ALTON
TOWN COUNCIL

King's Pond – The Next Steps in Deciding the Way Forward

This Briefing Paper has been prepared as an update - Issued on 24th October 2024

A report on King's Pond, commissioned by Alton Town Council (ATC) in 2022, and the public consultations that followed were controversial. In January 2023, ATC resolved to conduct more investigations. These investigations are complete and the possible ways forward can be considered again.

The King's Pond site has been a public amenity since the 1960s, valued by the local community for its landscape, wildlife, peace and quiet, and for offering a piece of countryside in the town. Our common objective must be to enhance and maintain the site in the most sustainable way for the well-being and enjoyment of current and future generations.

What are the problems?

The River Wey carries material from upstream and deposits it in King's Pond. The pond is heavily silted and is now very shallow in some parts.

The silting is a continuous process. If we do nothing the pond will eventually be filled with silt.

Water levels in the pond fluctuate, partly due to changes in water volumes and partly due to frequent blockages of the grille where the water flows out. This has caused erosion of the banks.

The pond was formed by the construction of a dam in the River Wey. The water flows out over a weir. The pond and weir block the normal life and functions of the river. Fish and other aquatic life cannot move up or down stream past the weir. The river deposits silt and gravels in the pond instead of carrying them away downstream as it should do naturally.

The river downstream is adversely affected by the pond. Chalk streams such as the Wey are spring fed and the stream water is cool. However, while it is held in the pond, the water warms up and the large numbers of wildfowl and pond fish change the nutrient content of the water that flows out over the weir in to the river downstream. These temperature and nutrient changes have a negative effect on the chalk stream ecology.

What have we learnt from recent investigations?

To restore the pond to the depths achieved by the dredging in 1996, there is approximately 10,000m^3 of silt to be removed. This is similar to the amount removed last time.

The silt is polluted with chemicals from road run-off and with high levels of lead and zinc. It would be acceptable for ordinary landfill but is not usable for agriculture, allotments or gardens. It can be re-used on site but would have to be covered with a layer of cleaner material.

ATC appointed Water Environment Limited to study the feasibility of removing the weir. In their report they conclude that the weir could be removed and they have described the options this would make available to us.

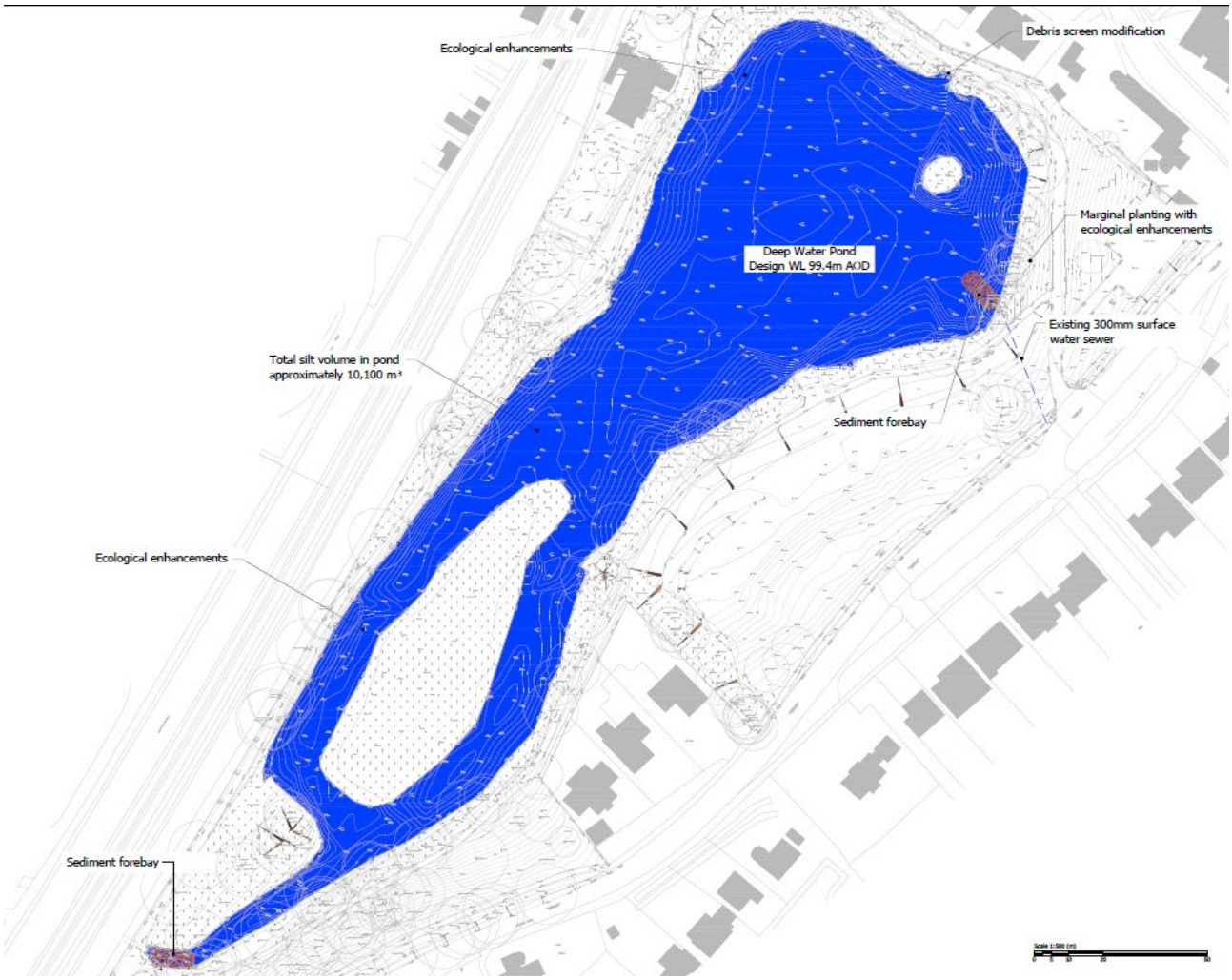
South East Water are considering improvement works to the Wey including how to reduce the silting problems at Brick Kiln Lane near the source of the river.

All surveys and reports are available on the ATC website by going to www.alton.gov.uk/kings-pond-update/.

Our Options

Any works at King's Pond will be subject to statutory regulations, approvals and permits. This may affect the viability or scope of options we may consider.

The Dredging Option: one vision for King's Pond is, of course, keeping the pond in its current form after dredging to remove the silt.



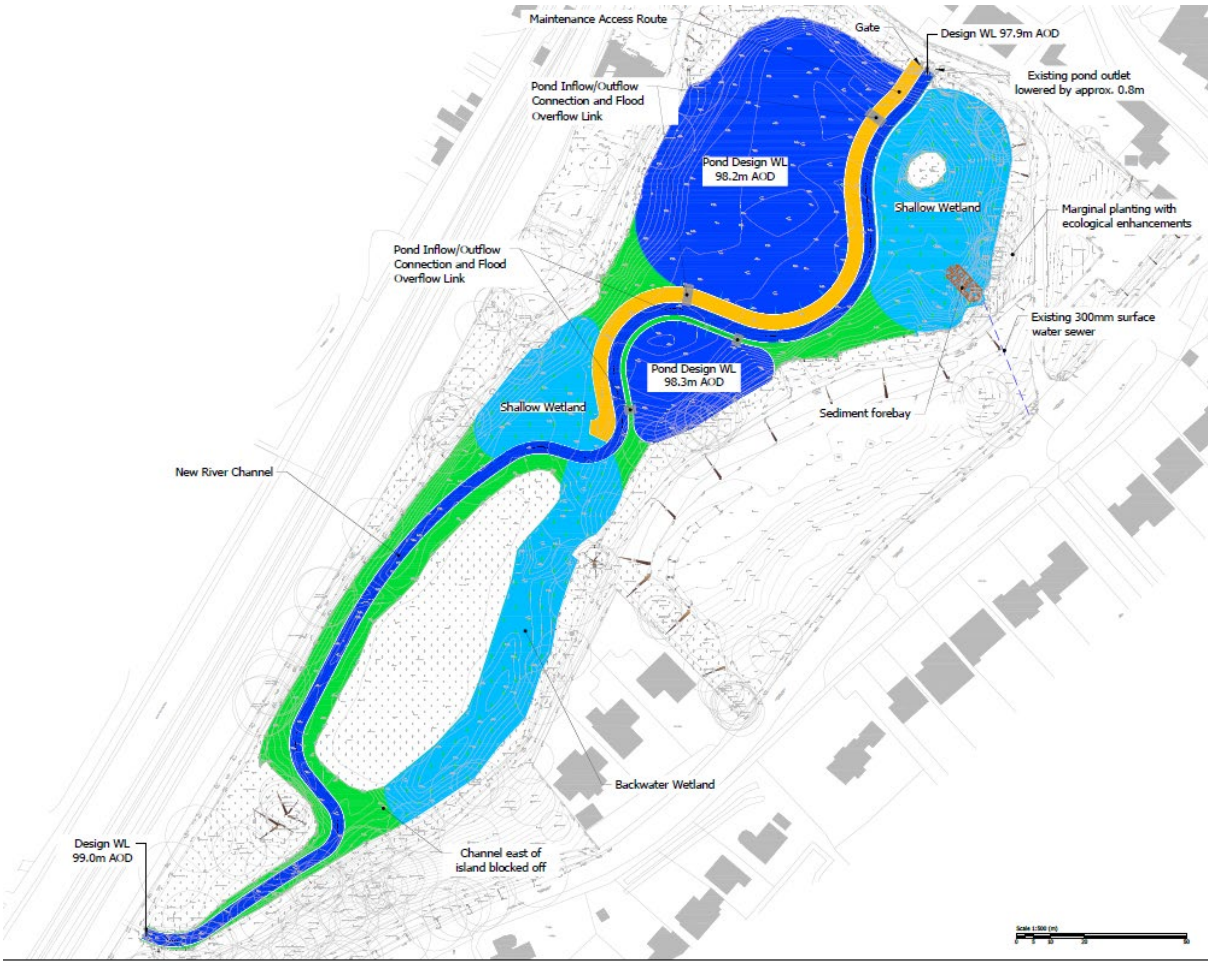
Drawing 2a King's Pond restored after Dredging

The associated work would include improvements to the weir to reduce blockages and fluctuations in water level, reinstatement and strengthening of the banks and islands. Some silt capture could be achieved, particularly on local drainage. Ecological improvements could be included with marginal planting, reed planting and creating small wetland areas. Improvements in the woodland, grassland and paths around the pond would also be part of the project.

Although dredging would be disruptive in the short term, many residents will see the main advantage of this option being the least change to the existing wildfowl population and other characteristics of the pond. And the pond would stay a similar size. Another advantage is that it is a low-risk option as we know what the finished project would look like!

The main disadvantage is that it is not a sustainable solution – silt would continue to accumulate in the pond and eventually it would need dredging again. It wouldn't remove or reduce any of the negative impacts that the pond has on the Wey. There would be no change in the range of habitats and biodiversity on the site.

The Pond & River Option: the alternative vision is of a restored river running though the site with ponds and wetland areas. Drawing 4a shows one possible arrangement. (Note that the yellow line is an unpaved maintenance access route on a grass bank)



Drawing 4a – Ponds, River & Wetlands

Pond banks would be reinstated and strengthened. A variety of pond, river, marginal and wetland habitats would be created. Improvements would be made to the surrounding woodland, grassland and paths

Advantages: This is a sustainable solution for the pond – with silting minimised there would be no need for future dredging. The negative impact on the River Wey would be removed. The connectivity between the upstream and downstream reaches of the river would be restored. Forming a river channel through the site, together with recent works upstream, would restore and greatly improve the condition of this important chalk stream. A wider range of habitats would improve biodiversity.

Disadvantages: The impact on the on existing pond. One large pond would be replaced by two or more smaller ponds so there may be a reduction in waterfowl numbers as populations find their new natural levels. There is the possibility that some species will move away and give way to others as habitats and biodiversities change. This option has some risk as we cannot be completely certain of what the completed project would look like until more work has been done.

The Next Steps

During November and early December, ATC will arrange some public briefing sessions on the possible ways forward for King's Pond and Councillors will also be willing to brief and discuss with any local interest groups that request a meeting.

ATC is already committed to conducting the technical and financial assessment of the Dredging Option.

ATC must now decide if the technical and financial assessment of the alternative Pond & River option should be conducted at the same time. Much of the work to be done is common to both options and they would be worked on in parallel. This will be on the agenda for the **Full Council Meeting on Wednesday 8th January 2025.**

There are some ecological surveys that are seasonal and should be started now. These will be necessary for any options. Approval of this expenditure will be on the agenda for the **Full Council Meeting on Wednesday 6th November 2024.**

At each stage ATC will re-affirm that any options taken forward will be presented for comparison and consideration at public consultation before any decision to proceed with work on site.