
**SCRUTINY INQUIRY PANEL - PROTECTING, PRESERVING AND PROMOTING THE
RIVER ITCHEN IN SOUTHAMPTON**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 MARCH 2023

Present: Councillors Savage (Chair), Cooper, and White

Attended by hybrid: Councillors T Bunday, Moulton (Vice-Chair)

13. **PROTECTING, PRESERVING AND PROMOTING THE RIVER ITCHEN IN
SOUTHAMPTON - EXPLORING GOOD PRACTICE**

The Panel considered the report of the Scrutiny Manager detailing examples of good practice being employed to protect, preserve and promote urban rivers in the UK.

The Panel received the following representations:

Lindsay Pratt, Principal Planner, Glasgow City Council provided an overview of the River Clyde Strategic Development Framework (SDF) and advised that:

- The growth and prosperity of Glasgow is intrinsically linked to the River Clyde.
- De-industrialisation and economic contraction have impacted on the river corridor and Glasgow City inner-urban core.
- The re-invention of the corridor began in the 1980s, supported by significant investment and in 2005 by the River Clyde Flood Management Strategy which unlocked the redevelopment of derelict land and created cultural, leisure, educational destinations and employment and housing hubs.
- More recently there has been a shift to a knowledge economy, encouraged by the proximity to Glasgow University.
- The river provides a strong framework for regeneration. There are opportunities to promote clusters of related activity but the future of the corridor is inseparable from climate change, particularly with regard to a risk of flooding. A long-term strategic approach to deliver sustainable development was required that understands flood risks alongside placemaking, and sustainable flood resilient design.
- The wider planning policy context to the SDF involves the levels of the national, regional (Clydeside), and Glasgow City Development Plan. The River Clyde Corridor SDF is supplementary guidance to the City Plan operating at a larger scale than a masterplan.
- Challenges have included complex issues effecting the river corridor and growth. In a 1 in 200 year flood event the river would over top the quay wall in a number of locations.
- There are a high number of large vacant and derelict sites in prominent locations that impact on quality of place.
- Investment in repair and maintenance of infrastructure (particularly quay walls) has declined with impact on investment opportunities, bio-diversity and flood resilience.
- Poor Connectivity is caused by barriers, lack of continuous access routes and perceived lack of safety which prevents movement along, to and across the

river. The Clydeside Expressway dual carriageway limits access to much of the north of the river.

- It has taken a number of years to prepare the SDF, shaped by extensive consultation. Three identified priorities are promoting a design-led, placemaking approach to enhance and protect the townscape, heritage and environment of the river corridor while delivering a well-connected and liveable city.
- The agreed vision was that the river corridor will be a world-class destination, with an accessible waterfront and attractive spaces where people want to spend time. It will be climate-resilient and support a mix of uses. New houses and flats will be linked to existing neighbourhoods. The historic character will be protected and enhanced, while innovative design will help create a distinct identity. It will form part of a wider network of urban waterways, will support continuous walking and cycling routes, and be celebrated as the city's largest, continuous open space.
- Agreed SDF outcomes match themes in the City Development Plan of a vibrant river, a sustainable river, a connected river, and a green river. They seek to co-ordinate development activity and address the identified challenges.
- The SDF was adopted in 2022. It is providing policy and guidance for applications for developments through the plan's design principles and approach.
- The tidal River Clyde Flood Model has been updated enabling better understanding of tidal flood risk to 2100. More detailed design guidance has been developed (Designing with Water) including core principles but still a requirement for a placemaking aspect in designs rather than just flood resilient.
- The design guidance encourages private development proposed for the city centre river corridor to be set back from the river edge to enable walking and cycling routes to be established. The distance is not prescribed but 12m is optimum.
- The River Activation Programme stimulates interest and engagement with the river with a small grants scheme. There is an ambition to develop a river park.
- The SDF recognises that there are competing interests and the need to balance them and seeks to find a way forward whereby constraints are overcome.
- Glasgow benefits from City Deal Funding, levelling up funding, vacant and derelict land funding that is funding the River Activation Programme grant.
- The River Clyde is viewed as a continuous open space. Glasgow's Open Space Strategy recognises blue and grey space.

Debbie Leach, Chief Executive, Thames21 provided an overview of the impact that an environmental non-government organisation could have on the health and vitality of a river through working in partnership with communities and stakeholders and advised that:

- Thames21 developed from a partnership programme supported by Keep Britain Tidy, the Port of London Authority and others in the 1990s.
- It aims to involve communities in everything that they do.
- Thames21 has about eight thousand volunteers active each year and they use a range of approaches and activities to encourage and inspire people.

- This includes a citizen science project training and supporting communities to investigate, better understand and evidence the environmental challenges faced by the river using robust citizen data to influence change.
- The Thames21 engagement structure includes stages from introduce oneself to the river, to value the river, to understand the river, to act on behalf of the river, to sustained action on the river, to lead action to protect the river, to advocate for the wellbeing of the river and its communities.
- Most of Thames21's work is delivered in partnership with other organisations including ten Catchment Partnerships that Thames21 hosts or co-hosts.
- There is a need to build relationships with a complex array of stakeholders.
- Catchment Plans often have close links to local authority objectives. Catchment hosts can be a useful resource for local authorities by helping them with project development, consultation and funding applications.
- Thames21 works with universities and provides volunteers to gather data for research activity.
- Thames21 has a key relationship with Thames Water. The lack of investment in assets has created challenges similar to those experienced in the River Itchen. Thames21 volunteers provide evidence to enable Thames Water to respond quickly to issues. Thames21 are influential in encouraging behaviour change and hold Thames Water to account and play a role in working with local communities to bring pollution issues to the water company.
- In the last five years Thames21 has organised thirty six thousand volunteering opportunities; directly engaged one hundred thousand people with their local river; involved forty-four thousand children in educational activities; championed and expanded urban delivery of integrated constructed wetlands; introduced a new web of reedbeds across canalised London water courses; established natural flood management to protect urban communities; delivered innovative new evidencing work on the ability of nature based solutions to reduce river pollution; led the sector in analysing and using data on road pollution of rivers; removed one thousand tonnes of rubbish from the River Thames alone; developed nationally accredited technical courses for volunteers.
- Thames21 has recently secured designated bathing water status (DBWS) to two sites, with four more expected to follow. DBWS is an official way of recognising that a body of water (whether a beach, lake, or river) is a popular site for swimming, paddling, and other water-based activities.
- Achieving DBWS means that each year over the "peak bathing season" (May-September), the Environment Agency will test the site for pollutants. For any DBWS sites that do not meet regulatory standards, the Agency will investigate the sources of pollution to identify remedial measures.

Karen McHugh, Manager, Solent Forum gave an overview of the work of the Solent Forum coastal partnership and advised that:

- The aims of Solent Forum are to promote, facilitate and support integrated planning and sustainable management of the Solent, and to provide a broad based consultative forum.
- It is a multi-sector membership partnership that covers the Solent from Selsey Bill to the Hampshire/Dorset border and northern coast of the Isle of Wight. Work is carried out via a business plan.

- Solent Forum members include local authorities, harbour authorities and numerous other organisations covering environmental, social and business sectors.
- Southampton City Council used to be a forum member, and a member of the Steering Group, but withdrew in 2018 and it is the only key local authority that is not a member.
- Solent Forum provides information hubs, as well as delivering a number of projects and events.
- Solent Forum brings together often competing interests to develop a greater understanding of the problems and to determine collective solutions.