providing clean hydropower.*
- *Weirs should be regularly cleaned by the EA to provide a buffering effect against increasing storm events and high flood flows.*
- *Issue raised of the perceived “benefit” of acting as gravel traps and “holding back water”*

Resident Statement

- *Cowan head currently has a fish pass that is badly maintained by the EA. The residents of Bowston maintain the fish pass themselves. (For example; during the sluice gate collapse in 2017).*

Resident Question: *Would the money not be better spent on flood defences?*

SCRT reply: *The Cumbria River Restoration Strategy aims to combine multiple benefits within its project proposals e.g. natural river processes and other habitat improvements, removal of barriers to migration, improvement to SSSI units and, of course, flood benefits where possible. However, it is not always possible to achieve such a blend of all these elements as every site location provides its own unique balance. Our investigations have found that the Bowston weir removal proposal is flood neutral. That is, there are neither significant improvements or detriment to flood risk posed by its removal. The other benefits described with this proposal remain significant to the Strategy and also meet the criteria of the funder.*

Resident Statement

- *Homeowner mentioned the possible damage to their house. The resident wanted to know if there would be compensation if this was to happen. There is also the risk of not getting insurance again.*
- *In their opinion, removal would be criminal.*

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Resident Statement:

Visitors come specifically to view the weir because of its beauty and sound of the weir, which the resident deemed very important.

Resident Statement:

· Counter argument to the above statement. Even without the weir in place the river would still be beautiful. There must be a balance.

Resident Question: *Do SCRT have the funding for the bed and check dams?*

SCRT reply: Yes.

Resident Question: *Had SCRT considered the amount of gravel that would need removing?*

SCRT reply: Yes. This was detailed in the options appraisal and final report created by cbec. This report can be found on our website; <https://scrt.co.uk/what-we-do/current-projects/bowston/>

Resident Question: *What about the Kendal Flood defence scheme? Will the flood defence scheme at Sandy bottoms counteract the good work SCRT aim to do through Bowston weir removal?*

SCRT reply: SCRT have not been directly consulted about the plans for phases 2 and 3 of the Kendal Flood Relief Scheme. However, SCRT's understanding is that these proposals involve the forming of flood flow storage areas on the main River Kent above Kendal. Our understanding is that they will operate only at times of high flows to protect homes and businesses at risk of inundation and that normal river processes and migration of fish and other species will be unimpeded at all other times. SCRT will comment on these plans, when available, should we consider that they present a risk to the River Kent & Tributaries SSSI/SAC and/or don't meet with our aims and objectives as a Trust.

Resident Question: *What about the installation of a full technical fish pass for coarse fish species?*

SCRT reply: A full technical fish pass still presents difficulties. There are liability and cost considerations in terms of installation and ongoing maintenance of a full technical fish pass built into an old weir. The removal option will allow unimpeded migration of fish and other species at all flows and importantly will encourage natural river processes to restart. This also removes any future maintenance liabilities for an ageing structure.

Resident Statement:

· The Burneside weir is not owned by Croppers Ltd but a relation under the name of Ellergreen Ltd.

Resident Question: *How will SCRT relay information?*

SCRT reply: As detailed in the Local Community Engagement Plan, SCRT will use a number of

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platforms to relay information about the proposal. These are subject to change but currently include; SCRT website (main source of information), e-leaflets, focus-group meetings, e-mail correspondence and social media platforms.

End of meeting

- *Thank you for attending this meeting.*
- *Update, including meeting notes will be formulated and shared among the attendees/residents/stakeholders within a few weeks.*
- *End.*