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

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 DECEMBER 2022

Present: Councillors Savage (Chair), Bunday, Cooper and Moulton (Vice-Chair)

Apologies: Councillors White

6. **APOLOGIES AND CHANGES IN MEMBERSHIP (IF ANY)**

Apologies were received from Councillor Ivan White.

7. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (INCLUDING MATTERS ARISING)**

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2022 be approved and signed as a correct record.

8. **PROTECTING, PRESERVING AND PROMOTING THE RIVER ITCHEN IN
SOUTHAMPTON - THE ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF THE RIVER**

The Panel considered the report of the Scrutiny Manager detailing the issues concerning the economic importance of the River Itchen in Southampton.

The Panel received the following representations:

Steven Masters, Harbour Master at Port of Southampton, Associated British Ports (ABP) summarised the key issues about vessel movements and wreck clearance in the River Itchen in Southampton as:

- Total commercial vessel movements recorded on the River Itchen south of Northam Bridge by the Southampton Vessel Tracking Service were 3,844 (2021), 3,238 (2020), 3,905 (2019).
- There is increasing propensity for vessels to be abandoned.
- There is no requirement to register vessel ownership.
- It would be challenging to keep a local register of vessels due to the high numbers in the Solent.
- Responsibility for clearance of abandoned vessels lies with the landowners where the vessel is located.
- During the past eighteen months nearly seventy wrecked, abandoned or illegally moored vessels have been removed by ABP and either sold or scrapped depending on their condition.
- ABP has invested over £500,000 in the wreck clearance project so far, and will continue to do more in 2023, whilst also undertaking increased patrols of river moorings to manage and prevent illegal mooring. Live aboard vessels present the biggest problem.
- Enforcing the rules on the river is difficult due to the number and nature of the various landowners and responsible organisations.
- ABP would welcome additional commercial development of the river, including an increase in moorings that are properly managed. This would limit illegal mooring and improve the appearance of the river.

Matthew Hill and Paulina Piotrowski, Economic Development Operations Managers, Southampton City Council summarised the key issues about the economic value provided by the industrial and business operations on and by the River Itchen in Southampton as:

- Southampton has a long history associated with the marine industry including the internationally significant port and port related activities, the Southampton Marine and Maritime Institute and Oceanography Centre, and a wide range of other marine industries including boat building and repair and yacht marinas.
- The sector depends on the limited number of sites which have access to the waterfront. It is important that these sites are safeguarded for marine uses to support the success and growth of the marine sector, including hi-tech and skilled marine activities.
- The Itchen Riverside area hosts a diverse range of businesses, local marine companies and institutions. It is estimated that there are between 500 and 550 businesses in the immediate area.
- Business sectors represented along the Itchen in Southampton include marinas, Southampton Dry Stack, marine aggregates, manufacturing, sports and leisure and educational establishments and training institutions.
- There are significant challenges in recruitment and training for the marine and maritime sector in Southampton and the Solent region. Action is required to develop and sustain a skilled workforce to enable these sectors to prosper.
- The Chamber of Commerce Local Skills and Improvement Plan is one important response.
- Business South is lobbying for changes to the Apprenticeship Levy to increase flexibility and to help people to relocate to work in maritime and marine industries.
- Co-ordinated by the Maritime and Transport Action Group, funded by the Solent LEP, ambassadors are going to schools to talk about the opportunities available in these sectors with the creation of the Freeport and the anticipated 16,000 additional jobs.
- A collaborative approach to addressing the skills challenge is required including British Marine (based in Southampton), Solent Freeport, business representative organisations, the City Council and through working with existing marine and maritime businesses.

Graham Tuck, Planning Policy Group Leader and Amber Trueman, Strategic Planning Manager, Southampton City Council summarised the key issues about how the draft Local Development Plan could impact the River Itchen in Southampton as:

- The emerging Southampton City Vision Local Plan with the Minerals and Waste Plan will guide planning applications for new development and will shape the city as a place to 2040 and beyond.
- Key policies and delivery issues in the emerging Local Plan relevant to the River Itchen include – Mineral and waste wharves, key transport connections, strategic flood defences (RIFAS) and environmental protection / enhancement, and potential release of some industrial sites.

- The Plan includes Waterfront Development Principles within a Waterfront Policy. The overarching criteria is to ensure the creation of a distinctive waterfront experience.
- The Waterfront Policy requires all development proposals within waterfront areas to ensure accessibility for all, work towards creating continuous waterfront walkways, cycleways and public spaces (potentially to link with the coastal footpath), create or enhance safe and attractive links to and from the waterfront, preserve and enhance views of the water and from the water, encourage a more distinctive and interesting skyline, be well-designed, attractive, safe and comprise high-quality materials, ensure appropriate, functional land use which is sensitive to the character and context of the area, not damage business interests of waterfront employment sites, compromise safety or conflict with biodiversity or flood risk policies.
- The Waterfront Policy supports marine leisure activities by safeguarding seven public hard, supporting proposals for marine leisure development and waterside recreation where there is no unacceptable conflict with water users, and restricts development on private waterside open space to private shore-based facilities and pontoons only.
- The Plan references five waterfront development areas – Ocean Village, Centenary Quay, Itchen Riverside, Weston Shore and Town Quay. Four of these areas, including the three sites on the River Itchen, have site-specific policies providing clear expectations for future development, ensuring positive change which fits with overall strategic aims for the city.
- The largest of the development areas is Itchen Riverside which currently plays a vital role supporting nearly 100 marine and industrial businesses plus water sports activities. It includes key waterfront regeneration sites, open space opportunities and residential areas. There is an opportunity for leisure-led regeneration linked to the football stadium and improved links to city centre and other waterfront areas. It includes nationally recognised Sites of Special Scientific Interest including important habitats and ecosystems. It requires flood alleviation works that will not prevent future development.
- The consultation period for the Draft Local Plan concludes on 3 January 2023.

To inform the final Local Plan and the Minerals and Waste Plan the Panel raised with the Strategic Planning Managers the following issues:

- The potential for an obligation for significant waterfront developments to have a docking station to facilitate the development of water taxi services.
- The potential to remove the safeguarding from the scrap metal site on Princes Wharf to help encourage relocation of the business to a suitable site.
- To consider the approach employed by Plymouth City Council to identify a financial value on the blue and green spaces to help aid decision making.
- To consider whether including a blue grid alongside the proposed green grid in the local plan to reflect the value of the water in the city.

Matthew Hill and Paulina Piotrowski, Economic Development Operations Managers, Southampton City Council summarised the key issues about masterplanning in Southampton with a focus on Itchen Riverside as:

- The Council has refreshed its approach to master-planning.
- New internal and external governance will be established to manage the masterplanning programme and ensure long term cross-party ownership and external stakeholder support.
- Activity will include in-depth consultation and engagement to ensure people and communities align with it.
- Initial focus for masterplanning includes Itchen Riverside and particularly a Development Brief on Gas Holder site, Britannia Road, Stadium, Waterfront, Aggregate Wharves, and Drivers Wharf.

Andy Tourell, Head of Sustainable Logistics, Ocean Infinity summarised the key issues about Southampton's 'Blue Highway' for water-borne travel as part of a transport network as:

- The vision of Ocean Infinity is a zero-carbon, water-borne, travel and transport network, connecting communities and delivering solutions against local priorities.
- Local waterways, which include the River Itchen, River Test, River Hamble, Southampton Water and the wider Solent present an opportunity to implement a city-scale "blue highway network" enhancing connectivity between our communities, open spaces, Southampton city centre, the port, employment and education hubs.
- Initially, delivering a proof of concept service across the River Itchen, Ocean Infinity anticipated that the network would gradually expand along the River Itchen before serving communities along both sides of Southampton Water, and ultimately connecting the Solent region.
- Vessels would be fitted with zero carbon power and propulsion systems.
- There is a planned progression towards unmanned vessel operation from a remote command and control centre in Woolston.
- Southampton City Council, Solent Transport and ABP Southampton have demonstrated support for the project. Ocean Infinity are developing a consortium of partners, spanning local authorities, land owners, developers, operators and the maritime industry, with an ambition of starting in 2023.
- Ocean Infinity promote this as a project, fully integrated with the Local Development Plan, conceived on the banks of the river, proved at the mouth of the river, serving communities along the river which can make a significant contribution to protecting, preserving and promoting the River Itchen.

The Panel recognised that the proposal could help to create a distinctive waterfront experience in Southampton and help to enable businesses to connect with their workforces.