

Allsmoor Pond Refurbishment Bracknell Optimise Water LLP (working on behalf of Thames Water)

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Community Engagement

Project overview

Allsmoor Pond is a Thames Water asset, used as an offline balancing pond. The pond is used to attenuate local stormwater via surface runoff, flooding from the Bull Brook stream to the south and a surface water sewer which drains into the southern end of the pond and exits at the weir to the northern end of the pond. It is a popular spot for waterfowl and heron. The pond is part of a wider recreational area, and is a favourite for fishing, is enjoyed by dogwalkers passing through and is appreciated for its scenic and ecological value.

The need related to footpath safety. There were two 40 metre sections of brick retaining walls on the north and south side of this pond which had been slowly collapsing towards the pond, creating a safety hazard. The aim of the project was to find a design solution which would reinstate this wall and in a way which was in keeping with the surrounding environment.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

The pond is home to a range of species including hundreds of fish and a variety of waterfowl. However biodiversity is limited by the hard engineered nature of the pond with minimal marginal vegetation. Around the pond, the green, wooded areas have flourished under the management of Bracknell Forest council. Habitats include small areas of woodland (including some mature trees), scrub, grassland and reedbeds in two corners of the pond.

Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?

Thames Water has a responsibility to ensure its assets are maintained and managed. The pathway around the pond had become hazardous. As the pond is in an area of public recreation, it had become a matter of public safety and enjoyment. Optimise was appointed on behalf of Thames Water to resolve the situation. The scheme did not require planning permission.



Jenny Minford of Optimise on the Community Planting Day after completion of the footpath improvement works.

There was no requirement to undertake biodiversity enhancements, rather these enhancements were delivered through the motivation and professionalism of Optimise staff.

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

To refurbish the wall, a limestone revetment was built within the pond on both sides. The revetment, when the water levels in the pond are low, would be visible above the water line. A landscape architect was engaged to consider how to improve the visual appearance and enhance biodiversity. As such, coir rolls pre-seeded with riparian plant species including *Iris pseudoacorus*; *Caltha palustris*; *Carex acutiformis*; and *Lythrum salicaria* were placed within the rock revetment to soften the visual impact of the revetment.

The pond was further enhanced by a widening of the path to provide fishing bays as well as the provision of benches to allow members of the public to enjoy the pond.

After the works were completed, members of the public and Bracknell Forest council were invited to a Community Day hosted by Optimise. The Optimise team did some fundraising and sought donations from landscaping suppliers and this resulted in the provision of 200 bluebells, 200 daffodils, wildflower seeding, bird boxes, three cherry trees and tools and materials to create reptile hibernacula. The project team were invited out to help and did so in force! The team demonstrated enthusiasm for the task at hand which was shared by members of the public who were fully briefed on the project and the ecological benefits of the day. It was hopefully also an educational day as our ecologists were on hand to talk through the purpose of the hibernacula, the biodiversity value of our planting and the wider benefits to reptiles and nesting birds.

In addition to the permanent enhancement measures, during construction works, a number of mitigation measures were employed to minimise the impacts. A fish survey was undertaken to assess the health, size and population of the fish within the pond. Measures were taken including the use of an aquadam - a low impact technique to secure dry working conditions that avoids the noise and vibration of sheet piling, oxygen was artificially pumped into the pond to compensate for the turbidity, and water sampling was undertaken to ensure that the fish were not harmed.

Floodwater defence now perfect haven for wildlife

A BRACKNELL pond which plays a key role in reducing flood risk has been transformed into a wildlife haven thanks to a small army of volunteers and councillors.

Allsmoor Pond in Calfridus Way is connected to the Thames Water surface water network and stores excess rainwater and is also open to the public for fishing and nature watching.

But it was closed off for maintenance last summer so the crumbling walls could be rebuilt and the surrounding pathways improved.

Councillors Ash Merry, Chris Turrell and Isabel Mattick helped with the works last Friday.

Organiser Rachel Groves from Thames Water said: "We're delighted with how the pond looks and once the flowers and other plants begin to grow it will be better still. We know this is a much loved spot for people who live nearby and it's great that a pond which plays such an important role in how we manage rainwater can double up as a home for wildlife."

"Our thanks go to Councillors Merry, Turrell and Mattick for their help with the planting and also to those members of the community who came along to lend a hand. We're also grateful to Waitrose for kindly providing us with breakfast."

Cllr Ash Merry said the reopening of the pond was "a great start to the month" while Cllr Chris Turrell said it was a good morning's work and was glad the pond had finally been reopened to residents. Cllr Isabel Mattick described it as "a special place for everyone to enjoy".



L-R: Cllr Isabel Mattick, Cllr Ash Merry and Cllr Chris Turrell ready to begin planting bulbs around the newly refurbished Allsmoor Pond

Local councillors help out on the community planting day.

How would you best describe the project?

An enhancement.

Further information

Ongoing maintenance and upgrading of any Thames Water asset is important, however, at the heart of this project was the assurance to the public that this pond could still be enjoyed in a safe and hazard free environment.

This project gave Optimise, on behalf of Thames Water, the opportunity to give back to the local community by enhancing the existing recreational value of the site as well as improving biodiversity and highlighting opportunities for the public to interact and enjoy the nature around them.

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

My personal motivation was to ensure that the works were designed in a way which was sensitive to the ichthyology, the greater ecology and which did not detract from the recreational and aesthetic value of the pond. I was also eager to ensure that a positive lasting impression was given to the public.



Cherry tree planted on community planting day

Clockwise from right: (1 and 2) the collapsing hard engineered edge to the pond prior to works, with no edge vegetation; (3) The new benches and new pond edge, including coir roll.; (4) Finally, the coir roll planting has matured and a local resident enjoying the view provides feedback to Optimise.





Clockwise from top right: (1 and 2) the aquadam installed during construction to minimise noise, vibration and silt impact on fish. In (1) the oxygenation is visible; (2) The pre-planted coir rolls have established and Lythrum salicaria is a hit with bees and butterflies; (3) Bird box installed during community planting day.

