

# Protecting, Preserving & Promoting the River Itchen in Southampton - Draft Final Report



## Scrutiny Inquiry Panel

### PANEL MEMBERSHIP – 2022/23

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## Chair's Introduction

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**Councillor Savage - Chair of the Protecting, Preserving and Promoting the River Itchen in Southampton Inquiry Panel (2022/23)**

To be added post 20<sup>th</sup> April Inquiry Panel meeting

## **Protecting, Preserving and Promoting the River Itchen in Southampton**

### **The Aim of the Inquiry**

1. The River Itchen has been the lifeblood of Southampton since Roman and Saxon times, it divides the city in two and is an important natural and commercial resource.
2. It is a globally important river of significant ecological interest. Areas of the River Itchen in Southampton are identified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) and, as the Itchen meanders through Southampton, it does, in places, offer opportunities for communities to access the waterfront and enjoy being by the water.
3. Marinas, wharves, and quays are located at the lower reaches of the river and businesses line its banks. In Southampton the river is also used by numerous clubs involved in water sports as well as SWAC (Southampton Water Activities Centre) and Woodmill Activity Centre.
4. However, the river is subject to use by numerous, and, at times competing interests that can create pressure on the natural environment and tensions between users.
5. Climate change is also impacting the river. The Itchen corridor is a flood risk zone whilst drought is an increasing concern with water being extracted upstream to provide for our growing demands.
6. Given the importance of the River Itchen to Southampton, and concerns about its health and resilience, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee recommended at the September 2022 meeting, that an inquiry focussing on protecting, preserving and promoting the River Itchen in Southampton be undertaken by the Scrutiny Inquiry Panel.
7. The set objectives of the inquiry were:
  - a. To identify the various different users and uses of the River Itchen in Southampton and the challenges this presents.
  - b. To understand existing plans and opportunities to address the identified challenges.
  - c. To identify good practice being employed to protect, preserve and promote urban rivers elsewhere.
  - d. To identify what initiatives and approaches could work well in Southampton to protect, preserve and promote the River Itchen.
8. The full terms of reference for the inquiry, agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, are shown in Appendix 1.

### **How the inquiry was conducted**

9. The Scrutiny Inquiry Panel undertook the inquiry over 6 evidence gathering meetings. The Panel received information from a wide variety of organisations including Wessex Rivers Trust, Natural England, The Environment Agency, Southern Water, ABP, Ocean Infinity, MDL Marinas, Hampshire Chamber of

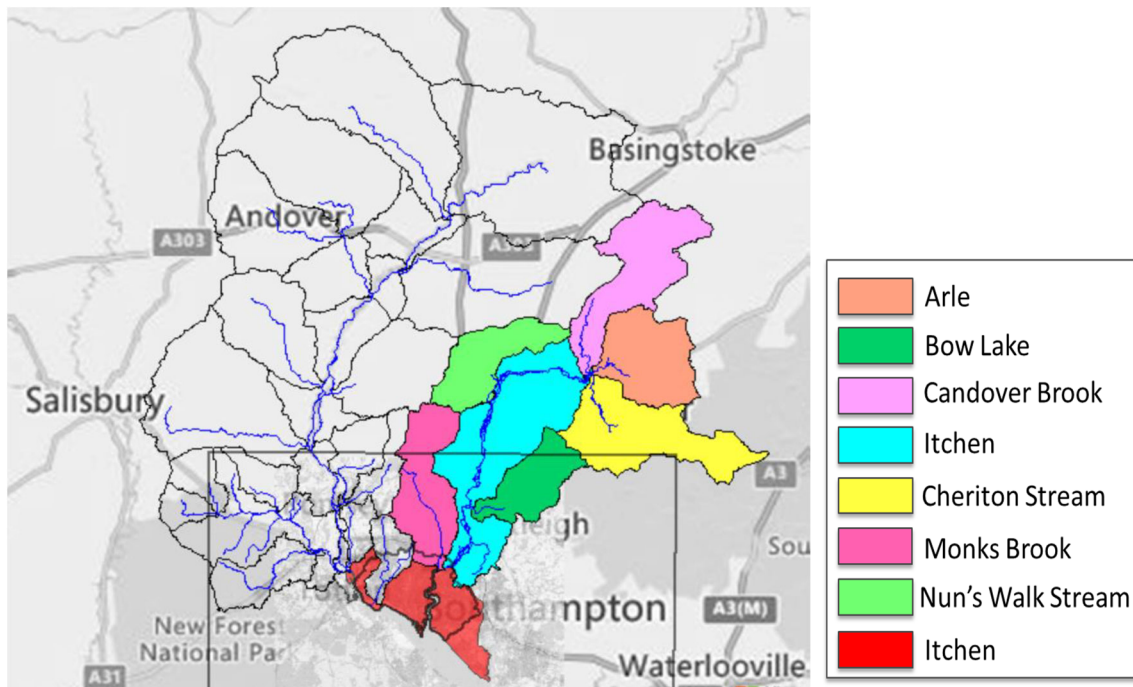
Commerce, Business South, British Canoeing, Glasgow City Council, Thames21 and Solent Forum.

10. As well as Southampton City Council officers representing various departments, the Panel also received evidence from numerous voluntary, community and recreational groups who are passionate about the River Itchen in Southampton. A full list of those who provided evidence is attached as Appendix 2.
11. The key findings, conclusions and recommendations from the inquiry are detailed succinctly later in this report.
12. Members of the Panel would like to thank all those who have assisted with the development of this review, in particular the following who have provided the Panel with invaluable advice throughout the inquiry:
  - Lindsay McCulloch – Natural Environment Manager, SCC
  - Dr David Rumble – Chief Executive, Wessex Rivers Trust
  - Sam Foulds - Flood Risk Management Team Leader, SCC
  - Cara Brims - Flood Risk Officer, SCC

## Introduction and Background

### The River Itchen

13. The River Itchen rises from Hampshire's chalk downs at Hinton Ampner and is approximately 28 miles in length. The river, as shown in the map below, is fed by multiple smaller river catchments covering a large area of Hampshire.



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**Figure 1 - River Itchen sub catchments**

14. The River Itchen is one of the most famous 'chalk streams' in the world. Chalk streams are a globally rare type of river, famed for their crystal clear waters which support a wide range of plants and animals. More than half of the world's chalk streams are found in southern England.
15. Below Woodmill Bridge in Southampton the river changes from being fluvial to tidal and becomes more industrial and modified before joining the River Test to form Southampton Water.

### Environmental Designations

16. Due to the steady flow, clear alkaline water and stable temperature, the chalk river is an ideal habitat for specific plants and it supports some of our rarest and most iconic wildlife, including salmon, otter, water vole, water crowfoot and many more.
17. Tidal zones of the Itchen are characterised by soft mud flats and saltmarsh habitats that are rich feeding grounds for birds and acts as a nursery for commercially important fish species such as Bass.
18. In recognition of its national and international importance its environment is highly protected by several pieces of legislation including:

- Lee-on-the-Solent to Itchen Estuary is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) – Nationally important for over-wintering dark-bellied brent geese.
- Solent and Southampton Water Ramsar – Globally significant wetlands that support internationally important numbers of wintering waterfowl, important breeding gull and tern populations, rare invertebrates and plants.
- Solent and Southampton Water Special Areas of Protection (SPA) – These sites are regularly used by several species of gull, tern, geese, plover and godwit.
- Non-Tidal River Itchen is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) – Due to the freshwater habitats.
- Chessel Bay Local Nature Reserve (LNR) – Became the first LNR in Southampton in 1989.

### Uses of the River Itchen in Southampton

19. People live on the river and the river is also home to numerous recreational activities from angling to open water swimming.
20. It is a popular location for walkers and cyclists who value the opportunity to be beside the river and enjoy the associated health and wellbeing benefits.
21. The river is of importance to the local economy. Boatyards, marinas, auxiliary industries and aggregates rely on the Itchen and many are located beside it. These industries provide employment and create wealth.



Figure 2 - Marine and Industrial businesses by the River Itchen in Northam

22. The river is also an important source of water. In the east of Southampton, 52% of the freshwater supply comes from river abstraction (Test and Itchen rivers). In the west of Southampton 100% of freshwater supply is abstracted from the Test and Itchen rivers.

## Ownership and responsibilities

23. Ownership of the river is complex with numerous different land interests. The Crown Estate own and manage the majority of the foreshore (area between mean high water and mean low water marks of the tidal river) and the bed of the estuary.
24. The majority of land adjacent to the River Itchen is privately owned by multiple individual landowners for commercial, industrial and residential use.
25. Southampton City Council own areas of land along the River Itchen, including Riverside Park, and small areas of mudflat.
26. There is no single organisation that oversees the management of all watercourses, estuaries or bodies of water. As a result, different organisations and landowners have different roles and responsibilities as it relates to the River Itchen in Southampton.
27. Key organisations include:



- Southampton City Council – Local Planning Authority; Lead Local Flood Authority; Environmental Health (Pollution); Ecology and Biodiversity; Parks and Open Spaces (landowner for watercourses that cross Southampton’s parks and open spaces); Emergency Planning.



- Environment Agency - Managing flooding risk; Regulating major industry & waste (including storm water overflows); Treatment of contaminated land; Water quality & resources (including abstraction licences for rivers); Fisheries; Inland river, estuary, harbour navigation; Conservation & ecology.



- Associated British Ports (ABP) - The Statutory and Competent Harbour Authority for Southampton; Manage access restrictions, speeds and general activities within the Harbour Authority area of jurisdiction.



- Marine Management Organisation (MMO) - The MMO is responsible for marine licensing in English waters. An MMO licence will be required for construction, dredging, deposit of substance/ object, removal of substance/ object.



- Southern Water - Freshwater and waste water supplier for Southampton; Managing storm overflows - discharging excess water during heavy or prolonged rainfall when the network becomes overwhelmed to prevent flooding to property.



- Natural England - Enforcing laws that protect wildlife and the natural environment.
- Riparian landowners - Those with a watercourse running through, adjacent or under their land. Key responsibilities: Report incidents of flooding, pollution or unusual change in flow of water to the Environment Agency; Let water flow naturally; Prevent pollution; Protect wildlife.



- The Crown Estate



## Rules governing the river

28. Lots of directives, acts and regulations cover the River Itchen. These encompass water, the environment, biodiversity, drainage and flooding. At the inaugural meeting of the inquiry Sam Foulds, Southampton City Council's Flood Risk Management Team Leader, highlighted the following rules governing the River Itchen:

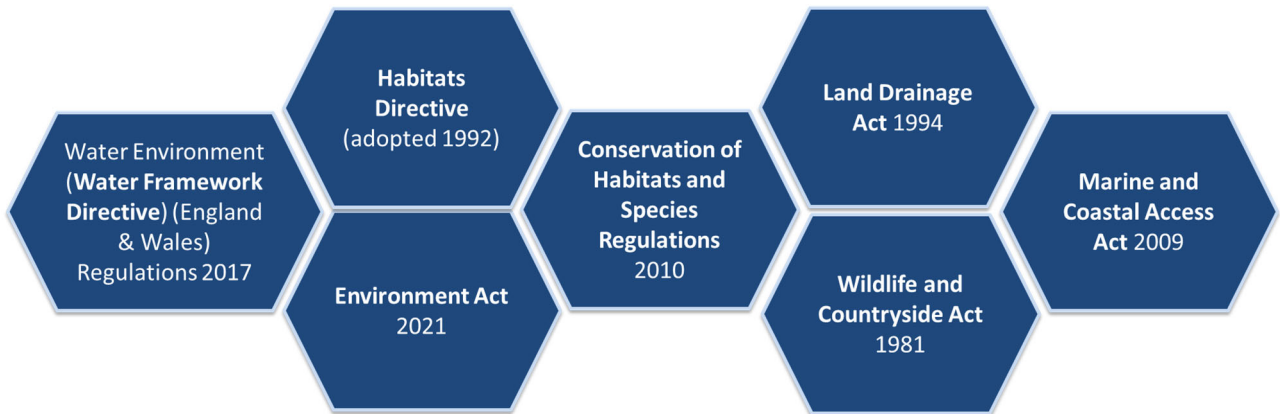


Figure 3 – Key Directives, Acts of Parliament and Regulations covering the River Itchen

29. Whilst no specific plan focusing on the River Itchen exists, the Council and other key organisations have several plans, frameworks and strategies which cover different aspects of the River Itchen. Key Council Plans include, but are not limited to:
- Adopted Local Development Plan and emerging Southampton City Vision Local Plan
  - Economic and Green Growth Strategy (2020-2030)
  - Southampton Coastal Flood and Erosion Risk Management Strategy
  - Local Flood Risk Management Strategy
  - Minerals and Waste Plan
  - Nitrates Position Statement
  - Coastal Pollution Plan
  - Biodiversity Action Plan
30. Relevant strategies, policies and plans from organisations other than Southampton City Council include:
- Solent European Marine Sites Management Plan
  - North Solent Shoreline Management Plan
  - The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan
  - Environment Agency's River Basin Management Plan
  - Southern Water's Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan
  - MMO South Marine Plan
  - ABP Port of Southampton Master Plan - 2009-2030

## Ambitions for the River Itchen in Southampton?

31. As identified in the previous section, there is no existing Council plan that identifies desired objectives or outcomes relating to the River Itchen in Southampton.
32. Based on extensive consultation, Glasgow City Council identified 4 outcomes in their River Clyde Corridor Strategic Development Framework published in February 2020.

| A VIBRANT RIVER                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | A SUSTAINABLE RIVER                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | A CONNECTED RIVER                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | A GREEN AND RESILIENT RIVER                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The River Corridor will be a vibrant, attractive destination which supports inclusive economic growth. The strategic approach seeks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realise potential and unlock development</li> <li>• Promote a new approach to growing the place</li> <li>• Activate the water</li> </ul> | <p>The River Corridor will balance environmental, social and economic pressures to create liveable, inclusive and distinctive places. The strategic approach seeks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support a higher density and a mix of uses</li> <li>• Promote climate responsive design</li> <li>• Create a distinctive townscape, and protect and enhance historic character</li> </ul> | <p>The River Corridor will be well-connected and link people, places and natural habitats. The strategic approach seeks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create seamless walking and cycling routes</li> <li>• Cluster activities and link people to jobs, town centres, services and public transport</li> <li>• Bring people to the river</li> </ul> | <p>The River Corridor will provide integrated, high quality, green, blue and grey infrastructure that helps deliver climate change adaptation and promotes health and wellbeing. The strategic approach seeks to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate climate readiness</li> <li>• Create a network of open spaces</li> <li>• Promote nature-based solutions</li> </ul> |

Figure 4 - River Clyde Corridor SDF Outcomes

33. Whilst recognising that Glasgow and Southampton, and their respective rivers, have different pressures and challenges, the outcomes identified above, if not all of the related strategic approaches, resonate with the findings from the River Itchen Survey that was conducted prior to the inaugural Inquiry Panel meeting and received 728 responses over a 2-week period.
34. When asked what developments or improvements you would like to happen to the River Itchen in Southampton, the most popular responses, in order, collectively related to:
  - **A Healthy (Green) and Resilient River** – Improvements to water quality; Improvements to natural habitats and biodiversity.
  - **A Vibrant River** – Increased use of the river to support economic growth; Opportunities to participate in water sports; Removal of wrecks.
  - **A Connected River** – More public access to the river.
35. The requirement for a sustainable approach that balances environmental, social and economic pressures is paramount and therefore should be embedded into all of our approaches associated with the river.
36. Reflecting the survey findings, the next section of the report will, utilising the evidence presented to the Inquiry Panel, seek to identify against each of the 3 identified outcomes/objectives, how Southampton and the River Itchen is currently performing; the plans and initiatives in place designed to improve outcomes; and, recommended actions that will support the delivery of the objectives.

## A Healthy and Resilient River

River Itchen Survey - Improvements to the water quality (87%) and improvements to natural habitats and biodiversity (75%) are the improvements that most respondents would like to happen to the River Itchen in Southampton.

37. The River Itchen is a globally important river due to it being a spring fed chalk stream. The chalk acts as a sponge and the water entering the river now may have fallen as rain 40 to 50 years ago.
38. The non-tidal river is a classic example of a chalk river with clear water and high biodiversity.
39. Despite the loss of much of the wildlife rich saltmarshes and habitats the tidal Itchen Estuary that runs through the heart of Southampton is still important. Estuaries in general are critical for the survival of many species. Tens of thousands of birds, mammals, fish and other wildlife depend on estuarine habitats as places to live and breed.<sup>1</sup>
40. Graham Horton, Thames Solent Team Manager at Natural England, provided the Panel with a summary of the environmental importance of the River Itchen:

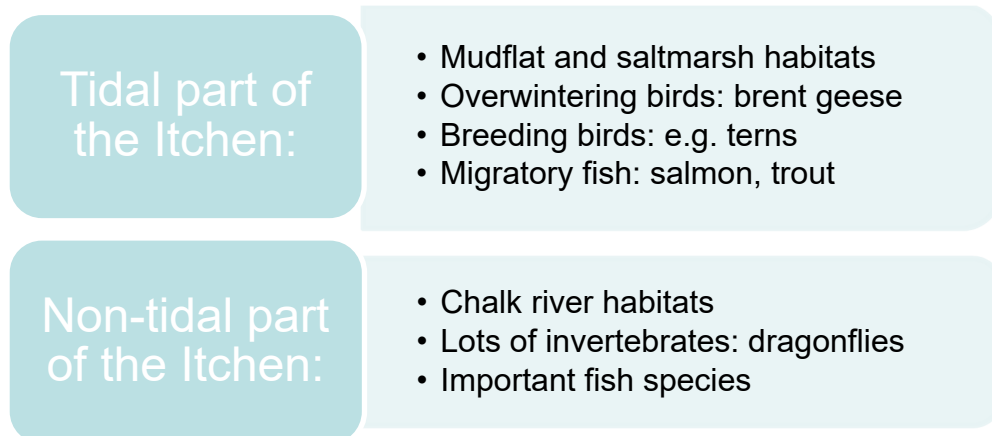


Figure 5 - Environmental importance of the River Itchen summary

### **Threats to the River Itchen's ecology, diversity and resilience**

41. In his presentation Graham Horton informed the Panel that, like many rivers and estuaries in the Solent, the Itchen is facing a number of threats that could impact on the fragile river environment. These included:

#### **Population and development pressures**

42. Whilst it was recognised that the Itchen environment, particularly in the tidal areas, is pretty robust and that much of the sensitive, easily disturbed wildlife has probably

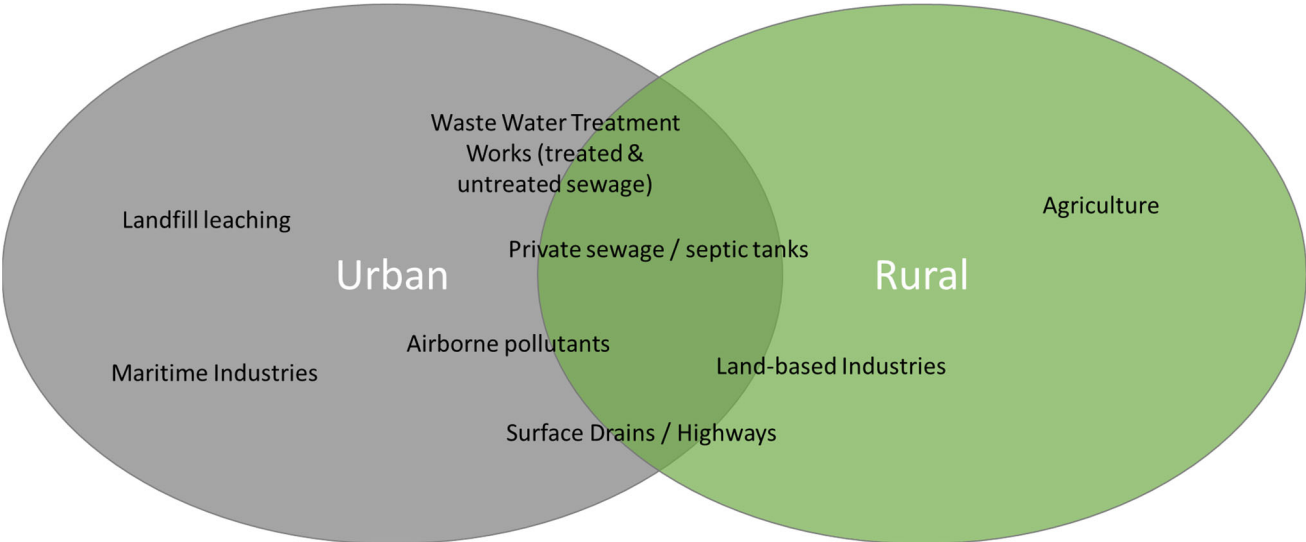
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<sup>1</sup> [Estuaries | WWT](#)

already disappeared, increased population and development within the Itchen Catchment could create additional demand for water at a time when the Test and Itchen Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy identifies that in Southampton water resources are over licenced or over abstracted to some degree.<sup>2</sup> This could adversely impact the River Itchen environment, and could increase pressure on undeveloped and less developed sections of the river.

**Pollution - Nutrients and other sources**

- 43. Information provided by the Environment Agency and analysed by Dr David Rumble, Chief Executive at Wessex Rivers Trust, identified that the tidal Itchen was being affected by a number of pollutants emanating from both rural and urban areas. Pesticides, fine sediment and organic waste were largely derived from rural areas; Particulates, heavy metals, hydrocarbons, pathogens, plastics, emerging chemicals, persistent synthetics originated predominantly from urban areas; Nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) come from both rural and urban areas.
- 44. Dr Rumble outlined the main sources of the pollution in the tidal River Itchen and these are outlined in the diagram below. Agriculture is thought to be the source of between 70-75% of nitrogen in the River Itchen.



**Figure 6 - Pollution sources affecting the tidal River Itchen**

- 45. Nutrients are essential for plant growth, but the overabundance of nutrients in water can have many harmful health and environmental effects. An overabundance of nutrients, primarily nitrogen and phosphorus, in water starts a process called eutrophication. Algae feed on the nutrients, growing, spreading, and turning the water green as well as blanketing vegetation and mudflats. Algae blooms can smell bad, block sunlight, and even release toxins in some cases. When the algae die, they are decomposed by bacteria, this process consumes the oxygen dissolved in the water and needed by fish and other aquatic life to breathe. If enough oxygen is removed, the water can become hypoxic, where there is not enough oxygen to sustain life, creating a "dead zone".

<sup>2</sup> [Test and Itchen Abstraction Licensing Strategy \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](http://publishing.service.gov.uk)

46. Information provided by the Environment Agency stated that:  
*'In common with many rivers, levels of nutrients such as nitrates and phosphates are elevated above natural levels in the River Itchen. Our evidence also shows that run-off can introduce high levels of sediment into the river in certain areas which can smother gravels and affect the associated habitats and species.'*<sup>3</sup>
47. Under the Water Framework Directive, the River Itchen is classified by the Environment Agency as being at Good Ecological Status. Southampton Water (this includes the tidal Itchen) is classified as being at Moderate Ecological Status. The reasons why this water body does not achieve good status relate to dissolved inorganic nitrogen and mitigation measures.
48. The chemical status for both the River Itchen and Southampton Water is defined as failing due to priority hazardous substances (UPBTs - Ubiquitous Persistent Bioaccumulative Toxic substances). All water bodies now fail the chemical status due to UPBTs. If UPBTs are excluded the River Itchen is 'Good', Southampton Water is 'Moderate' due to Tributyltin (found in anti-fouling paints used to prevent biofouling on boat hulls).

### Storm water overflows, treated wastewater and surface water outfalls

49. The Environment Agency's submission identified that the main sources of potential point source pollution (single, easily identified points of discharge) in the Itchen include treated wastewater, storm water from sewerage systems, pollution from privately owned sewage treatment works and septic tanks, and road run-off.
50. The Panel were informed by Southern Water that during heavy storms the rainwater, combined with the wastewater can exceed the capacity of the storm tanks. To protect homes and businesses the storm overflows are released into the Itchen. In Portswood up to 90% of flow arriving during a storm is rainwater, mainly from roof and road run-off, however, the storm overflow includes silt, sewage and other contaminants that, along with treated wastewater, increase the level of nutrients in the river harming the ecology and creating a health concern for recreational users.

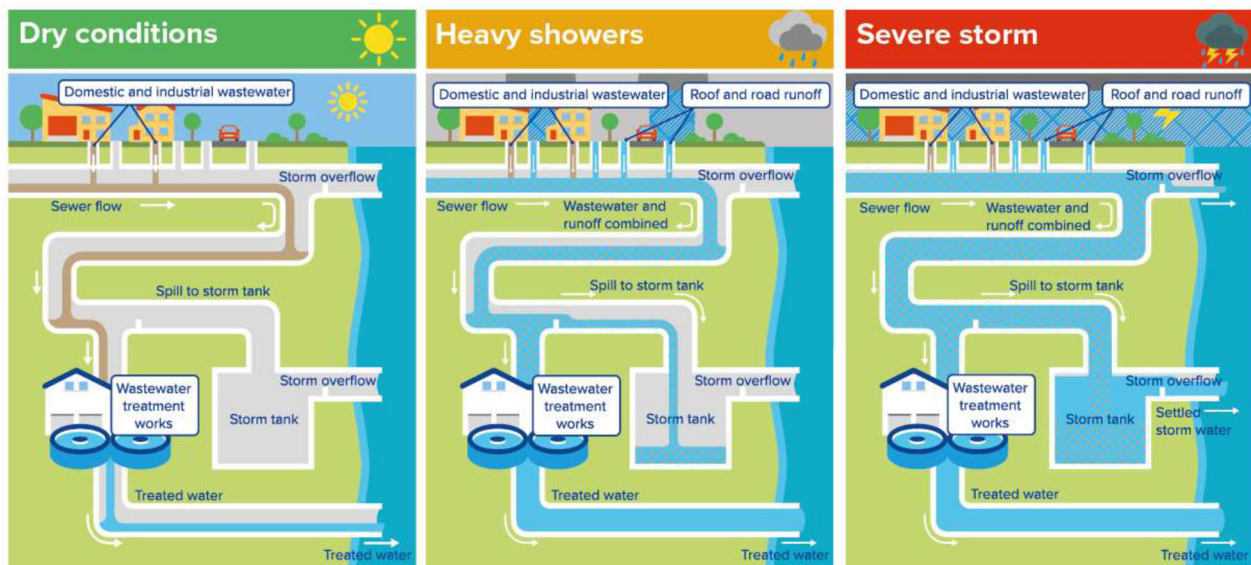


Figure 7 - An explanation of storm overflows

<sup>3</sup> [River Itchen Water Quality - Environment Agency](#)

51. In total there are 15 storm overflows in Southampton's wastewater systems discharging to the River Itchen.
52. Of the 15 overflow sites, which excludes the Chickenhall Wastewater Works in Eastleigh located just a few miles north of the city boundary, 3 spill more frequently than the new DEFRA requirements of 10 per year:
  - Sirdar Road – average of 18 discharges per year
  - Woolston Storm Tanks (Woolston Wastewater Works) – average of 29 discharges per year
  - Portswood Storm Tanks (Portswood Wastewater Works) - average of 56 discharges per year
53. In addition to the 15 overflow sites owned by Southern Water, there are at least 50 outfalls from public surface water sewers, and numerous private connections, that discharge into the River Itchen. These operate every time it rains.
54. Land based activities can influence water quality as runoff from buildings and roads collected by surface water sewers and highway drains is typically not treated or monitored.
55. The Panel were also informed by Southern Water that misconnections from homes is a source of pollution into surface water sewers and on to the River Itchen. Southern Water work with the City Council when properties are found to be misconnected to the wastewater system.



Figure 8 - The location of surface water outfalls into, and near to, the River Itchen in Southampton

### **Pollution - Plastics and other litter**

56. The threat from plastic pollution and litter is summed up by the findings from studies being undertaken at Chessel Bay, the last undeveloped section of the tidal river in Southampton. It is an SSSI, SPA and Ramsar designated site and it was the first Local Nature Reserve in Southampton in 1989.
57. The City Council is working with the Environment Agency, Natural England, University of Southampton and Nurdle to remove debris, including plastic nurdles (small pellets of plastic which serves as raw material in the manufacture of plastic products), from Chessel Bay. A recent clean up using Nurdle's technology removed 600kg of micro-plastic from Chessel Bay. Prof Malcolm Hudson from the University of Southampton is analysing the findings, support has been provided by Surfers Against Sewage, but more plastic has arrived.
58. Plastic is not the only litter to be found at Chessel Bay. At community clean-ups, hard-working volunteers give up a significant proportion of their Saturdays to rid the bay of rubbish. With support from City Council officers, typically a ton of rubbish is removed during each clean up. This is replicated at other locations on the river, including by the Friends of Riverside Park and the Friends of the Itchen Navigation.



Figure 9 - Chessel Bay clean-up in 2017

### Climate Change

59. Whilst coastal wetlands are effective at locking away carbon and play an important role in mitigating climate change<sup>4</sup>, there are signs that climate change is impacting on the River Itchen.
60. The 2022 drought put parts of the River Itchen ecosystem under severe pressure, and extreme weather events such as heatwaves, storms and flooding appear to be happening more often in the UK.<sup>5</sup>
61. The presentation delivered to the Panel on the River Itchen Flood Alleviation Scheme outlined various scenarios based on the forecast rise in sea levels and extreme weather events. Vulnerability to tidal flood risk will increase over time and, with the rise in sea levels, it will result not only in the need for flood alleviation schemes but also in the loss of habitats along the river.
62. When considering the likely impact of climate change on the River Itchen, Dr David Rumble, at the inaugural meeting of the Panel concluded that:  
*“If the climate trends continue over the next 40 years winners and losers will emerge. New species will be attracted to the Itchen in Southampton but overall net losses to the diversity and the ecology are expected.”*

### Invasive species

63. Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) threaten our biodiversity, our ecosystems, and our economy. They are one of the top five drivers of biodiversity loss globally.<sup>6</sup>
64. The Climate Change Committees 2021 assessment of climate risks to the UK highlighted INNS as a priority risk facing terrestrial, freshwater, and marine habitats and species, as well as agriculture and forestry. Climate change is expected to increase the risk from many NNS that are currently unable to establish.
65. A combination of factors, such as frost-free winters and increased flooding events, will increase the range and abundance of many INNS. Stressed habitats may also be more vulnerable to invasion and disease, increasing the risk to natural habitats.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> [Estuaries | WWT](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Climate change and extreme weather | Greenpeace UK](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services | IPBES secretariat](#)

<sup>7</sup> [The Great Britain Invasive Non-Native Species Strategy 2023 to 2030 \(nonnativespecies.org\)](#)

## **What action is being taken to combat the threats to the health and resilience of the River Itchen in Southampton?**

66. The Panel were informed of a number of initiatives, plans or proposals designed to mitigate the environmental threats to the River Itchen and enhance the rivers health.

### **Population and development pressure**

#### **Southampton City Vision Local Plan – Biodiversity, Water consumption**

67. The emerging Local Plan will guide planning applications for new development and will shape the city as a place to 2040 and beyond.
68. The protection and enhancement of the natural environment is a key theme in the emerging plan and the plan states that this should be considered at the outset of any development proposal.
69. The emerging plan includes a biodiversity policy that aims to protect sites designated due to their importance for habitats and species. It also delivers measurable biodiversity net gain to improve development sites biodiversity value.<sup>8</sup>
70. In support of the biodiversity policy, the draft Waterfront Policy (DE4(s) specifically states that waterfront development may be considered inappropriate where it would conflict with the biodiversity policy.
71. Finally, reflecting pressure on Southampton's water supply, Policy EN8 requires new development to meet a water consumption target of 100 litres per person per day. This is a more ambitious target than the optional Building Regulation standard.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Southampton Nitrogen Mitigation Position Statement**

72. In response to Natural England's concerns about eutrophication, particularly of the Solent, to comply with the provisions of the Habitat Regulations, Southampton City Council approved a policy in 2022 whereby new development which leads to a net increase in residential or hotel units must be subject to an appropriate assessment to demonstrate how mitigation measures will be implemented to achieve nitrogen neutrality.
73. Where possible, the Council will encourage the implementation of measures within the city and/or measures which contribute to a range of benefits for the city's residents and environment (for example - water efficiency, biodiversity net gain, suitable alternative natural greenspace, and carbon reductions).

[Southampton Nitrogen Mitigation Position Statement](#)

### **Pollution – Nutrients and other sources**

#### **Environment Agency – Farmers, landowners and water companies**

74. The Panel were informed that the Environment Agency are working with farmers to support environmentally friendly farming that doesn't damage water quality. A dedicated agricultural team has been set up and they have been visiting farms across Hampshire and Sussex. Advice and guidance is being provided to ensure that

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<sup>8</sup> [Draft Local Plan with Options - Environment \(southampton.gov.uk\)](#) (Biodiversity from p134)

<sup>9</sup> [Draft Local Plan with Options - Environment \(southampton.gov.uk\)](#) (Water Resource p164)

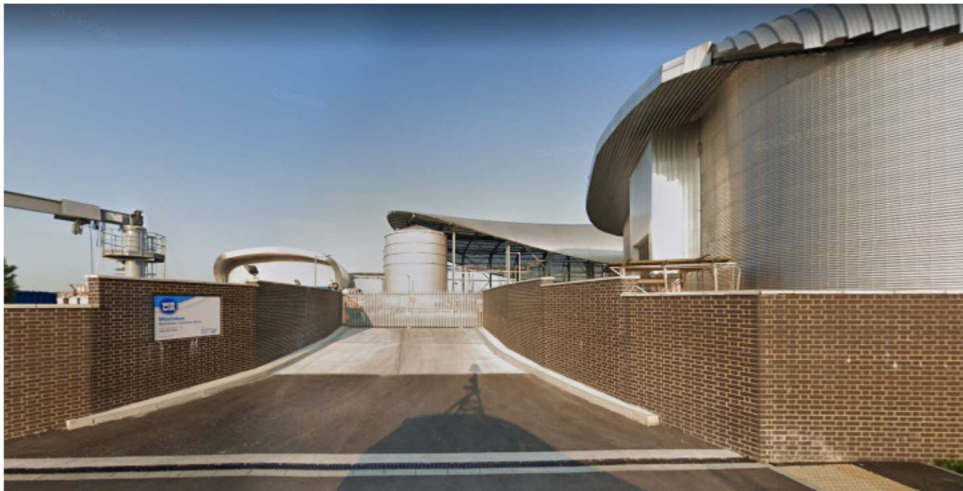


good practice is being followed and any necessary measures to protect the environment are implemented.

75. The Environment Agency work with other agencies including Natural England (Catchment Sensitive Farming Officers) to influence best practice land use to reduce run-off and lower pollution.
76. The Environment Agency are also trying to hold water companies to account to reduce pollution, tackle storm overflows and invest more of their profits into the environment.

### **Southern Water**

77. Woolston Wastewater Treatment Works has recently been upgraded and fitted with membrane filtration treatment, primarily to reduce nutrient pollution.



**Figure 10 - Newly constructed Woolston Wastewater Treatment Works**

78. Southern Water are also working with the Environment Agency and other organisations and stakeholders on Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans (DWMP) for the Test and Itchen rivers. These plans identify risks to the environment from wastewater and drainage and identify where improvements need to be made to prevent deterioration or harm.
79. As a result of the DWMP process, Southern Water have identified planned investment to 2025 in excess of £25m in the wastewater infrastructure in Southampton and its environs. Proposals include increasing storm tank capacity at Portswood Wastewater Works and Woolston Wastewater works to reduce storm overflow events and a regional programme of pumping station refurbishment based on site criticality and performance.  
[Drainage and Wastewater Management Plans \(DWMPs\) \(southernwater.co.uk\)](https://www.southernwater.co.uk/dwmp)
80. Southern Water provides near real-time information about storm release activity near coastal bathing waters through its [Beachbuoy](#) tool. There are plans to improve the app to make the information more user friendly and extend it to inland waters such as the River Itchen. There are no set timescales for this at present.

### **Designated Bathing Water Status**

81. Designated Bathing Water Status (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.

82. Achieving DBWS means that each year over the peak bathing season, the Environment Agency will test the site for pollutants. For any DWBS sites that don't meet regulatory standards, the Environment Agency will investigate the sources of pollution to identify remedial measures.
83. At a meeting of the Inquiry Panel, local community groups outlined proposals to seek DBWS for parts of the River Itchen in Southampton known to be popular with swimmers and paddlers.

### Sustainable Drainage Systems

84. In January 2023 the Government announced that it is committed to the enactment of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 by the end of 2024.

85. It will become a requirement that all new developments of more than 1 dwelling house or where the construction area is 100 square meters or more, will require sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) for managing surface water.



86. SuDS work with nature to slow the flow and recharge the ground at the point rain falls.

87. SuDS can support improvements to:

- Water quantity – reduce water entering underground drainage.
- Water quality – filter out sediments, chemicals and litter before water enters a watercourse.
- Biodiversity – provides habitat for insects and wildlife within urban setting.
- Amenity – visually attractive, helping to green grey spaces.



88. SuDS, if best practice is followed, could help to reduce the number of combined sewer overflows into the Itchen and improve the quality of highway runoff.



Figure 11 - Example of SuDS

89. The requirement for SuDS does not extend to highways projects. A recent report on [pollution in Buckinghamshire's Rivers and Chalk Streams](#) noted that diffuse urban pollution is a significant issue for chalk streams in Buckinghamshire due to surface water from road run-off carrying pollutants directly into watercourses. These pollutants include plant and animal matter and by-products from vehicles such as hydrocarbons, oil, brake dust, tyre fragments, hydraulic fluids, and anti-freeze.

90. Whilst road gullies include gully pots which trap solids to reduce contaminated sediment from entering watercourses, the report references technology that can be utilised in gullies to remove further pollutants from flowing surface water. One example is an adaptor that fits into standard road gullies and skims surface water to remove contamination without impacting flow or silt maintenance procedures. This type of product could potentially remove 95% of oil and pollutants that enter the gully if regularly maintained and replaced when necessary.

91. In Southampton it is usual for highways gullies to trap silts, but they don't have oil intercepting specifications and there are currently no plans for this technology to be introduced. In addition, there is no dedicated highways SuDS rollout programme.

### **Marina initiatives**

92. MDL Marinas, who manage 19 marinas, including Saxon Wharf, Shamrock Quay and Ocean Village Marina on the River Itchen, informed the Panel of a number of initiatives they are engaged with designed to reduce pollution. These included the following:
- Water Filtration systems – MDL have installed filtration systems to clean wastewater from boatyard activities, improving local water quality. A system has been installed at Shamrock Quay with plans to roll them out across their estate.
  - Drive in boat wash – As identified, anti-fouling paints used to prevent the build-up of micro-organisms, algae or plants (known as biofouling) on boat hulls can have negative consequences for marine habitats and is a source of water pollution. MDL are currently researching methods of efficient antifouling without biocides but also systems that remove the need for antifoul all together. One of these methods is drive in boat washes. These machines are designed to stop using copper based and other harmful antifouling paint all together. MDL are hoping to work with local authorities to find suitable locations to locate the UKs first drive in boat wash.

### **Oyster Reefs**

93. A single adult oyster can purify 50 gallons of water a day, removing pollutants including sediment and nitrogen as it sifts for food.<sup>10</sup>
94. Pilot schemes to introduce oyster reefs are being trialled in the River Hamble and on the Isle of Wight. Natural England are working with universities and are ready to scale up the introduction of oyster reefs to rivers. In Southampton there is the opportunity for reefs to be established in the River Itchen. Care would need to be taken to pick viable sites but this would have a positive impact upon water quality.

### **Pollution – Plastics and other litter**

#### **Plastic pollution partnership project**

95. Building on the success of the work to remove plastic nurdles from Chessel Bay, the Environment Agency, together with Southampton City Council, the University of Southampton and others, are now looking to support the development of a much larger 'preventing plastic pollution' partnership project that will aim to clean up plastic pollution across the wider River Itchen Estuary. The project includes plans to help reduce the amount of plastic entering the environment in the first place through engagement with local communities and businesses.
96. In Southampton 3 large plastics companies are regulated by the Environment Agency, a number of smaller plastics businesses are not regulated. SIVA Group

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<sup>10</sup> [How oysters are cleaning New York's polluted harbor | World Economic Forum \(weforum.org\)](https://www.weforum.org/articles/how-oysters-are-cleaning-new-york-s-polluted-harbor/)

have invested significant resources to improve processes to reduce plastic pollution in the Itchen. Polystar are improving their processes.

## Climate Change

### Net Zero Strategy

97. Southampton City Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and soon after set itself the challenge of being a net zero organisation by 2030. More recently, the Southampton City Council Corporate Plan (2022-2030) sets a vision for a zero carbon city by 2035, so that Southampton can be part of the solution to tackling climate change.
98. A Net Zero Strategy is currently being consulted on. This strategy provides the framework for actions to deliver net zero carbon.

## Invasive Species

### The Test and Itchen Invasive Non Native Species Project

99. This ambitious multi-year partnership project, led by the Test and Itchen Catchment Partnership, aims to reduce the presence of invasive non native species on our native wildlife and habitats in the Test and Itchen River catchments. To achieve this goal, the project aims to develop a co-ordinated catchment scale approach to address the 14 priority target species highlighted as being the biggest threats to the health of these precious chalk streams.

### Clean Before You Leave Campaign

100. This is a campaign across MDLs marinas and boatyards to reduce the volume of non-native species invading the River Itchen or other local waterways. If you go to any of the MDL owned marinas on the River Itchen you will see the campaign posters (Figure 12).
101. The posters outline a few easy steps for boat owners to follow to prevent the spread of invasive species. Key actions include cleaning off aquatic plants and animals before leaving the area and learning to identify common invasive species and reporting them to the marina office.

### Co-ordinated Action

102. In addition to the specific actions and plans identified above, a number of bodies are seeking to raise awareness of the threats to the River Itchen and encourage collective action.
103. The Test and Itchen Catchment Partnership was established in 2013 and is made up of a number of organisations who share the common goal of working together to improve the management and health of the Test and Itchen river catchment.
104. The Panel were also made aware of the Respect the River Campaign, a community led campaign whose aim is a clean and pollution free city river – the tidal Itchen in Southampton.



Figure 12 - Clean before you leave campaign poster

## **Recommendations for a healthier and more resilient River Itchen in Southampton**

105. The River Itchen is a globally important river of significant ecological interest. A healthy and resilient River Itchen in Southampton is an asset to the city. People want to be beside it, exercise on and in it, and live alongside it.
106. A healthy river, and a high quality natural environment benefits wildlife and our health and wellbeing.<sup>11</sup> However, the river ecosystem is fragile and, despite the numerous positive actions designed to mitigate the outlined threats, there remain significant concerns about the current and future health of the River Itchen in Southampton.
107. The Water Framework Directive Ecological Status rating for the River Itchen is good and for Southampton Water, including the tidal Itchen, it is moderate due to nitrates. In recognition of the bar being relatively low, Dr David Rumble, Chief Executive of Wessex Rivers Trust challenged Southampton to aim for a Water Framework Directive Ecological Status rating of good for the estuary and closer to high for the freshwater section of the river.
108. Opportunities exist that can help us to meet this challenge. The mitigating initiatives presented in this report need to be delivered in full and the health of the river needs to be nurtured and treated as a priority.
109. To improve the health and resilience of the River Itchen in Southampton and move it closer to a Water Framework Directive Ecological Status rating of high, the following actions are recommended:

### **General**

- i. The Council works with partners to actively pursue opportunities to restore and enhance biodiversity and natural habitats along the river to improve the situation for wildlife. The Nitrogen Neutrality Scheme could be a source of funding to support such initiatives, dependent upon discussions with Natural England.

### **Pollution – Nutrients and other sources**

- ii. Whilst the Panel support the proposed additional investment in Southampton's infrastructure by Southern Water to reduce wastewater incidents, Southern Water are encouraged to follow the example set by Thames Water relating to inland waterways and provide real time information about pollution events impacting on the River Itchen. The Panel request that this is undertaken as soon as possible, via the Beachbuoy tool or through other communication outlets, to enable informed decisions to be taken.
- iii. To reduce and slow the run-off and pollution into the River Itchen, build sustainable drainage solutions into highway projects, as well as those mandated for new developments by the enactment of Schedule 3 of the in the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, and utilise new gully technology to limit harmful chemicals from the highways entering the watercourse.

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<sup>11</sup> [Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing | Scientific Reports](#)

- iv. If requested, the Council provides timely support to community groups in their campaign for areas of the River Itchen to be awarded Designated Bathing Water Status.
- v. If pilot schemes in the River Hamble and Isle of Wight identify them to be beneficial to the river environment, the Council should support the establishment of oyster reefs in the River Itchen to help improve water quality.

**Pollution – Plastics and other litter**

- vi. To help reduce locally produced waste and pollution and to build upon the momentum created by the work at Chessel Bay, work with partners to develop an accreditation scheme for businesses that 'respect the river'. There is potential for this initiative to be funded through the Southampton Airport Community Fund.

**Strategic**

- vii. To aid policy and decision making and encourage investment in our natural environment, consideration should be given by the Council to adopting a natural capital approach by placing a value on Southampton's natural environment.

## **A Vibrant River**

River Itchen Survey – When asked what improvements respondents would like to happen to the River Itchen in Southampton, the removal of wrecks was supported by 48% of respondents, more opportunities to participate in water sports was raised by 28% and 17% favoured increased use of the river to support economic growth.

110. The River Clyde Strategic Development Framework identifies a vibrant river to be an attractive destination which supports inclusive economic growth. The approach to deliver this outcome for the River Clyde in Glasgow focuses on:
- Realising the potential and unlocking development
  - Promoting a new approach to growing the place
  - Activating the water.
111. Whilst recognising the primary importance of ensuring a healthy and resilient River Itchen in Southampton, and the need for development to be sustainable and in accordance with healthy river objectives, discussions at Inquiry Panel meetings identified support for growing the marine/maritime sector in Southampton; increasing recreational activity on the river and ensuring that future development contributes to the creation of a distinctive waterfront experience.

### **How 'vibrant' is the River Itchen in Southampton?**

#### **Economic function**

112. Southampton has a long history associated with the marine industry. This includes the internationally significant port and port related activities, the Southampton Marine and Maritime Institute, the National Oceanography Centre, and a wide range of other marine industries.
113. The tidal Itchen is a working river and the riverbanks are home to a diverse range of businesses that provide employment and create wealth. These include boatyards, marinas, auxiliary industries and aggregates which supply a significant proportion of the aggregate needs for the city and wider sub-region and are safeguarded by the Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan. Many of the businesses rely on the Itchen and the limited number of sites which have access to the waterfront.
114. In 2021, ABP's vessel tracking system recorded a total of 3,844 commercial vessel movements on the River Itchen. The recorded movements are all south of the Northam Bridge.
115. To provide economic context, the Panel were presented with a snapshot of the Northam/Itchen Riverside area of Southampton. Analysis identified that Itchen Riverside is home to a diverse range of businesses and many local marine companies and institutions. It is estimated that there are between 500-550 businesses in the immediate area.

116. Sectors represented include marine, manufacturing, aggregates, leisure and storage.



Figure 13 - Distribution of businesses in Northam

117. The Solent is at the centre of the growing UK marine sector. Recently, Ocean Infinity located its control, data, maintenance and engineering centre in the former Vosper Thornycroft shipyard, on the Centenary Quay employment site in Woolston. The site has been developed as a remote control and data-centre for robotic vessels, ensuring Southampton, and the wider Solent area, are at the forefront in deploying next generation marine technologies.

118. The Panel were also informed that the creation of the Solent Freeport is anticipated to create an additional 16,000 jobs in the locality. The challenge raised was not a lack of opportunity but one of recruitment and training for the marine and maritime sector in Southampton and the Solent region to enable these increasingly hi-tech, high skilled companies to prosper.

**Development**

119. Unlike Glasgow and the River Clyde Corridor, there are a limited number of vacant waterfront sites beside the River Itchen in Southampton that are suitable for development. The aggregate wharfs and metal recycling wharfs located in Northam/Itchen Riverside are currently protected within the Hampshire Minerals and Waste Plan.

120. The risk of flooding is also a constraint to redevelopment and regeneration in areas of Southampton. Significant parts of the city neighbouring the River Itchen are vulnerable to flooding. The greatest risk at present is the west bank as land is lower but, over time, the area vulnerable to flooding is expected to increase and the flood depths could reach 1.8m in places.

121. All new development (including change of use) in a present day or future flood risk area must be accompanied by a Site-Specific Flood Risk Assessment.

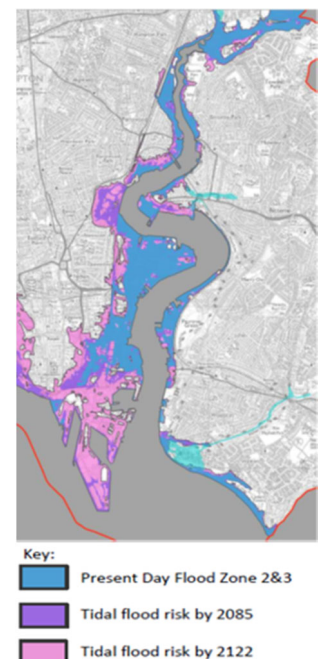


Figure 14 – Tidal flood risk in Southampton



## Recreational and community usage

122. A number of community events are held on, in and alongside the river that help to drive engagement and interest in the River Itchen. These include the All Aboard Festival and Trifest.
123. The River Itchen in Southampton is also used for numerous water sports and other recreational activities. There are over 20 groups, clubs or activity centres concerned with the river with an estimated 20,000 people active on the river each year.



Figure 15 - Location of water sports clubs and activities associated with the River Itchen

124. Within the city, St Denys Sailing and Rowing Club are working with Southampton Water Activities Centre to broaden the appeal of water sports, including health and wellbeing benefits, to those communities who might not otherwise access the water.
125. There are multiple sporting events that happen on the river each year bringing visitors to the city, and many businesses in the city catering to the water sports market.
126. Southampton has a strong record of sporting success across the various water sports with representation in 2022 from Southampton Clubs in GB teams for sailing, rowing, kayak sprint and beach rowing.
127. However, in his presentation to the Panel, James Hinves - National Club Development Manager at British Canoeing, raised a number of challenges that were impacting on recreational users of the River Itchen. These included the following:
  - Water quality, litter and associated health risks
  - The lack of toilet facilities and infrastructure issues around the river – Including the public hard near to the football stadium that was currently inaccessible; Crosshouse Hard, a key point for accessing the water, being in need of remedial works.
  - There is a feeling that the river and its users are a blind spot for the City Council, with actions being focused around land based areas and objectives such as the parks rather than the river flowing through them. Both Bournemouth and Portsmouth have Blue Space Strategies, enabling a city-

wide approach to their water. Recent examples of this proving successful are the developing British Canoeing links with StreetGames in Paulsgrove, that was drawn together by Portsmouth City Council or the hosting of the National Beach Rowing Championships in Bournemouth.

128. To make the river more user friendly and safe, the clearance of boat wreckages from the River Itchen was also raised by rowing clubs.

### **What action is being taken to increase the vibrancy of the River Itchen in Southampton?**

129. The Panel were informed of a number of initiatives, plans or proposals designed to stimulate activity and increase the vibrancy of the River Itchen in Southampton.

### **Economic function**

#### **Southampton City Vision Local Plan – Safeguarding Marine Sites**

130. Reflecting the marine sectors importance to the economy of the city and wider sub region, and its reliance on the limited number of sites which have access to the waterfront, the emerging Local Plan that will guide planning applications for new development and will shape the city as a place to 2040 and beyond states that:

*'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.'*<sup>12</sup>

#### **Solent Skills Plans**

131. The economic footprint of the marine and maritime sector is substantial, contributing £5.8 billion of Gross Value Added each year, equivalent to 19% of the Solent LEP economy.<sup>13</sup> Critical to the successful performance of the sector locally is a world-class workforce and talent base that can adapt to the key drivers of change within global marine and maritime.
132. The impacts of digitisation and automation; the drive for greater environmental sustainability; and, global competition, are leading to significant changes in the demand for marine and maritime skills in the Solent. However, the UK's Maritime 2050 Strategy<sup>14</sup> highlights the problems of attracting young people into the sector because of relatively poor conditions in some occupations, the lack of career progression, low diversity, and the general lack of visibility of the marine and maritime sectors.
133. To help address these challenges, Solent LEP has established Maritime UK Solent Limited to provide leadership for and promote a thriving maritime sector within the Solent through activities that support growth, collaboration, and innovation, and that showcase the Solent's maritime strengths on a national and international stage.
134. Hampshire Chamber of Commerce is also leading a Local Skills Improvement Plan for the Solent. Under the plan, the Chamber will use its convening power and

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<sup>12</sup> [Draft Plan with Options \(southampton.gov.uk\)](https://www.southampton.gov.uk) – p65

<sup>13</sup> [Solent LEP Local Skills Report 2022](https://www.solentlep.gov.uk)

<sup>14</sup> [Maritime 2050 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk)

knowledge of the local business landscape to bring stakeholders together to address long-standing skills challenges, including those in the marine sector.

135. Key players such as employers, colleges, universities, local authorities, the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership and other business organisations will work together to align labour market needs more closely with training provision and skills support programmes.
136. Co-ordinated by Business South's Maritime and Transport Action Group, funded by the Solent LEP, ambassadors are also going to local schools to talk about the opportunities available in the marine, maritime and transport sectors.
137. At the December 2022 meeting of the Inquiry Panel, representatives from the Hampshire Chamber of Commerce and Business South outlined the need for a collaborative approach to addressing the marine sector skills challenge, including engagement from the City Council.

## **Development**

### **River Itchen Flood Alleviation Scheme (RIFAS)**

138. Southampton has a number of areas that are vulnerable to flooding with a greater than 0.5% chance of flooding in any given year. Through the impact of climate change and rising sea levels vulnerability to tidal flood risk will increase over time and more land areas, property and critical infrastructure will become at risk or experience more regular flooding.
139. There are currently no formal raised flood defences in Southampton. There is a mix of engineered high ground, quay walls, low flood walls and embankments of varying condition and standard of protection. Where standard of protection is lower than a potential flood level, water is likely to overtop, resulting in flooding to the ground behind.
140. The Southampton Coastal Flood and Erosion Risk Management Strategy presents options for management of tidal risk on the west bank of the Itchen Estuary. The strategy will be delivered in stages over time to create a continuous raised flood defence from Woodmill to Redbridge.
141. To prevent future tidal flooding for communities where risk and need for defences is greatest, the Environment Agency are working in partnership with the Council and others to deliver the River Itchen Flood Alleviation Scheme (RIFAS), a flood defence scheme between Mount Pleasant Industrial Estate to just south of the Itchen Bridge.
142. Plans are for the scheme to be delivered in two stages:
  - Phase one (present day) – Construct an interim height wall to provide a 0.5% AEP (Annual Exceedance Probability) standard of protection by 2070.
  - Phase two (future, before 2070) – increase the height of the wall to provide a 0.5% AEP standard of protection by 2120.
143. In January 2022 the estimated cost of the scheme was £85.6m. Confirmed funding currently stands at £45.5m. Construction is provisionally planned to commence in January 2026 and conclude in Sept 2028.

144. Funding is being sought from alternative external funding streams to plug the gap. Funding challenges are standard for such projects. If funding is not found consideration will be given to extending the timescales of the project to enable more time for funding to be sought.

145. On completion, the RIFAS will remove the constraint of flood risk to many areas and increase regeneration and development opportunities.

146. The RIFAS will seek to improve public access to the riverfront and the public realm along the waterfront, including planned improvements to the Boardwalk and Crosshouse Hard car park.

147. To facilitate improvements a bid to the Levelling Up Fund was submitted in August 2022. This was unsuccessful but another round, with objectives more aligned to the RIFAS scheme objectives, will commence next year.

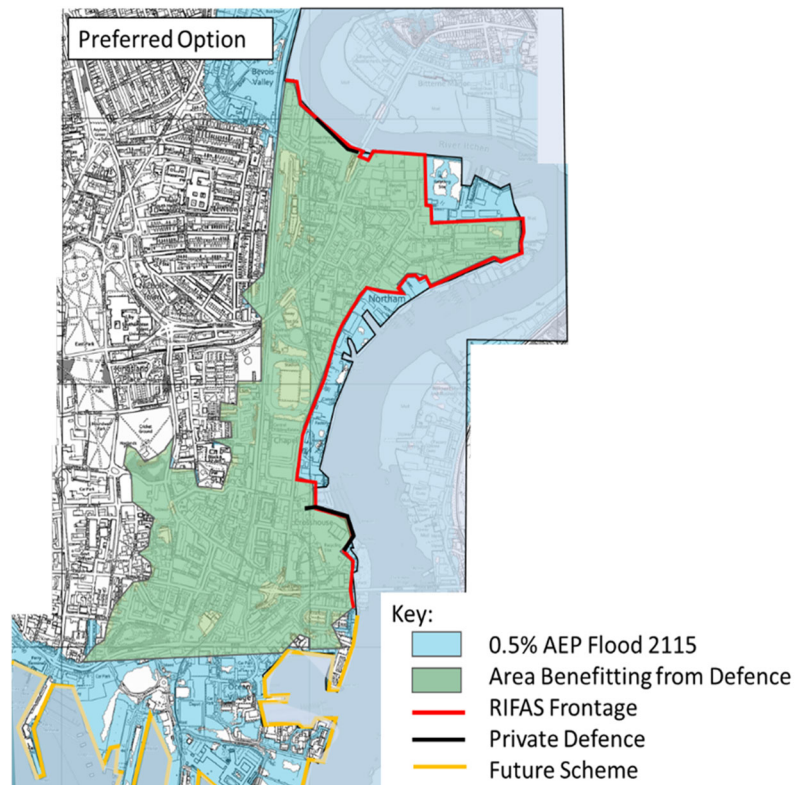


Figure 16 - RIFAS preferred option

### Southampton City Vision Local Plan – Creating a Distinctive Waterfront

148. As mentioned earlier in the report, the emerging Local Plan includes Waterfront Development Principles within a draft Waterfront Policy. The overarching criteria is to ensure the creation of a distinctive waterfront experience by, for example, upgrading the quality and accessibility of the city's waterfront public realm where this is possible. This will create an improved sense of place in Southampton which will better reflect its maritime identity.

149. To ensure the creation of a distinctive waterfront experience, development proposals within any of Southampton's waterfront areas must 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.

150. The Plan references five waterfront development areas – Ocean Village, Centenary Quay, Itchen Riverside, Weston Shore and Town Quay. Four out of the five, including the 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.

### Itchen Riverside

151. Partly enabled by the RIFAS, the largest of the development areas is the Itchen Riverside. The site currently plays a vital role supporting nearly 100 marine and

industrial businesses plus water sports activities. It includes a number of key waterfront regeneration sites, open space opportunities and residential areas. These include an opportunity for leisure-led regeneration linked to the football stadium and improved links to city centre and other waterfront areas.

- 152. The site includes nationally recognised Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), important habitats and ecosystems.
- 153. The development will be subject to master-planning activity. Initial focus for Itchen Riverside master-planning includes the Gas Holder site on Britannia Road, Stadium, Waterfront, Aggregate Wharves and Drivers Wharf.

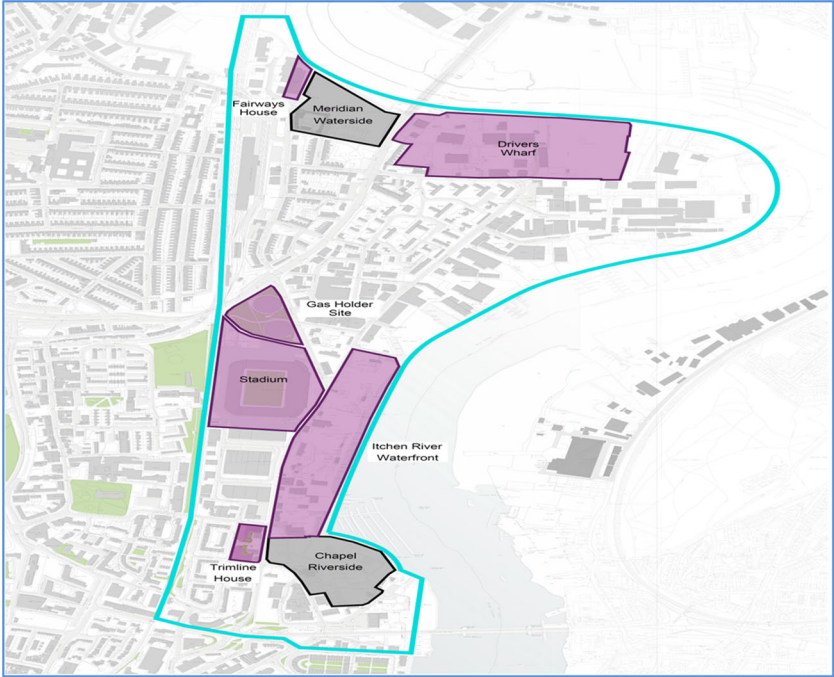


Figure 17 - Itchen Riverside focus of development

- 154. The Council’s Flood Risk Team are working closely with Economic Development, Strategic Planning and the Master-planning Team to align opportunities through RIFAS with the ambition outlined in the emerging City Vision Local Plan.

**Recreation and community use**

**Southampton City Vision Local Plan – Safeguarding Public Hards**

- 155. To support marine leisure activities the Waterfront Policy in the emerging City Vision Local Plan safeguards the 7 public hards in Southampton.

**Wrecked and Abandoned Vessel Removal**

- 156. The Harbour Master for ABP Port of Southampton informed the Panel that over the past 18 months, nearly 70 wrecked, abandoned or illegally moored vessels have been removed by ABP and either sold or scrapped depending on their condition.
- 157. ABP has invested over £500,000 in this 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 in the future.
- 158. This action has made the river more user friendly and safer for recreational groups.

## **Recommendations for a vibrant River Itchen in Southampton**

159. The River Itchen has been vibrant for hundreds of years and remains a hub for the marine and maritime industry, and a magnet for water sports enthusiasts.
160. Concerns have been raised about the future prosperity of the marine and maritime sector due to skills and recruitment challenges, and recreational users have outlined limitations that, if addressed could further activate the water.
161. The development opportunities, partly enabled by the RIFAS, need to deliver in accordance with the principles within the Waterfront Policy and create a distinctive waterfront that is well-designed, attractive, sensitive to the character and context of the area whilst also protecting and enhancing the natural environment.
162. To increase the vibrancy of the River Itchen in Southampton the following actions are recommended:

### **Economic Function**

- i. Whilst the Panel welcome the safeguarding of sites in the draft Local Plan for marine uses, to enable this vitally important sector to grow and prosper in Southampton it is recommended that the Council works collaboratively with partners, including British Marine, Solent Freeport, business representative organisations, and with existing marine and maritime businesses, to address the recruitment and training challenge via the Local Skills and Improvement Plan, to develop a skilled workforce now, and in the future.

### **Development**

- ii. The Panel recognise the potential of the redevelopment of the Itchen Riverside to revitalise the waterfront, enhancing the quality of the natural and built environment. The Panel would support the creation of a distinctive, design led waterfront that, through the master-planning process, integrates biodiversity, public access to the waterfront, flood resilience and high quality green spaces into its design and planning from the outset.

### **Recreation and Community Use**

- iii. In collaboration with partners, draft a 'Blue Space Strategy' for Southampton enabling a city-wide approach to recreation on the water to be developed and priorities for maintenance and infrastructure improvements to be identified.
- iv. To enable access to the water for watercraft, review the accessibility of the public hard on the River Itchen and ensure that they are well maintained and fit for purpose.
- v. In support of the ambition to activate the water the Panel welcomes the work that has been undertaken by ABP in clearing the wrecks and abandoned vessels from the River Itchen and encourage them to continue delivering their plans for further clearance activity until all such vessels are removed.

## **A Connected River**

River Itchen Survey - When asked what developments or improvements people would like to happen to the River Itchen in Southampton, more public access to the waterfront was raised by 63% of respondents.

163. The River Clyde Strategic Development Framework identifies a connected river to be one that links people, places and natural habitats. The approach to deliver this outcome for the River Clyde in Glasgow focuses on:
- Creating seamless walking and cycling routes
  - Bringing people to the river (access)
  - Clustering activities and linking people to jobs, town centres, services and public transport.
164. Research by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) shows that being around coastal environments, such as estuaries, is fundamental to our mental health and wellbeing.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps reflecting this, the River Itchen survey conducted in advance of the inquiry, identified that the most popular activity associated with the river was walking and cycling along the riverbanks.
165. People in Southampton want to be beside the river and feedback presented during the inquiry challenged decision makers to try to find more places where people can enjoy being by the river.
166. Creating seamless walking and cycling routes and using the river corridor to link people to jobs, town centres, services and public transport also supports ambitions in the Connected Southampton Local Transport Strategy.
167. A key strategic objective is 'a Better Way to Travel' - supporting people in changing the way they move around the city, by widening their travel choices so they can get around actively and healthily and travel moves towards becoming 'zero emission'.<sup>16</sup>

### **How well connected is the River Itchen in Southampton?**

#### **Seamless walking and cycling routes and access to the river**

168. The map attached as Figure 18 details the parks, paths and access points to the Itchen in Southampton. There is not a continuous walking and cycling route along the river's banks and Lindsay McCulloch, Natural Environment Manager at the City Council, observed that opportunities to travel alongside the river, or enjoy the river from public open spaces, range from good to non-existent.
169. A notable trend is that access reduces as you travel closer to the mouth of the estuary. This is due to a combination of physical constraints and the historical economic uses of the river. Most economic activity has been on the west bank where land is flatter. This leaves legacy spaces for recreational access.

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<sup>15</sup> [Estuaries | WWT](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Connected Southampton Transport Strategy - 2040](#)



Figure 18 - River Itchen parks, paths and access to water in Southampton



## Paths

170. The east bank of the river enjoys considerably greater access to riverside paths than the west bank. There are 2½ Km of paths through Riverside Park, however, beyond that the paths move away from the river with only 380m of riverside footpath access before reaching Jurds Lake at the mouth of the estuary.
171. There are only 940m of waterside footpaths along the west bank of the river.
172. It was reported to the Panel that the stretches of pathways that are most heavily used are the continuous routes, paths that connect from one place to another.

## Parks and open spaces

173. Along the river, open spaces occur where land is not suitable, or is no longer suitable, for commercial use. Large areas of informal green spaces exist above Woodmill that are ideal for walking and cycling.
174. The east bank enjoys Riverside Park, a parcel of land at Bitterne Manor (the site of Roman Clausentum), Chessel Bay and Peartree Green that has no direct access to the river but has excellent views.



Figure 19 – Riverside Park, north of Woodmill

175. The west bank has very limited open spaces. Small areas at Janaway Gardens and Pettinger Gardens exist and open space is due to be provided at the Meridian Waterside development.

## Care and maintenance

176. Graham Linecar, Secretary of Southampton Commons and Parks Protection Society (SCAPPS), when discussing the importance of access to the river in Southampton, raised concerns about the care and maintenance of open spaces and paths by the river's edge. Graham noted that some sites look neglected and linked high quality landscaping and regular maintenance with increased usage and a reduction in the likelihood of anti-social behaviour.

## Signage

177. Having identified that the most popular paths are the routes that connect from one place to another, SCAPPS' submission also referenced several riverfront greenspaces which are not connected and are not part of a continuous route. They concluded that although perhaps known and used by locals, in some cases it is not immediately obvious if it is a public or private space and there is a need to heighten awareness of these sites. SCAPPS recommended improving signage to paths and open spaces, and the associated historic waterfront sites, to encourage greater use of these valuable community assets.

## Access for anglers

178. Bill Baynes, Chairman of Southampton Sea Angling Club, raised the lack of access to the river for anglers. He explained that anglers are being prohibited from fishing in places where the waterfront is owned by private companies and fear that, with more waterfront development planned, the tidal River Itchen in Southampton could be a no fishing zone in the future.
179. In response to these concerns, the Panel referenced the role played by the planning process when determining waterfront access for new developments.

## Linking people to jobs, town centres, services and public transport

180. The aforementioned restricted network of paths alongside the river, particularly on the west bank, and the limited river crossing points, currently restrict the ability of the River Itchen corridor to play a key role in supporting sustainable travel by connecting the river with key services and hubs via walking and cycling routes.
181. As previously noted, the longer riverside paths are well used and do perform an important role improving connections and linking people with places whilst benefitting from views of the Itchen.
182. A good example of this is the boardwalk in Bevois Valley. In 2010, a 300-metre length of boardwalk was constructed projecting from the railway embankment over the tidal flats of the estuary by a partnership of Sustrans, Southampton City Council and Network Rail. This path now links the northern suburbs of Southampton, the suburban centre of St Denys and St Denys main line station to the north, with the City Centre, Northam Bridge and St Mary's Football Ground to the south and forms part of National Cycle Network route 23 from Reading to Southampton.



Figure 20 - Boardwalk in Southampton

## What action is being taken to improve the connectivity of the River Itchen in Southampton?

183. The Panel were informed of a number of initiatives, plans or proposals designed to link people, places and natural habitats via the River Itchen corridor in Southampton.

### Seamless walking and cycling routes and access to the river

#### Southampton City Vision Local Plan – Waterfront Policy

184. The emerging Local Plan recognises that currently, waterfront accessibility is fairly limited for residents and visitors alike, particularly in the west of the city. To address this the Waterfront Policy states that:

*‘To ensure creation of a distinctive waterfront experience, development proposals within any of Southampton’s waterfront areas must:*

*a. ensure waterfront accessibility for all, including Disabled People and those with reduced mobility;*

*b. create new continuous waterfront walkways, cycleways and public spaces, and create or enhance safe, well designed and attractive links to and from the waterfront from the city centre and between the city’s waterfront areas.’<sup>17</sup>*

185. Additional detail within the plan outlines the overall approach:

*‘The council will require all waterside development to incorporate or improve public access to and into the water unless this would adversely affect nature conservation interests or there would be unavoidable conflicts with other river users. Where possible, all areas of waterfront development must be linked together to eventually provide long stretches of accessible waterfront. This fits with the opening of the section of the England Coast Path between Calshot and Gosport to the public in August 2022. The provision of publicly accessible waterfront is a requirement in major development proposals such as Royal Pier, Chapel Riverside and longer-term schemes. However, in certain cases, such as the presence of dangerous or hazardous industrial operations, public access to the river frontage may not be appropriate, particularly if there is a danger to public safety.’<sup>18</sup>*

#### River Itchen Flood Alleviation Scheme (RIFAS)

186. The RIFAS will seek to improve public access and the public realm along the west bank of the River Itchen. This project provides the ideal opportunity to implement the policy aspirations outlined above and deliver improved waterfront connections that link people to places and natural habitats. The boardwalk development demonstrates what can be achieved when stakeholders collaborate.

### Linking people to jobs, town centres, services and public transport

187. Whilst recognising the significance of the requirement outlined in the emerging City Vision Local Plan for development proposals within any of Southampton’s waterfront to create or enhance safe, well designed and attractive links to and from the

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<sup>17</sup> [Draft Local Plan with Options - Development Principles \(southampton.gov.uk\)](#) - p219

<sup>18</sup> [Draft Local Plan with Options - Development Principles \(southampton.gov.uk\)](#) – p220

waterfront from the city centre and between the city’s waterfront areas, the Panel were particularly animated about the potential for a zero-carbon water-borne, travel and transport network operating on the River Itchen in Southampton.

**Southampton’s Blue Highway - Water Taxis**

- 188. In his presentation to the Inquiry Panel, Andy Tourell - Head of Sustainable Logistics at Ocean Infinity, explained that our 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” of water taxis enhancing connectivity between our communities, open spaces, the city centre, the port, employment and education hubs.
- 189. Initially, delivering a proof of concept service across the River Itchen, it is anticipated that the network would gradually expand along the Itchen before serving communities along both sides of Southampton Water, ultimately connecting the region.

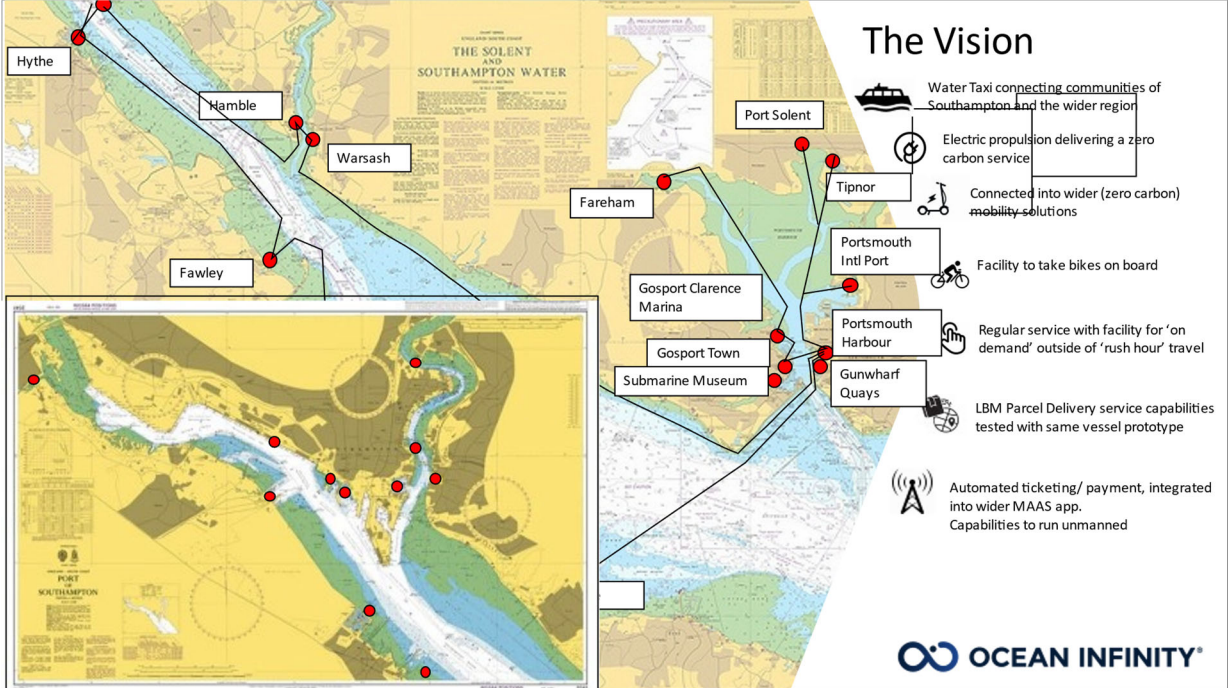


Figure 21 - A vision for a water taxi service connecting Southampton and the Solent

- 190. Fitted with zero carbon power and propulsion systems from day 1, there would also be a roadmap to unmanned vessel operation from a remote command and control centre in Woolston.
- 191. Southampton City Council, Solent Transport and ABP Southampton have demonstrated support for the project. Ocean Infinity are now building a consortium of partners, spanning local authorities, land owners, developers, operators and the maritime industry to bring this project to reality.
- 192. The Panel recognised that the 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 could make a significant contribution to protecting, preserving and promoting the River Itchen now, and in the future.

## Recommendations for a connected River Itchen in Southampton

193. In his presentation to the Panel, Graham Horton - Thames Solent Team Manager at Natural England, acknowledged that the River Itchen corridor was a fantastic asset to Southampton, providing direct access to valuable blue/green space that is beneficial to our mental and physical health and wellbeing. He noted that much of the sensitive, easily disturbed wildlife interest has probably already disappeared from the tidal River Itchen in Southampton and the river could accommodate increased recreational pressures, if well managed.
194. He concluded that there was:
- ‘Significant opportunity to increase access provision, build a stronger relationship with ‘place’ and with the natural environment.’<sup>19</sup>*
195. During the inquiry the Panel were informed of opportunities to deliver increased access to, and along the river, that would link people, places and natural habitats thereby meeting the challenge to find more places where people can enjoy being by the river.
196. However, these opportunities need to be delivered, therefore, to increase the connectivity of the River Itchen in Southampton and meet the aspirations of residents for enhanced public access to the waterfront, the following actions are recommended:

### **Seamless walking and cycling routes and access to the river**

- i. Access to the riverfront has improved in Southampton through developments such as the boardwalk and the River Itchen Flood Alleviation Scheme (RIFAS) provides an opportunity to extend access to the river and the waterfront footpath network. The Panel recognise the intrinsic value associated with being by the river and therefore the Council should maximise opportunities, wherever they arise, to improve public access to the Itchen River in Southampton.
- ii. The draft Waterfront Policy in the emerging City Vision Local Plan seeks to enhance public access to the waterfront wherever possible and work towards creating continuous waterfront walkways, cycleways and public spaces. To deliver on this ambition the tools available to the Council must be deployed and City Council leaders need to provide a strong message that public access to the waterfront is a priority and that the Council will pro-actively pursue Rights of Way breaches and failures to follow Section 106 agreements. This will support officers when making decisions about future developments and balancing economic interests, environmental concerns and community aspirations regarding access and connectivity. To avoid anglers from being excluded, the ability of anglers to access the water needs to be a consideration when waterfront access for new developments is determined.
- iii. To promote and raise awareness of the ‘green’ riverside areas and waterside footpaths, tidy up the publicly owned open spaces and improve the signage of these routes and associated waterfront historic sights.

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<sup>19</sup> [Graham Horton - Natural England presentation](#)

### **Linking people to jobs, town centres, services and public transport**

- iv. The introduction of a zero-carbon water-borne, travel and transport network, connecting communities could help to create a distinctive waterfront experience in Southampton, enable businesses to connect with their workforce, and could make a significant contribution to protecting, preserving and promoting the River Itchen for years and generations to come. The Council needs to use its influence and connections to secure a Solent water taxi service, commencing initially on the River Itchen and promote within the Local Plan a requirement for new waterfront development over a certain size to include a docking facility.

## **Strategic Management and Partnership Working**

River Itchen Survey - When asked what concerns, if any, you have about the River Itchen in Southampton, 229 out of the 647 comments received (35%) were linked to the management of the river.

197. Previous sections of this report have been focused on specific criteria and objectives – A healthy and resilient river; A vibrant river; A connected river. However, the examples of good practice considered at the March 2023 meeting of the Panel emphasised the importance of effective strategic management and partnership working if agreed objectives are to be delivered.
198. In the introduction to this report the complexity of the management, ownership, rules and regulations relating to the Itchen were outlined. There is no single organisation that oversees the management of all watercourses, estuaries or bodies of water. Different organisations and landowners have different roles and responsibilities.
199. There is currently no forum specifically focused on the River Itchen in Southampton where key stakeholders could meet regularly to address the challenges facing the river, and there is no plan or vision that they are signed up to.

### **Solent Forum**

200. Like the River Itchen, the Solent has a highly complex system of planning and management due to the different regulatory systems across the land-sea divide and the wide range of authorities and agencies involved. There is a correspondingly large number of plans, strategies and other initiatives around the Solent, produced by a range of organisations for different purposes, covering different areas and timescales.
201. The Solent Forum was established in December 1992 with aims to promote, facilitate and support integrated planning and sustainable management of the Solent, and, to provide a broad-based consultative forum.
202. Karen McHugh, Solent Forum Manager, when discussing the achievements of the Forum, identified the benefit of bringing together often competing interests to develop a greater understanding of the problems and to determine collective solutions. Most challenges cannot be resolved by one organisation acting independently.
203. Southampton City Council used to be a member of Solent Forum, and a member of the Steering Group, but withdrew in 2018. Southampton City Council is the only key local authority that is not a member of the Forum. The Panel recognised that this limits the influence the Council is able to exert over issues impacting on the city.

### **Thames21**

204. Thames21, like Wessex Rivers Trust, is a member of The Rivers Trust and acts as the voice for London's waterways, working with communities to improve rivers and canals for people and wildlife.
205. It has a track record of improving rivers but most of Thames21 work is delivered in partnership with other organisations. Debbie Leach, Chief Executive at Thames21 attributed part of their success to their ability to build strong relationships with the

complex array of stakeholders, thereby enabling the charity to exert influence, over organisations such as Thames Water, to champion the Thames and its tributaries.



**IN THE LAST 5 YEARS THAMES21 HAS:-**

- Organised **36,000+** volunteering opportunities
- Directly engaged **100,000+** people with their local river
- Involved **44,000+** children in educational activities
- Championed + expanded urban delivery of **integrated constructed wetlands**
- Introduced new **web of reedbeds** across canalised London water courses
- Established **Natural Flood Management** to protect **urban communities**
- Delivered **innovative new evidencing work** on ability of **Nature Based Solutions** to reduce river pollution
- **Led the sector in analysing and using data** on road pollution of rivers
- Removed **1000+** tonnes of rubbish from the River Thames alone
- Developed **nationally-accredited technical courses** for volunteers




Figure 22 - Thames21 achievements since 2017

**Glasgow – The River Clyde Strategic Development Framework**

206. The Strategic Development Framework sets out key outcomes for the transformational regeneration of the River Clyde Corridor in Glasgow. The Panel were drawn to the clarity of the outcomes and the vision driving Glasgow’s approach:

*‘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.’*

207. If Southampton is to effectively protect, preserve and promote the River Itchen it needs a vision for the future that is shared by stakeholders and the city, supported by a River Itchen plan with clear objectives.

208. To facilitate improved outcomes for the River Itchen in Southampton, the following actions relating to strategic, sustainable management, relationship building, and partnership working are recommended:

- i. Establish an Itchen River Forum comprising key stakeholders, including representatives from recreation users, community groups (Respect River Campaign), Wessex Rivers Trust, Southern Water, statutory agencies and the business community to develop relationships, acquire a greater understanding of the issues and to determine collective solutions.
- ii. Develop, through the Forum, a River Itchen vision and plan that sets clear objectives for the River Itchen in Southampton.
- iii. Undertake regular monitoring and evaluation to underpin the plans objectives.
- iv. To develop understanding and influence regarding issues impacting on the Solent coastline, the City Council should re-join Solent Forum as a full and active member.



## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

209. A summary of the key evidence presented at each of the inquiry meetings is attached as Appendix 3. All the reports, presentations and minutes from the inquiry meetings can be found here:

[Browse meetings - Scrutiny Inquiry Panel - Protecting, Preserving and Promoting The River Itchen in Southampton | Southampton City Council](#)

### **Conclusions**

210. In his presentation to Southampton's historical Court Leet on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2022, Gavin Millar from the Friends of Itchen Estuary stated that:

*'The Itchen Estuary has been central to the history and development of Southampton – from the Roman settlement of Clausentum, to the Saxon town of Hamwic, through to the period of industrialisation with shipbuilding and aircraft manufacturing amongst many other industries along its shores.*

*Over the centuries and through to the present day, Southampton citizens have made a living by this tidal river, they have fished on this river, walked by the river, swum in the river and rowed and sailed on the river.*

*Few cities can lay claim to a river estuary within their city boundaries. Although much of the wildlife rich salt-marshes and green riverbanks have been lost to development some still remain. The Itchen Estuary still has huge value for biodiversity, and carbon capture, and as the world's climate heats up, this estuary becomes increasingly important for countering the urban heat island we inhabit during our hotter summers.*

*Despite its huge heritage, wildlife, ecological and recreational value this precious open space within Southampton faces multiple threats from pollution, from increasing restrictions to access, and from development.<sup>20</sup>*

211. Echoing Gavin's words, many of those who attended Panel meetings referenced the value of the Itchen Estuary, and the globally important non-tidal section of the river above Woodmill, to the city, recognising it to be an asset that we should cherish.
212. However, despite, as eloquently put by Graham Linecar from SCAPPs, *'the river giving the city its identity and a sense of place'*, he, like many, are of the view that the River Itchen in Southampton is under appreciated and is taken for granted.
213. The threats identified leave the river's health in the balance. A healthy river that supports abundant flora and fauna enhances our health and wellbeing, encourages recreation and active community support, and increases the desire to be by the river thereby increasing investment and economic prosperity.
214. A healthy river therefore leads to a vibrant river and potentially a better connected river.
215. Reflecting the concerns raised and the evidence presented, a different approach to the river is required. An approach that recognises the value of the River Itchen to Southampton, where the focus is on investing in the health of the river and a high quality river environment rather than, as has historically happened, exploiting the river.

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<sup>20</sup> [Appendix 1 Court Leet Presentments 2022.pdf \(southampton.gov.uk\)](#) – Number 8

216. Fortunately, a number of timely developments mean that this is an opportune moment to commit to the new approach. The most significant of these being the refresh of the Local Plan and the opportunity it presents to guide planning applications and shape the city as a place to 2040 and beyond.
217. Progress has been made, and if these opportunities are harnessed there is the potential to rise to the challenges set and to have a fluvial and tidal river that is closer to being of high ecological status; a distinctive waterfront that is well-designed, attractive, sensitive to the character and context of the area which also protects and enhances the natural environment; and a river that effectively links people, places and habitats.
218. This will contribute significantly to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the city as the foreword to Thames21 5 year plan explains:

*'A healthy and clean river is joyous and energising, it gladdens our hearts and restores our souls. It is abundant with nature and flourishing wildlife. It empowers, enables and protects human activity and achievement. A healthy river builds community. Urban and rural populations consistently gather, grow and prosper around a healthy river.'*<sup>21</sup>

### **Recommendations**

219. In this report recommendations have been identified against each of the ambitions for the river. In summary, reflecting the key findings and conclusions the following actions are recommended to protect, preserve and promote the River Itchen in Southampton:

### **Strategic Management and Partnership Working**

220. To facilitate improved outcomes for the River Itchen in Southampton, the following actions relating to strategic, sustainable management, relationship building, and partnership working are recommended:
1. Establish an Itchen River Forum comprising key stakeholders, including representatives from recreation users, community groups (Respect River Campaign), Wessex Rivers Trust, Southern Water, statutory agencies and the business community to develop relationships, acquire a greater understanding of the issues and to determine collective solutions.
  2. Develop, through the Forum, a River Itchen vision and plan that sets clear objectives for the River Itchen in Southampton.
  3. Undertake regular monitoring and evaluation to underpin the plans objectives.
  4. To develop understanding and influence regarding issues impacting on the Solent coastline, the City Council should re-join Solent Forum as a full and active member.

### **A Healthy and Resilient River**

221. To improve the health and resilience of the River Itchen in Southampton and move it closer to a Water Framework Directive Ecological Status rating of high, the following actions are recommended:

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<sup>21</sup> [Thames21 5 year plan](#)

5. The Council works with partners to actively pursue opportunities to restore and enhance biodiversity and natural habitats along the river to improve the situation for wildlife. The Nitrogen Neutrality Scheme could be a source of funding to support such initiatives, dependent upon discussions with Natural England.
6. Whilst the Panel support the proposed additional investment in Southampton's infrastructure by Southern Water to reduce wastewater incidents, Southern Water are encouraged to follow the example set by Thames Water relating to inland waterways and provide real time information about pollution events impacting on the River Itchen. The Panel request that this is undertaken as soon as possible, via the Beachbuoy tool or through other communication outlets, to enable informed decisions to be taken.
7. To reduce and slow the run-off and pollution into the River Itchen, build sustainable drainage solutions into highway projects, as well as those mandated for new developments by the enactment of Schedule 3 of the in the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, and utilise new gully technology to limit harmful chemicals from the highways entering the watercourse.
8. If requested, the Council provides timely support to community groups in their campaign for areas of the River Itchen to be awarded Designated Bathing Water Status.
9. If pilot schemes in the River Hamble and Isle of Wight identify them to be beneficial to the river environment, the Council should support the establishment of oyster reefs in the River Itchen to help improve water quality.
10. To help reduce locally produced waste and pollution and to build upon the momentum created by the work at Chessel Bay, work with partners to develop an accreditation scheme for businesses that 'respect the river'. There is potential for this initiative to be funded through the Southampton Airport Community Fund.
11. To aid policy and decision making and encourage investment in our natural environment, consideration should be given by the Council to adopting a natural capital approach by placing a value on Southampton's natural environment.

### **A Vibrant River**

222. To increase the vibrancy of the River Itchen in Southampton the following actions are recommended:
12. Whilst the Panel welcome the safeguarding of sites in the draft Local Plan for marine uses, to enable this vitally important sector to grow and prosper in Southampton it is recommended that the Council works collaboratively with partners, including British Marine, Solent Freeport, business representative organisations, and with existing marine and maritime businesses, to address the recruitment and training challenge via the Local Skills and Improvement Plan, to develop a skilled workforce now, and in the future.
  13. The Panel recognise the potential of the redevelopment of the Itchen Riverside to revitalise the waterfront, enhancing the quality of the natural and built environment. The Panel would support the creation of a distinctive, design led waterfront that, through the master-planning process, integrates biodiversity,

public access to the waterfront, flood resilience and high quality green spaces into its design and planning from the outset.

- 14.** In collaboration with partners, draft a 'Blue Space Strategy' for Southampton enabling a city-wide approach to recreation on the water to be developed and priorities for maintenance and infrastructure improvements to be identified.
- 15.** To enable access to the water for watercraft, review the accessibility of the public hard on the River Itchen and ensure that they are well maintained and fit for purpose.
- 16.** In support of the ambition to activate the water the Panel welcomes the work that has been undertaken by ABP in clearing the wrecks and abandoned vessels from the River Itchen and encourage them to continue delivering their plans for further clearance activity until all such vessels are removed.

### **A Connected River**

**223.** To increase the connectivity of the River Itchen in Southampton and meet the aspirations of residents for enhanced public access to the waterfront, the following actions are recommended:

- 17.** Access to the riverfront has improved in Southampton through developments such as the boardwalk and the River Itchen Flood Alleviation Scheme (RIFAS) provides an opportunity to extend access to the river and the waterfront footpath network. The Panel recognise the intrinsic value associated with being by the river and therefore the Council should maximise opportunities, wherever they arise, to improve public access to the Itchen River in Southampton.
- 18.** The draft Waterfront Policy in the emerging City Vision Local Plan seeks to enhance public access to the waterfront wherever possible and work towards creating continuous waterfront walkways, cycleways and public spaces. To deliver on this ambition the tools available to the Council must be deployed and City Council leaders need to provide a strong message that public access to the waterfront is a priority and that the Council will pro-actively pursue Rights of Way breaches and failures to follow Section 106 agreements. This will support officers when making decisions about future developments and balancing economic interests, environmental concerns and community aspirations regarding access and connectivity. To avoid anglers from being excluded, the ability of anglers to access the water needs to be a consideration when waterfront access for new developments is determined.
- 19.** To promote and raise awareness of the 'green' riverside areas and waterside footpaths, tidy up the publicly owned open spaces and improve the signage of these routes and associated waterfront historic sights.
- 20.** The introduction of a zero-carbon water-borne, travel and transport network, connecting communities could help to create a distinctive waterfront experience in Southampton, enable businesses to connect with their workforce, and could make a significant contribution to protecting, preserving and promoting the River Itchen for years and generations to come. The Council needs to use its influence and connections to secure a Solent water taxi service, commencing initially on the River Itchen and promote within the Local Plan a requirement for new waterfront development over a certain size to include a docking facility.

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Inquiry Terms of Reference

Appendix 2 - Inquiry Plan

Appendix 3 - Summary of evidence

## **Appendix 1 – Inquiry Terms of Reference**

### **Protecting, Preserving and Promoting the River Itchen in Southampton Scrutiny Inquiry - Terms of Reference and Outline Inquiry Plan**

#### **1. Scrutiny Panel membership:**

Councillor Savage  
Councillor A Bunday  
Councillor Cooper  
Councillor Moulton  
Councillor White

#### **2. Purpose:**

In partnership with stakeholders to identify opportunities to protect, preserve and promote the River Itchen in Southampton.

#### **2. Background:**

- The River Itchen in Hampshire is an example of a chalk stream, rivers that rise from springs in landscapes with a bedrock of chalk. It is approximately 28 miles in length.
- The source of the river is just south of the village of Cheriton, and the river becomes tidal after it passes under Woodmill Bridge in Swaythling.
- The Itchen has been the lifeblood of Southampton since Roman and Saxon times, it divides the city in two and is an important commercial and natural resource.
- Marinas, wharves, and quays are located at the lower reaches of the river and businesses line its banks. In Southampton the river is also used by numerous clubs involved in water sports as well as SWAC (Southampton Water Activities Centre) and Woodmill Activity Centre.
- Areas of the River Itchen in Southampton are identified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA) and as the Itchen meanders through Southampton it does, in places, offer opportunities for communities to access the waterfront and enjoy being by the water.
- The river is subject to use by numerous, and, at times competing interests that can create pressure on the natural environment and tensions between user groups. In addition, ownership and oversight of the river is complex and the responsibility of a number of different organisations.
- Reflecting their importance to communities, across the UK there are examples of local approaches where stakeholders are working in partnership to protect, preserve and promote urban rivers.

#### **3. Objectives:**

- a. To identify the various different users and uses of the River Itchen in Southampton and the challenges this presents.
- b. To understand existing plans and opportunities to address the identified challenges.
- c. To identify good practice being employed to protect, preserve and promote urban rivers elsewhere.
- d. To identify what initiatives and approaches could work well in Southampton to protect, preserve and promote the River Itchen.

#### **4. Methodology:**

- a. Seek the views of residents and stakeholders
- b. Undertake desktop research
- c. Identify best practice

#### **5. Proposed Timetable:**

Seven meetings between October 2022 and April 2023

##### **Meeting 1: 6 October 2022**

- Introduction, context and background
  - Ownership
  - Responsibilities
  - Rules governing the river
  - Uses of the river
  - Feedback from resident's survey

##### **Meeting 2: 17 November 2022**

- The condition of the river and plans for improvement
  - Water quality
  - Habitat and biodiversity
  - Chessel Bay case study

##### **Meeting 3: 1 December 2022**

- Economic importance of the river (Understand the role of the river in the local economy and recognise the impact of some commercial use)
  - Wharfs
  - Marinas
  - Hazards / Wrecks
  - Business along riverbanks
  - Housing and transport developments
  - Planning policies and development

##### **Meeting 4: 19 January 2023**

- Flood Risk Management

- River Itchen Flood Risk Alleviation Scheme

**Meeting 5: 16 February 2023**

- Recreation / Community use and access to the river (How can more people enjoy the river?)
  - Water sports / Anglers
  - Friends of groups
  - Houseboat residents
  - Riverside walks and access

**Meeting 6: 2 March 2023**

- Review of best practice (What urban areas have sought to address the challenges raised?)

**Meeting 7: 20 April 2023**

- Consideration of the final report



## Appendix 2 – Inquiry Plan

| DATE     | MEETING THEME                                                                           | EVIDENCE PROVIDED BY                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 06/10/22 | <b>Agree Terms of Reference and Introduction, context and background to the inquiry</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr David Rumble - Chief Executive Officer, Wessex Rivers Trust</li> <li>• Sam Foulds - Flood Risk Management Team Leader</li> <li>• Cara Brims - Flood Risk Officer, SCC</li> <li>• Rose Nicole - Co-founder of Respect the River Campaign and Co-ordinator of Friends of Chessel Bay Nature Reserve</li> <li>• Mark Pirnie - Scrutiny Manager at SCC</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 17/11/22 | <b>The River Environment</b>                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graham Horton - Thames Solent Team Manager, Natural England</li> <li>• Dr David Rumble - Chief Executive, Wessex Rivers Trust</li> <li>• Andrew Adams - Catchment Planning Manager, Southern Water</li> <li>• David Murphy - Wastewater Strategy Manager, Southern Water</li> <li>• Lindsay McCulloch - Natural Environment Manager, SCC</li> <li>• The Environment Agency</li> <li>• Colin Perris - Service Manager, Highways Contracts, SCC</li> <li>• Tim Mayer - MDL Marinas Sales and Marketing Director</li> </ul>                                                                                     |
| 01/12/22 | <b>The Economic Importance of the River Itchen</b>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Steve Masters - Harbour Master, ABP Port of Southampton</li> <li>• Matthew Hill - Economic Development Operations Manager, SCC</li> <li>• Paulina Piotrowski - Economic Development Operations Manager, SCC</li> <li>• Graham Tuck - Planning Policy Group Leader, SCC</li> <li>• Amber Trueman - Strategic Planning Manager, SCC</li> <li>• Andy Tourell - Head of Sustainable Logistics, Ocean Infinity</li> <li>• Leigh-Sara Timberlake – Group CEO, Business South Group Ltd</li> <li>• Gavin Hall - Chair of Planning &amp; Transport Business Strategy Group, Hampshire Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul> |

| <b>DATE</b>     | <b>MEETING THEME</b>                        | <b>EVIDENCE PROVIDED BY</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>19/01/23</b> | <b>Flood Risk Management</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dave Martin – Flood and Coastal Risk Management Partnership &amp; Strategic Overview Team Leader, New Forest, Test &amp; Itchen, The Environment Agency</li> <li>• Blake Jones – Project Executive, RIFAS, The Environment Agency</li> <li>• Sam Foulds – Flood Risk Management Team Leader, SCC</li> <li>• Cara Brims – Flood Risk Officer, SCC</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>16/02/23</b> | <b>How can more people enjoy the river?</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lindsay McCulloch - Natural Environment Manager, SCC</li> <li>• Graham Linecar - Secretary of Southampton Commons and Parks Protection Society (SCAPPS)</li> <li>• Mark Pirnie - Scrutiny Manager, SCC</li> <li>• James Hinves - National Club Development Manager, British Canoeing</li> <li>• Feedback from - Friends of Itchen Navigation; Friends of Riverside Park; Friends of Chessel Bay; All Aboard Festival; Respect the River Campaign; SWAC and Woodmill Activity Centre; Coalporters Amateur Rowing Club; BTC Rowing Club; British Canoeing; Southampton Canoe Club; Southampton Sailing Club; St Denys Boat Club; 25th Northam Sea Scouts; Kingfisher Swimmers; Southampton Sea Angling Club; a Woodmill Activity Centre volunteer.</li> </ul> |
| <b>02/03/23</b> | <b>Exploring Good Practice</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lindsay Pratt - Principal Planner, Glasgow City Council</li> <li>• Debbie Leach - Chief Executive, Thames21</li> <li>• Karen McHugh - Solent Forum Manager</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>20/04/23</b> | <b>Agree final report</b>                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

The minutes for each meeting, the evidence submitted to the Scrutiny Inquiry Panel and presentations delivered at each meeting is available at:

[Browse meetings - Scrutiny Inquiry Panel - Protecting, Preserving and Promoting The River Itchen in Southampton | Southampton City Council](#)

### **Appendix 3 – Summary of Evidence**

Following each meeting of the Inquiry Panel the Scrutiny Manager provided a summary of the evidence presented to Panel Members. The summaries can be accessed via the following link:

[Protecting, Preserving and Promoting the River Itchen in Southampton - Summary of evidence](#)