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ENHANCING STRAIGHTENED RIVER CHANNELS

3.4 Radical re-design from uniform, straight channel to a sinuous, multi-channel river

RIVER ALT

LOCATION – Knowlesley, Liverpool, Merseyside SJ 435927

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION – 1996

LENGTH – 140m

COST – £40,000

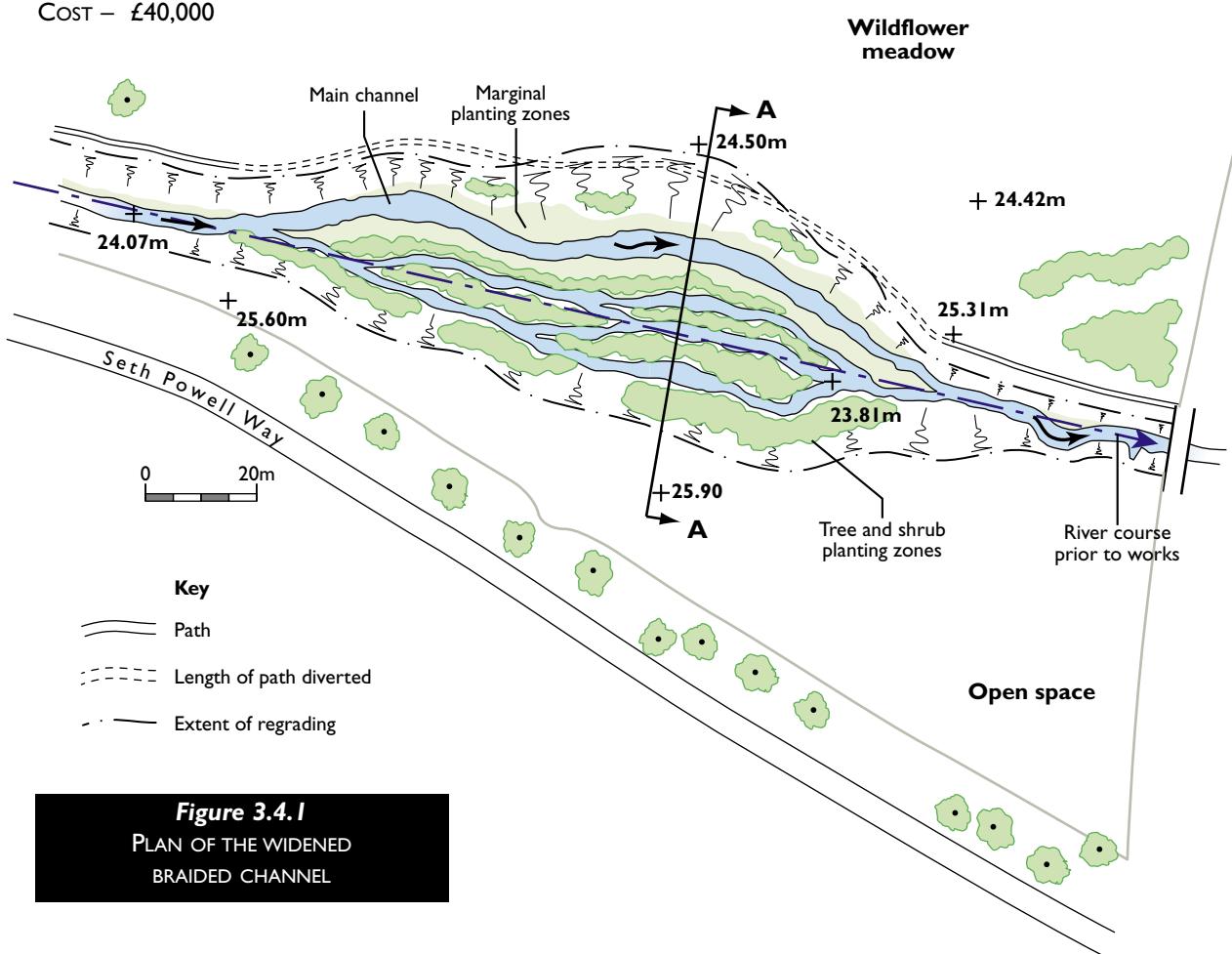


Figure 3.4.1
PLAN OF THE WIDENED BRAIDED CHANNEL

DESCRIPTION

The River Alt is a small (1.5-2m wide), low energy (1:1000) urban river. In the past the river has been re-sectioned, straightened and over-deepened. The rehabilitated section runs through an area of public open space having been previously realigned to follow the road edge, close to a housing estate. Improved water quality has resulted in fish returning to some parts of the system in recent years, but further improvements in wildlife value had been limited by the poor quality of the river habitat.

Consultation with local authorities, community groups and local schools took place during the design and construction phases. Options for rehabilitation

were constrained by existing planning permissions on part of the site and the existence of a wildflower meadow. The provision of public access was a very important element in the design.

The river flows beside a road and was constrained within a trapezoidal channel. Dense bankside growth often hid the small watercourse. An existing footpath on the left bank was set back from the river. A result of disposal of excavated material from the original construction of the course, the immediate bank was at a higher level than the surrounding land, effectively shielding the river from view.

As the river course moved away from the roadside, it presented the opportunity to create a wide (up to

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Trees, shrubs and marginal plant species

Trees at 2m centres	Shrubs at 1m centres	Marginals at ~ 4/m ²
White willow	Common osier	Purple loosestrife
Ash	Goat willow	Yellow flag
Oak	Hawthorn	Water plantain
Alder	Blackthorn	Common club-rush
Gean	Hazel	Common reed
Bird cherry	Dog rose	Water mint
Eating apple varieties	Honeysuckle	Gypsy wort
	Dogwood	Water forget-me-not
	Bramble	Brooklime

Trees and shrubs all 1+1 bare root transplants 600-900mm, ratio of 2:1 shrubs to trees. Random species groups of 3-5 trees and 5-7 shrubs.



30m) floodplain within the confines of the channel. By doing so this could open up the view of the river by removing the existing 'raised' bank.

DESIGN

The 1.5 metre 30 degree banks were excavated back on either side of the existing course, creating up to a 30m width of 'floodplain'. This work was carried out over 140m. The 'floodplain' comprises a 'main' channel and several braided channels separated by marginal berms. In order to achieve a matrix of channels, standing water and damp areas, interspersed by trees and shrubs, ground levels needed to vary. Due to the uncertainties of ground condition and in order to work with the natural conditions as much as possible, this was supervised on-site to avoid over-specification on the design drawings, and to allow for adjustments as necessary.

Bed levels were calculated from existing levels, constrained by a bridge at both ends and an outfall half way along the scheme. Fortunately the bed level corresponded to a clay layer, making a good guide for the contractors. Working in the wet also provided a good guide to relative levels.

The existing channel was narrowed to form the deeper of the braids. The new 'main' course was about 25% larger and deeper than the braided channels to encourage the majority of low-flows along this





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The excavated 'floodplain' area

route, and was located along the left bank, nearest to the footpath route. It was accepted that high flows would possibly alter this pattern and that such natural changes could take place due to the excess flood capacity within the new 'floodplain'.

The final bank profiles were as shallow as 1:25, connecting the low lying adjacent land by removing the existing raised edge. For a length of 50m the redirected footpath now cuts across the shallow bank slope bringing the public closer to the watercourse.

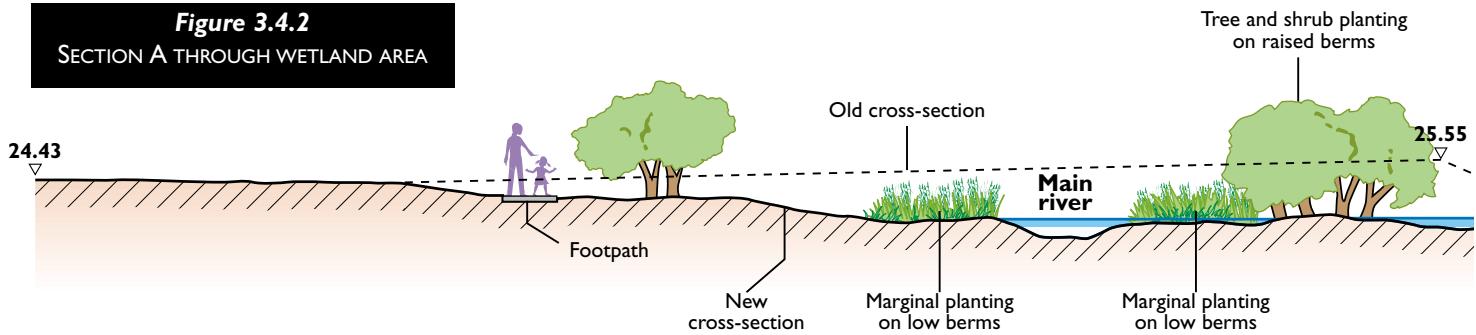
The shallow berms separating the braids and main course were planted with various riparian species

rather than relying on natural recolonisation, as there was little natural seed source upstream. In addition on some of the higher berms willow was planted to provide extra cover. A native grass and wildflower mix was used for the banks.

Spoil disposal had to be addressed at an early stage to permit such a large (9000m^3) 'floodplain' excavation. The nearby school planned to build an earth bank to prevent illicit vehicle access to its playing fields. By using 6000m^3 from the enhancement works to help the school achieve this, the project avoided a potential doubling of costs.

Figure 3.4.2

SECTION A THROUGH WETLAND AREA



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SUBSEQUENT PERFORMANCE 1996 – 2001

The planting has been successful, with the exception of some of the shrubs on the riverbank which were removed.

Though only indicative at this stage, on at least two occasions there has been a whole water quality class improvement between upstream and downstream on the site. Though not physically well suited to most fish, the number of sticklebacks has increased markedly.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that people are happy with the scheme. However, there is also evidence that some people were expecting something different. A short study is due in 2001 looking at the public response to the scheme.

When creating a wide, shallow and braided channel it is important to recognise the likely increase in urban rubbish deposited after flood events. If not properly managed this can seriously affect the success of the overall project, particularly from the public's viewpoint.

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A good diverse vegetation structure has developed along and between the channel threads

Wetland Area