

KINGS POND DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS) - 3rd November 2022

The following list of questions and answers has been compiled to assist respondents to the draft management plan. The list will be updated as other questions arise from the drop-in sessions

Q) *I am struggling to find the details of the consultation on the Town Council website?*

A) We have put a direct link on our home page to make it easier to navigate. Please go to www.alton.gov.uk

Q) *I read in the local paper that the consultants being used by the Town Council are a fisheries specialist and therefore not expert in ponds and rivers.*

A) The consultants are specialists in pond and river restoration as well as fisheries. They have project managed a number of aquatic habitat restoration and management schemes and water quality improvement projects. Please visit their website <http://aquamaintain.com/> for more information on their work on ponds and rivers.

Q) *I have been told that the Council are working with the Environment Agency to improve the water quality, so the water can be sold to South East Water. Is this true?*

A) No. Water ceased to be abstracted from the source of the River Wey in 2003 when the WeySprings Pumping station near Flood Meadows was decommissioned. There are currently no plans to renew any abstraction licence in this area.

South East Water have confirmed that the water for Alton currently comes from Lasham (chalk groundwater catchment) and Windmill Hill (groundwater abstraction). South East Water have requested that if anyone would like to find out more about the future plans for water abstraction in the local area, they take part in the Water Resources Management Plan 2025 – 2085 consultation which is due to go live in mid-November. Links will be available on their website.

Q) *The water level of the river entering the pond is very low; is the Town Council blocking up the stream so that the pond dries out?*

A) No. The River Wey is a winterbourne chalk stream and as such the lowest water levels are around September to November each year. With the incredibly dry summer there is virtually no water coming out from the source of the river, just upstream from Flood Meadows and this is what has caused the low water level. Indeed, the river was dammed here to form the pond because historically this area never dried out.

Q) *If you cut off the river from the pond, will it just dry up and become a muddy swamp?*

A) There is no evidence that this would happen. In fact, if nothing were done to the current pond the silt problem would get worse and may risk it becoming dried up in places.

Q) *How does water come to be in King's Pond?*

A) The River Wey currently enters the pond by Ashdell Bridge and leaves via the weir. The pond also has several natural springs, which contribute to the water level. The precise location of all the springs is unknown but the Rangers will be able to show people an example of a spring which is near one of the banks, as part of the

drop-in sessions. Finally, the pond takes surface water run-off from surrounding properties and roads which flow into the pond when it rains.

Q) *I have read the plan but there is very little by way of data to suggest what might happen if taking the pond off-line took place – how would it effect wildlife and water quality?*

A) The main question being asked in the consultation is whether residents and users of the pond would be happy for the Council to undertake a feasibility study to ascertain if the pond could be taken off-line. Feasibility studies take time and money and there would be little point in commissioning such work if local people are not in favour of exploring this as a long-term option for the pond.

Q) *Why is the Council looking at this now?*

A) The Council, in discussions with the Environment Agency about dredging the pond, were introduced to the concept of taking it off-line as a more sustainable long-term solution to prevent having to keep dredging in the future, which would improve water quality and biodiversity. Hence, why this option is presented along with the alternative of dredging.

Q) *I do not have access to the internet, how can I read the King's Pond draft management plan and respond?*

A) Paper copies of the draft Management Plan and the consultation response form are available from the Town Hall or at the drop-in sessions. Please only use this method to respond if you do not have internet access as all manually completed forms will need to be uploaded to the portal by council officers.

Q) *I have read in the local paper that "If the pond were to completely dry, all the fish would die and most of the birds"*

A) There is no evidence that the pond would completely dry or that the fish and birds would die. The impact on wildlife will be explored as part of any feasibility study. The aspiration is to provide a better-quality environment to attract more diverse range of wildlife to the site.

As the river will not disappear the fish will not die out and some might actually do better because they will now be able to swim up and down stream (without the weir).

Q) *I work and therefore cannot attend the consultation sessions. How can I find out more?*

A) The consultation drop-in sessions have been arranged to offer a Saturday and Sunday session as well as weekdays and an evening. If you are unable to make any of these please email any questions you have and we can respond or call the office.

Q) *I enjoy a circular walk around the pond. If the pond is taken off-line or any of the other options pursued, will I still be able to do this?*

A) Yes, there are no plans to alter the circular path around the pond.

Q) *I've heard that the Town Council planning in filling in the pond and selling it to a property developer Is this true?*

A) No. We are not sure who started this rumour but it is categorically not true.

Q) ***ATC has deliberately encouraged the overpopulation of geese to engineer the deterioration of the pond, hasn't it?***

A) No. The Town Council uses a technique called egg oiling to control the population numbers breeding on site and has done so for over 20 years under licence from DEFRA, with an average of 40 eggs being oiled each year. The exceptions were in 2020 and 2021 due to covid and in 2019 when Council officers were prevented from oiling due to a local resident protesting on site. The window for egg oiling is very small and was unable to be rearranged in time.

Except for the birds with angel wing, the Canada geese are migratory and the council has no control of migratory birds landing at the site.

Q) ***I attended the first drop-in session but have a mobility issue – could you move the gazebo to nearer the car park so I don't have to climb the slope?***

A) Unfortunately, the grass areas by the car park are not ideal due to kerbs and slopes but we can certainly move the gazebo to near feeding station 2 which is flatter and on tarmac.

Q) ***What would happen to the fish if the pond were taken offline from the pond?***

A) As part of any feasibility study we would seek to understand the benefits to fish of taking the pond offline from the river by improving the water quality. The Fisheries Officer from the Environment Agency has been involved in a number of discussions with the Town Council over the last few years with a view to improving water quality and the habitat for fish and wildlife and has advocated taking the pond off-line.

Q) ***Why is the water quality of the River Wey important?***

A) The River Wey is a chalk stream and one of only 200 in the world. Chalk streams are the UK's rainforests and very important to the environment. Chalk streams have amongst the best water quality of any rivers in the world, but currently the river through Alton fails to achieve even 'Good' water or ecological status according to Environment Agency studies.

Q) ***I have been told that the on-line survey won't allow for more than one submission from the same household? What if more than one member of the family wishes to respond?***

A) The Survey Monkey has been set up to not allow repeated responses from the same IP address as an anti-spam measure; however, according to Survey Monkey you can submit from the same IP address so long as you use a different browser. So if one of you has used Google, you can make a second submission using Explorer or another browser.

Q) ***Dredging is a straight-forward solution to the problem. It will keep the pond as-is; the silt can be easily disposed of 'spread on farmland' and £265k isn't a lot of money to spend on it every 25-30 years.***

A) Dredging can be a very invasive option and is not straight forward. We have photographs from the last dredging in 1996. It is incredibly disruptive to wildlife habitats. There is little room to dispose of it on site and will mean the closure of the site for some months. If other options are not feasible or do not have public support then absolutely it will be considered.

Q) ***Why is do nothing not an option in the plan; it has been a pond for 200+ years without a problem?***

A) The Current Pond size dates from 1857 but the pond was self-cleansing when the paper mill was there, flushing the water through. The mill was sold in 1919, since then the silt problem developed exacerbated by the creation of tarmac roads and housing development. Dredging has been undertaken twice in the 1970s and 1996-7. If a do-nothing option is taken, the pond will continue to silt up and will eventually cease to be a pond.

Q) ***King's Pond is a wildlife haven, particularly for birds. What will happen to them in the new plans.***

A) This will be one of the questions specifically posed for any feasibility study. It is likely that taking the pond off-line may disrupt some habitats but they can then settle long into the future. Dredging the site may be an incredibly disruptive experience for the current bird population. With the dredging option, the birds' habitats will continue to be disrupted every 25-30 years.

Q) ***Will the proposals provide any benefits to wildlife?***

A) Absolutely. The conditions for the wildlife that live on site are just as important as the residents that use the site for recreation. It is anticipated that restoring the chalk stream of the River Wey will attract a greater diversity of birds and other wildlife than is currently at the pond.

Q) ***I've been told that taking the pond offline will destroy the island, which is the only "safe space" for the birds.***

A) This is incorrect, there are no plans to remove the island.

Q) ***Why does the report recommend translocation or culling for the Canada geese?***

A) The report does not advocate any particular way of "managing" the Canada Geese in fact we have had very divergent views from a few residents who love to go and feed them and others who want them removed as they leave a volume of faeces on the grass and the paths. We are looking for views from a wider audience, hence the inclusion in the draft management plan

Q) ***Would the plans have an adverse effect upon the bats that live on site?***

A) Bats are a protected species and any proposals arising from the feasibility study will need to ensure they compliant with environmental laws.

Q) ***Do you know what wildlife lives on site – I've read in the local paper that you are relying on old source material.?***

A) A bioblitz was undertaken in 2021, led by Hampshire Biodiversity and scientists from Reading University. The results have been published on our website. The results currently only show 15 species which rely on water for their habitat; by improving the water quality the biodiversity of the site will improve and attract more species. At present the county dragonfly recorder has stated the pond " is of minimal value for its wildlife."

Q) ***The draft management plan does not detail what biodiversity can be expected after the work. Why not?***

A) That is correct. The plan is asking people whether they would support a feasibility study into the concept of taking the pond off line, which would address questions such as this. Until such time as a feasibility study is undertaken we simply do not know what the options and outcomes may be. We are asking people if they would be prepared for the Council to spend funds on undertaking the feasibility study.

Q) ***Does the weir not prevent the pond from being taken offline?***

A) It might and engineers would need to explore under the weir in the first instance to see if it is able to be removed or for the plates in the weir to be lowered sufficiently to enable a free flow of river water

Q) ***Can't the council stop the silting up of the pond?***

A) Unfortunately not, not without creating an entire new drainage system for the local area to divert water run-off away from the pond. What we can do is provide marginal planting and use of materials at the water edge such as permeable Nicospan, to effectively try to filter the out the pollutants before they enter the water.