

Public Document Pack

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

Thursday, 8th June, 2023
at 5.30 pm

PLEASE NOTE TIME OF MEETING

Council Chamber, Civic Centre,
Southampton

This meeting is open to the public

Members

Councillor Blackman (Chair)
Councillor Y Frampton
Councillor Galton
Councillor Letts
Councillor Moulton
Councillor Dr Paffey
Councillor Councillor
Councillor Rayment
Councillor Every

Appointed Members

Catherine Hobbs, Roman Catholic Church
Francis Otieno, Primary Parent Governor
Rob Sanders, Church of England

Contacts

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PUBLIC INFORMATION

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee holds the Executive to account, exercises the call-in process, and sets and monitors standards for scrutiny. It formulates a programme of scrutiny inquiries and appoints Scrutiny Panels to undertake them. Members of the Executive cannot serve on this Committee.

Role of Overview and Scrutiny

Overview and Scrutiny includes the following three functions:

- Holding the Executive to account by questioning and evaluating the Executive's actions, both before and after decisions taken.
- Developing and reviewing Council policies, including the Policy Framework and Budget Strategy.
- Making reports and recommendations on any aspect of Council business and other matters that affect the City and its citizens.

Overview and Scrutiny can ask the Executive to reconsider a decision, but they do not have the power to change the decision themselves.

Southampton: Corporate Plan 2022-2030 sets out the four key outcomes:

- Communities, culture & homes - Celebrating the diversity of cultures within Southampton; enhancing our cultural and historical offer and using these to help transform our communities.
- Green City - Providing a sustainable, clean, healthy and safe environment for everyone. Nurturing green spaces and embracing our waterfront.
- Place shaping - Delivering a city for future generations. Using data, insight and vision to meet the current and future needs of the city.
- Wellbeing - Start well, live well, age well, die well; working with other partners and other services to make sure that customers get the right help at the right time

Procedure / Public Representations

At the discretion of the Chair, members of the public may address the meeting on any report included on the agenda in which they have a relevant interest. Any member of the public wishing to address the meeting should advise the Democratic Support Officer (DSO) whose contact details are on the front sheet of the agenda.

Access is available for disabled people.

Please contact the Democratic Support Officer who will help to make any necessary arrangements.

Fire Procedure: -

In the event of a fire or other emergency a continuous alarm will sound, and you will be advised by Council officers what action to take.

Mobile Telephones: - Please switch your mobile telephones to silent whilst in the meeting

Use of Social Media: - The Council supports the video or audio recording of meetings open to the public, for either live or subsequent broadcast. However, if, in the Chair's opinion, a person filming or recording a meeting or taking photographs is interrupting proceedings or causing a disturbance, under the Council's Standing Orders the person can be ordered to stop their activity, or to leave the meeting. By entering the meeting room, you are consenting to being recorded and to the use of those images and recordings for broadcasting and or/training purposes. The meeting may be recorded by the press or members of the public. Any person or organisation filming, recording, or broadcasting any meeting of the Council is responsible for any claims or other liability resulting from them doing so. Details of the Council's Guidance on the recording of meetings is available on the Council's website.

Smoking Policy: - The Council operates a no-smoking policy in all civic buildings.

Dates of Meetings for the Municipal Year:

2022	2023
9 June	12 January
14 July	2 February
11 August	9 March
8 September	13 April
13 October	
10 November	
15 December	

CONDUCT OF MEETING

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The general role and terms of reference for the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, together with those for all Scrutiny Panels, are set out in Part 2 (Article 6) of the Council’s Constitution, and their particular roles are set out in Part 4 (Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules – paragraph 5) of the Constitution.

RULES OF PROCEDURE

The meeting is governed by the Council Procedure Rules and the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules as set out in Part 4 of the Constitution.

BUSINESS TO BE DISCUSSED

Only those items listed on the attached agenda may be considered at this meeting.

QUORUM

The minimum number of appointed Members required to be in attendance to hold the meeting is 4.

DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Members are required to disclose, in accordance with the Members’ Code of Conduct, **both** the existence **and** nature of any “Disclosable Pecuniary Interest” or “Other Interest” they may have in relation to matters for consideration on this Agenda.

DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS

A Member must regard himself or herself as having a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter that they or their spouse, partner, a person they are living with as husband or wife, or a person with whom they are living as if they were a civil partner in relation to:

- (i) Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
- (ii) Sponsorship:

Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from Southampton City Council) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expense incurred by you in carrying out duties as a member, or towards your election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.

- (iii) Any contract which is made between you / your spouse etc (or a body in which the you / your spouse etc has a beneficial interest) and Southampton City Council under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed, and which has not been fully discharged.
- (iv) Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of Southampton.
- (v) Any license (held alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of Southampton for a month or longer.
- (vi) Any tenancy where (to your knowledge) the landlord is Southampton City Council and the tenant is a body in which you / your spouse etc has a beneficial interests.
- (vii) Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where that body (to your knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of Southampton, and either:
 - a) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body, or
 - b) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which you / your spouse etc has a beneficial interest that exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

Other Interests

A Member must regard himself or herself as having an, 'Other Interest' in any membership of, or occupation of a position of general control or management in:

- Any public authority or body exercising functions of a public nature
- Any body directed to charitable purposes
- Any body whose principal purpose includes the influence of public opinion or policy

Principles of Decision Making

All decisions of the Council will be made in accordance with the following principles:-

- proportionality (i.e. the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome);
- due consultation and the taking of professional advice from officers;
- respect for human rights;
- a presumption in favour of openness, accountability and transparency;
- setting out what options have been considered;
- setting out reasons for the decision; and
- clarity of aims and desired outcomes.

In exercising discretion, the decision maker must:

- understand the law that regulates the decision making power and gives effect to it. The decision-maker must direct itself properly in law;
- take into account all relevant matters (those matters which the law requires the authority as a matter of legal obligation to take into account);
- leave out of account irrelevant considerations;
- act for a proper purpose, exercising its powers for the public good;
- not reach a decision which no authority acting reasonably could reach, (also known as the "rationality" or "taking leave of your senses" principle);
- comply with the rule that local government finance is to be conducted on an annual basis. Save to the extent authorised by Parliament, 'live now, pay later' and forward funding are unlawful; and
- act with procedural propriety in accordance with the rules of fairness.

AGENDA

1 APOLOGIES AND CHANGES IN PANEL MEMBERSHIP (IF ANY)

To note any changes in membership of the Panel made in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4.3.

2 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

To elect the Vice Chair for the Municipal Year 2023-2024.

3 DISCLOSURE OF PERSONAL AND PECUNIARY INTERESTS

In accordance with the Localism Act 2011, and the Council's Code of Conduct, Members to disclose any personal or pecuniary interests in any matter included on the agenda for this meeting.

NOTE: Members are reminded that, where applicable, they must complete the appropriate form recording details of any such interests and hand it to the Democratic Support Officer.

4 DECLARATIONS OF SCRUTINY INTEREST

Members are invited to declare any prior participation in any decision taken by a Committee, Sub-Committee, or Panel of the Council on the agenda and being scrutinised at this meeting.

5 DECLARATION OF PARTY POLITICAL WHIP

Members are invited to declare the application of any party political whip on any matter on the agenda and being scrutinised at this meeting.

6 STATEMENT FROM THE CHAIR

7 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (INCLUDING MATTERS ARISING) (Pages 1 - 4)

To approve and sign as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 2023 and the final meeting of the Scrutiny Inquiry on the 20 April 2023 and to deal with any matters arising, attached.

8 DRAFT GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND BIODIVERSITY STRATEGIES (Pages 5 - 42)

Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport recommending that the Committee review and provide feedback on the draft Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity Strategies prior to external consultation in July 2023.

9 SCRUTINY INQUIRY PANEL - PROTECTING, PRESERVING AND PROMOTING

THE RIVER ITCHEN IN SOUTHAMPTON (Pages 43 - 102)

Report of the Chair of the Scrutiny Inquiry Panel 2022/23, recommending that the Committee consider and approve the final report of the Scrutiny Inquiry Panel and forward it to the Executive for consideration and further action.

10 **MONITORING SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE** (Pages 103 - 106)

Report of the Scrutiny Manager enabling the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to monitor and track progress on recommendations made to the Executive at previous meetings.

Wednesday, 31 May 2023

Director – Legal, Governance and HR

SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 APRIL 2023

Present: Councillors Fuller (Chair), Houghton (Vice-Chair), Cooper, Guthrie, Moulton, Savage, Shields and Winning
Appointed Members: Rob Sanders

Apologies: Councillors White

48. **APOLOGIES AND CHANGES IN COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP (IF ANY)**

The apologies of Councillor White were noted.

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

RESOLVED: that the minutes for the Committee meeting on 9 March 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

50. **CONSIDERATION OF A PETITION**

The Committee considered the report of the Scrutiny Manager which recommended that the Committee discussed a petition that met the threshold for consideration at the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the officer response provided.

Petitioners Katherine Barbour and Helen Makarakis; Councillor Keogh, Cabinet Member for Transport and District Regeneration and Iain Steane, Transport Policy and Sustainable Travel Manager were present and with the consent of the Chair addressed the meeting.

RESOLVED

- 1) That the Administration extends the promotion of the national £2 bus fare offer through the range of communication channels available to the Council.
- 2) That consideration is given to exploring the creation of a salary sacrifice scheme to increase bus patronage and reduce the cost of bus travel.
- 3) That, to reduce the cost of travelling by bus for Southampton residents, the Council seeks to maximise the amount of grant funding it receives from the Government and ensures that any submission for funding is targeted to ensure the greatest chance of success.

51. **FORWARD PLAN**

The Committee noted the report of the Scrutiny Manager enabling the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to examine the content of the Forward Plan and to discuss issues of interest or concern with the Executive.

ST MARY'S LEISURE CENTRE

The Committee noted the briefing paper attached to this item detailing the forthcoming Cabinet Decision regarding St Mary's Leisure Centre.

Councillor Fielker, Cabinet Member for Health, Adults and Leisure was present and with the consent of the Chair addressed the meeting.

52. **MONITORING SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE**

The Committee considered the report of the Scrutiny Manager enabling the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to monitor and track progress on recommendations made to the Executive at previous meetings.

RESOLVED that following consideration of the Executive's response to the Committee's recommendations made on the Household Waste and Fly-Tipping Policy 2023-2026, the Executive are requested to provide clarity about what waste service managers are asking of our operatives with regards to collecting side waste.

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

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 APRIL 2023

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

Apologies: Councillors Moulton

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

The apologies of Councillor Moulton were noted.

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

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meetings held on 16 February 2023 and 2 March 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

16. **PROTECTING, PRESERVING AND PROMOTING THE RIVER ITCHEN IN
SOUTHAMPTON INQUIRY - DRAFT FINAL REPORT**

Mark Pirnie, Scrutiny Manager, Southampton City Council with the permission of the Chair advised the Panel that in the process of publishing a copy of his draft final report some paragraphs had been omitted which did not materially impact on the report or its recommendations. The members of the Panel had been sent a complete copy of the draft final report for their consideration in advance of the meeting.

The Panel discussed and agreed the draft final report.

Resolved: Authority is granted to the Scrutiny Manager to amend the final report following consultation with the Chair of the Panel.

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Agenda Item 8

DECISION-MAKER:	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
SUBJECT:	DRAFT GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND BIODIVERSITY STRATEGIES
DATE OF DECISION:	8 JUNE 2023
REPORT OF:	CLLR KEOGH CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT

<u>CONTACT DETAILS</u>			
Executive Director	Title	Executive Director for Place	
	Name	Adam Wilkinson	Tel: 023 8254 5853
	E-mail	Adam.wilkinson@southampton.gov.uk	
Author	Title	Natural Environment Manager	
	Name	Lindsay McCulloch	Tel: 023 8083 2727
	E-mail	Lindsay.mcculloch@southampton.gov.uk	

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY
N/A
BRIEF SUMMARY
<p>The council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019. In its Green City Plan 2030, it made a commitment to create a greener, healthier, and more sustainable city that is better adapted to the various challenges arising from climate change. The Corporate Plan 2022/30 sets a further ambition for Southampton to have an increased amount of connected, good quality green space. A key aim of both plans is to create a more resilient city, one that is healthy, and attractive for people to live in, work in and visit. A city that is designed to benefit people and wildlife.</p> <p>We need to address the commitments in those plans. We also need to meet new statutory obligations, arising from the Environment Act 2021 (as amended), including a strengthened Biodiversity Duty and a requirement to secure at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) from planning developments. Southampton City Council will also be required to contribute toward the development, and delivery, of new Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), which focus on restoring habitats and increasing connectivity.</p> <p>The draft Green and Blue Infrastructure (GI) Strategy and draft Biodiversity Strategy, attached as Appendices 1 and 2, outline how the council will play its part in transforming its own activities in terms of land management and spatial planning. They also set out how improved GI and biodiversity will make the city more resilient to the effects of climate and improve the health, wellbeing and prosperity of Southampton.</p> <p>These strategies might immediately seem similar, and whilst there is some cross over in terms of supporting our natural environment, they are also quite distinct. Presenting them separately recognises this and ensures we can accommodate the range of outcomes we want to achieve. The GI Strategy seeks to optimise the full range of benefits that our natural assets can offer. This includes offering outdoor amenity space,</p>

safe and attractive routes for travel, local flood management, improving local air quality, capturing carbon and providing the infrastructure to support wildlife. Meanwhile, the Biodiversity Strategy compliments the GI Strategy by identifying a wider range of opportunities that will specifically support wildlife.

With approval, and subject to a full assessment of any financial implications of each strategy, public consultation of both strategies will take place between July and September 2023 and run for a minimum period of ten weeks. Responses will be considered, and the strategies reviewed and amended as appropriate, with the expectation they will be presented to Cabinet for adoption in December 2023.

It must be noted that both strategies set out a vision and broad priorities that will dictate future delivery plans. Those delivery plans will be subject to a process of due diligence to ensure they are affordable, can be resourced and offer value for money. This in turn will dictate the speed, scale and scope of the outcomes achieved.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

	(i)	The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee is recommended to review and provide feedback on the appended draft Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity Strategies prior to external consultation in July 2023.
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REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

1.	To enable the Committee to contribute to the consultation process for both strategies.
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ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

2.	Not applicable.
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DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)

3.	The scientific consensus is that human induced climate change has already started. Our world is warming causing more extreme weather events, and sea level rise. The consequences include increased loss of biodiversity, flooding, more frequent and severe heat waves, water scarcity and more pollution. There will be a detrimental impact on people’s lives including health, and damage to homes and businesses. The UK is already experiencing more frequent and extreme weather events. In February 2020, storms brought devastating floods to large areas of Wales, northern England and the Midlands; in 2015, storms resulted in benchmark levels of flooding in the UK. Droughts were formally declared across much of England in 2022 due to record temperatures and low rainfall.
4.	Our GI and Biodiversity Strategies, together with our Net Zero Strategy, help address our aim for Southampton to be more resilient to the effects of climate change, effects which are particularly felt within a city setting with its hard landscape, sealed surfaces, and higher temperatures. The main current drivers of GI loss in Southampton include pressure from increased development, absence of or poorly designed GI in new development, pollution, increased public pressure and inappropriate management of habitats. Over time, the city’s GI has become more fragmented. Small-scale, incremental encroachment on incidental spaces (such as road verges) is eroding the network. Equally, our network of semi-natural habitat is under threat through both direct loss and degradation.

5.	GI, the network of natural and semi-natural areas, is capable of providing a suite of environmental benefits. GI which is linked together in urban settings creates a network, a Green Grid, which is able to provide multiple benefits including supporting a green economy, improving quality of life, protecting biodiversity and enhancing the ability of ecosystems to deliver services (Ecosystem Services) such as, providing space for recreation and relaxation, improving water and air quality, reducing surface water flood risk, lower ambient air temperatures and capturing and storing carbon.
6.	In Southampton, GI includes open spaces (such as parks and gardens), greenways, allotments, woodlands, grassland, road verges, hedges, lakes, ponds, playing fields, coastal habitats, as well as footpaths, cycleways, railway corridors, streams and rivers. The GI in our city is currently disconnected and is therefore not resilient to climate change. The GI Strategy seeks to create a way forward by increasing the extent of GI, forming stronger links between areas and improving habitat condition to increase resilience to environmental pressures. We need GI that is well designed and multi-functional, GI which helps address local flooding, improves air quality and delivers benefits for wildlife.
7.	Our Biodiversity Strategy complements the aims of the GI Strategy by providing objectives and methods for how the city can address the severe declines in wildlife, improving and increasing the extent and condition of our semi-natural habitats and in turn, improving species populations and increasing biodiversity. Both strategies set out ambitious, but realistic, targets for creating a better city for wildlife and for people.
8.	The GI Strategy deals with GI, our network of green and blue infrastructure. Our Biodiversity Strategy focusses on conservation and enhancement of species and semi-natural habitats. Although different in their objectives, the strategies rely on each other for ensuring our GI network is strong, resilient and delivers Ecosystem Services, services needed by people and wildlife.
9.	The Biodiversity Strategy underwent internal consultation in December 2022. Internal and external consultation took place in July 2022 to introduce the concept and need for the Green Grid, over 2,500 responses were received. The GI Strategy is currently being consulted on internally.
10.	Geodata (University of Southampton) were commissioned by SCC to analyse socio-economic data alongside maps and other data sets, including priority habitats, designated sites, street trees and public rights of way. The data has been brought together to produce a high-level map of the GI in the city, our green and blue network termed our "Green Grid". The Green Grid is the city's ecological network that connects a series of core 'ecosystems' with corridors and steppingstones of habitats. Parks, open spaces, streams and rivers form the core areas of the network connected by corridors of street trees, highway verges, railway embankments and gardens. We are identifying opportunities to utilise buildings and land to add to the Green Grid through the creation of green walls/facades and roofs, tree planting and wildflower areas. We will work with landowners across the city to assess opportunities for forming links in the Green Grid on non-council land and encouraging the creation of GI wherever possible to create a connected, resilient, healthy, climate change adapted city.

11.	Policies and Supplementary Planning Documents within the Local Plan have been reviewed and include guidance on the GI standards we expect as part of any development. Our Green Grid map shows where this GI is most needed. We will provide guidance on what type of GI we expect to be delivered, ensuring it is high quality, effective and suitable for our city setting. A Green Grid Implementation Plan is being developed. The Plan will include how and where GI will be delivered.
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Capital/Revenue/Property/Other</u>	
12.	Both strategies have been developed using existing internal resources and their completion and adoption generates no budget pressures. Neither will they limit services in their ability to deliver any immediate savings targets. Both strategies set out a vision and broad priorities that will dictate future delivery plans. Those delivery plans will be subject to a process of due diligence to ensure they are affordable, can be resourced and offer value for money. This in turn will dictate the speed, scale and scope of the outcomes achieved.
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:</u>	
13.	N/A
<u>Other Legal Implications:</u>	
14.	The strengthened Biodiversity Duty, as set out in paragraph 102 of the Environment Act 2021, has just been enacted and a deadline of 1st January 2024 sets for the completion of the first review of what actions the City Council will take to conserve biodiversity. Reporting on these actions is required by 1st January 2026. The draft Biodiversity Strategy constitutes a review of actions needed to conserve biodiversity within Southampton and will enable the City Council to meet its obligations. From November 2023, the Council will have a mandatory duty to deliver BNG through the spatial planning system. To maximise the benefits of BNG for the city's biodiversity, the draft Biodiversity Strategy includes actions relating to the delivery of BNG within development sites and at other sites within the LPA area. The draft Biodiversity and GI Strategies both contain actions aimed at delivering relevant targets from the Hampshire LNRS which is being developed by Hampshire County Council.
RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS	
15.	In the absence of a GI and Biodiversity Strategy or, where there is a delay in their introduction, the council will be unable to demonstrate how it intends to deliver its obligations under the strengthened Environment Act 2021 Biodiversity Duty or the goals set out in the Corporate Plan or the Green City Plan. Penalties for failing to deliver statutory duties are currently unclear, however, there is a risk of reputational damage in addition to incurring higher future costs in adapting to the impacts of climate change and coping with loss of GI and continued loss and degradation of habitats and wildlife.
POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS	
16.	Strategies will assist with delivery of the Corporate Plan 2022/30 and satisfy actions identified in the Green City Plan. They will form part of an integrated

	policy framework that will ultimately replace the Green City Plan and ensure the council is able to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to address the challenges of climate change and ecological decline by creating a cleaner, greener, healthier and more sustainable city.
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KEY DECISION?	No
WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	ALL
<u>SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION</u>	
Appendices	
1.	Green Infrastructure Strategy (draft)
2.	Biodiversity Strategy (draft)

Documents In Members' Rooms

1.	N/A
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Equality Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality and Safety Impact Assessment (ESIA) to be carried out?	Yes (Being drafted)
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Data Protection Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) to be carried out?	No
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Other Background Documents

Other Background documents available for inspection at: N/A

Title of Background Paper(s)	
1.	N/A

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GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY - DRAFT

VISION: "CREATE A GREENER, BETTER LINKED CITY,
DELIVERING IMPROVEMENTS FOR OUR RESIDENTS'
WELLBEING, ENSURING RESILIENT GREEN
INFRASTRUCTURE THAT CAN CONTINUE TO DELIVER
ECOSYSTEM SERVICE BENEFITS "

Foreword.

- Green Infrastructure (GI) is a network of natural and semi-natural areas capable of providing a suite of environmental benefits. GI which is linked together in urban settings creates a network, a Green Grid, which is able to provide multiple benefits including supporting a green economy, improving quality of life, protecting biodiversity and enhancing the ability of ecosystems to deliver services (Ecosystem Services) such as improving water and air quality, providing space for recreation/relaxation and climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- In Southampton, GI includes open spaces (such as parks and gardens), greenways, allotments, woodlands, grassland, road verges, hedges, lakes, ponds, playing fields, coastal habitats, as well as footpaths, cycleways, railway corridors and streams and rivers.
- Southampton has long been known as a green city. With its diversity of parks, semi-natural spaces and two chalk rivers (Test and Itchen) flowing through it into the Solent; we have a wealth of GI for such an urban setting although much of our GI is fragmented rather than linked up.
- As in the vast majority of town and cities, benefits from GI are not well understood, let alone properly valued. This situation risks the loss of critical natural capital at a point in time when we need it most. With a backdrop of rapidly diminishing budgets, infrastructure that can provide a diverse range of benefits, simultaneously, is a vital resource.
- This Strategy is, quite naturally, incomplete; no matter how long we spend gathering information we can never know all there is to know about the natural environment. However, this is no reason to delay taking action.

Executive Summary.

“We may have distanced ourselves from nature, but we rely completely on the services it delivers.”

Living Beyond Our Means: Natural Assets and Human Well-being. The Board of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005).

The simple statement above neatly sums up our current relationship to the natural world. However, as the information in this Strategy illustrates, this is a dangerous road to travel risking a loss of human wellbeing and prosperity.

The worst consequences are not inevitable; by adopting a new approach to the natural environment we can better understand the benefits we are receiving and ensure that safeguarding them is integrated into the City Council’s policies and practices. In this way we can restore the health and wellbeing of our communities and achieve long term sustainable prosperity.

Our Approach.

- Following local and national activity, Southampton City Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and published its Green City Charter, identifying key priorities to create a cleaner, greener, healthier and more sustainable city. Since then, we have gone on to demonstrate how we intend to deliver on this Charter through the Green City Plan. As part of our commitments, we are developing a robust, bigger, better, well linked network of GI, a Southampton Green Grid. This will help us recognise, record and safeguard existing GI in Southampton. It will identify how the best benefits can be achieved by introducing more, well designed GI to deliver much needed Ecosystem Services across our city. This well designed, well connected, robust Green Grid, will provide benefits for both the city's wildlife (much of which has decreased/deteriorated) and our increasing population. An increase in more, better linked GI will be imperative in helping the city meet its net zero goal by 2035.
- Developing our Green Grid started in January 2021. The first step was to produce a set of maps clearly identifying all of our existing green and blue spaces. Geodata (of Southampton University) analysed socio-economic data alongside other data sets, including priority habitats, designated sites, street trees and public rights of way. As part of the development of our Green Grid, we are identifying opportunities to utilise buildings and land to add to the Green Grid through the creation of green walls/facades and roofs, tree planting and wildflower areas. We will also be working with landowners across the city, assessing opportunities for forming links in the Green Grid on non-council land, encouraging the implementation of green infrastructure wherever we possibly can to create a resilient, healthy, climate change adaptable city.
- Policies and Supplementary Planning Documents within the Local Plan are being reviewed and will include guidance on GI standards we expect as part of any development. Our Green Grid map will show where this GI is most needed and we will provide guidance on what type of GI we expect to be delivered, ensuring it is good quality and suitable for our City setting. We will ensure our cityscape is well designed and high quality, ensuring the built environment meets the highest of standards.
- We are developing a Green Grid Implementation Plan. The Plan will include how GI will be delivered (ie. will it be in the form of reduced mowing of our grassland to increase sward height, more hedgerows, roadside planters etc), how, where and when this will be delivered and by whom. To create a well-connected and well-designed GI, will require input and energy from all city users and landowners. We can achieve a greener, better linked and healthier city if we all work together.
- We will find ways to quantify the Ecosystem Services delivered by good quality, well planned GI so investment can be based on sound business cases and to find innovative ways to use this to attract investment through inseting and social value schemes.

Focus.

We have identified seven priorities:

- Biodiversity. The city has a diverse range of species, with robust population levels and a connected network of habitats that are accessible to both people and wildlife.
- Flood Regulation. Southampton will develop a network of GI that reduces the risk of flooding across the city and has sufficient capacity to cope with all but the most extreme weather events.
- Temperature Regulation. There is sufficient GI with Southampton to moderate the effects of high temperatures and poor air quality caused by the urban heat island and as climate change.
- Air Quality Management. Effective use of GI has improved the city's air quality and reduced pollutant levels to below national thresholds.
- Health and Wellbeing. GI across the city is providing opportunities for residents to get outside and take more exercise. There are also tranquil places for people to relax and unwind.
- Recreation. Residents have access to a variety of GI, close to their homes, which provides opportunities for a range of recreation activities.
- Social Cohesion. Green spaces are at the heart of community activity, providing opportunities for friendship and collective action.
- Economic Value. A high quality green and blue environment in which to live and work that supports the prosperity of the city.
- Education and Skills and Training. Green spaces are a focal point for education and training, providing skills for employment and skills for life.
- Carbon Capture. Improving our green infrastructure will be integral to helping us achieve our net zero targets. Refer to our Net Zero Strategy.

Setting the Scene.

- Parks and greenspaces in England deliver an estimated £6.6 billion of health, climate change and environmental benefits every year. But with 80% of people now living in towns and cities, one third of people do not have access to good quality green and blue space within 15 minutes of their home (Natural England). In February 2023, Natural England launched their new GI Framework, including SCC's Green Space Factor (a tool developed by the council that score different types of surfaces based on water infiltration potential) as one of its case studies. A major new tool to help towns and cities turn greener, aimed at planners and developers. The new Natural England GI Framework will help increase the amount of green cover in England to 40% in urban residential areas; one of its priorities is to connect people to nature by creating accessible nature rich spaces close to where people live and work.
- The council will support this Framework by improving and increasing the greenspace across the city, playing its part in helping with the struggle to halt the loss of vegetated areas (habitat). We realise the importance of acting without delay; halting the decline and fragmentation of GI in the city needs to be addressed urgently. Making important changes now to how we deal with our natural environment will have lasting physical and mental health benefits for the city's population and make the city a more attractive place to work, live and visit. This strategy, along with our other Strategies (including Net Zero and our Public Realm Masterplan), details the key ways in which we will work together with our partners to make improvements in the quality and extent of green space across the city.
- The city has a large amount of green space. It has 49 parks and 1,140 hectares of opens spaces, including the Common which hosts over 17 million visitors each year. In total, 20% of the city is classified as green space. It neighbours the New Forest National Park, Southampton Water, the Solent and the range of protected habitats within them. The city supports a wide variety of habitats including coasts, mudflats, rivers, ponds, wet meadows and woodlands. Some of these habitats are of national and international importance, including our two chalk river systems.
- The main current drivers of GI loss in Southampton include climate change, pressure from increased development, absence of or poorly designed GI as part of development, pollution (both on the land and in our watercourses), increasing public pressure and inappropriate management of habitats. Over time, the city has become more and more fragmented. Small-scale, incremental encroachment on incidental spaces (including road verge loss and reduction of private gardens) is eroding the network for both people and wildlife.

Priority/ outcomes 1. Biodiversity

- The term ‘biodiversity’ is a shortened version of the phrase ‘biological diversity’ which can be defined very simply as the variety or life.
- Biodiversity forms the fabric of GI. This ranges from very common to extremely rare species. The strategy addresses the two different facets of biodiversity and its interaction with GI. Firstly, as the basis of GI there is a need to ensure the resilience of the species that are providing the Ecosystem Service benefits that we want delivered. Secondly, there is the issue of biodiversity conservation where we take specific actions to reverse the losses of species and improve the size and resilience of populations. This second aspect is covered in detail in the Biodiversity Strategy.
- Biodiversity has long been appreciated for the goods and services it provides and the way it enhances our quality of life however, this has not prevented significant losses occurring. Significant declines have been caused by human activities such as agriculture, urban development and pollution. Within Southampton, for example, intensification of the built environment through building on gardens and open spaces has led to further losses.
- Biodiversity plays a key functional role in ecosystems and hence the delivery of Ecosystem Services. Whilst the precise role it plays is not well understood, it appears that ecosystems are more stable with higher levels of biodiversity which means that maintenance of good levels of biodiversity is key to ensuring future provision of Ecosystem Services.
- Unfortunately, despite concerted efforts at both the national and local level, biodiversity is in decline which could result in a reduction or loss of ecosystem services. The consequences of this decline would be particularly noticeable in urban areas such as Southampton where large numbers of people, who benefit directly from Ecosystem Services, live.

Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
Ecosystems within the city are in good condition and Ecosystem Service provision is protected.	GI which contains the right species and is made up of habitat types which are capable of coping with the environmental challenges, such as climate change. Offset some of our current carbon emissions through localised habitat creation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitor the biodiversity value of new GI including open spaces, green roofs and green walls/facades ▪ Undertake research to establish bio value of ornamental species/cultivars ▪ Continue to work with the city’s universities to develop a better understanding of ecosystem service delivery within Southampton ▪ Develop a natural capital asset register ▪ Undertake a natural capital assessment to establish the financial value of Ecosystem Services being delivered in Southampton ▪ Use results of natural capital assessment to create business case to attract investment in the GI ▪ Undertake research into management of GI in the face of climate change

Priority/ outcome 2. Flood Protection

- Flooding is one of the most significant challenges faced by Southampton. It poses a risk to the health and well-being of residents; it damages homes and infrastructure and interrupts businesses causing losses to the local economy.
- The risk to the city is increasing. A rise in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, linked to climate change, will result in more rainfall. Unfortunately, the fabric of the city, in common with most urban areas, is very poor at dealing with water. Extensive areas of impermeable surfaces on buildings, roads and pavements speeds water into the nearest drain leading to water, and in some cases sewage, overflowing onto roads and into property.
- Some areas of the city will fare better than others. Those areas with high levels of green infrastructure will benefit from the greater levels of water interception and infiltration provided by vegetation and natural soils. Features such as woodlands, wetlands and meadows and gardens all have an important role to play.
- Areas with little green infrastructure, for example the city centre, will be more at risk however, the inclusion of green roofs, green walls and street trees in new developments or retro-fitted into existing areas can help.
- The focus going forward will need to be on the protection and management of existing green infrastructure, including gardens, and the creation of new features to increase water storage capacity.

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Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
<p>A city-wide network of green infrastructure capable of delivering high levels of water interception and infiltration will have been identified. New developments will include green infrastructure leading to an increase in water storage capacity. Green roofs and green walls/facades will have been retro-fitted into city centre sites.</p>	<p>Southampton will develop a network of green and blue infrastructure that reduces the risk of flooding across the city and has sufficient capacity to cope with all but the most extreme weather events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create additional water attenuation capacity across the city through widespread but small scale introductions of new landscape planting ▪ Review land management practices adjacent to water courses to identify opportunities for increasing water interception capacity ▪ Secure additional tree planting ▪ Ensure new development uses sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) to minimise and slow the rate of runoff ▪ Encourage greater use of green roofs and green walls/facades to improve water attenuation in areas with high levels of sealed surfaces ▪ Map GI across the city to identify areas with good water management capacity ▪ Map vegetation along transport corridors to increase understanding of current water attenuation capacity ▪ Encourage local communities to identify places for new tree planting ▪ Secure sponsorship for a community street tree project ▪ Develop simple messages explaining the role that vegetation plays in reducing flood risk

Priority/ outcomes 3. Temperature Regulation

- Urban areas are generally warmer, often by a degree or two, than surrounding countryside due to the release of heat from buildings and man-made surfaces. This is termed the urban heat island effect.
- The main causes of the urban heat island effect are: the release of heat from buildings and other man made surfaces into the atmosphere at night which causes an increase in urban air temperature; and the loss of evaporative cooling from vegetation which has been replaced by built structures.
- Solar radiation is the principal source of heat being released from buildings and other surfaces however, this is often supplemented by waste heat from air conditioning and the effects of vehicles and industry.
- Climate change is increasing the incidence of heat waves and exacerbates the Urban Heat Island effect which has implications for health and the economy. Along with warming at the Earth’s surface, many other changes in the climate are occurring including rising sea levels and more extreme weather events.
- Green infrastructure has been proposed as an effective tool for mitigating the adverse effects. It has been suggested that a 10% increase in tree cover in a dense urban area, would result in a cooling by up to 2.5°C.
- Green infrastructure reduces temperatures in a number of ways: moisture is released into the atmosphere by evapotranspiration and reduces the ambient air temperature around vegetation, large plants such as trees and shrubs provide direct protection from both heat and UV radiation by shading buildings and outdoor space, lower temperatures as a result of evapotranspiration and shading lead to a reduction in the amount of heat absorbed by man-made urban surfaces.
- Many areas in Southampton benefit from good levels of green infrastructure and will not be at risk from the Urban Heat Island effect. However, the high density of population and lower levels of green infrastructure within the City Centre increases the risk of Urban Heat Island.

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Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
<p>The severity of the Urban Heat Island effect has been reduced through the creation of new GI. Shade spaces have been created to provide cool spots which enable residents to gain relief from high temperatures. Residents have access to shade spaces which allow them to safely enjoy time outdoors.</p>	<p>Ensure there is sufficient GI within Southampton to moderate the effects of high temperatures and poor air quality caused by the Urban Heat Island.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implement our Net Zero Strategy ▪ Identify opportunities for new street tree planting to create shady routes ▪ Encourage the installation of green roofs/green walls/green facades on new buildings within the City Centre (with reference to our Public Realm Framework) ▪ Develop a better understanding of how urban heat could affect the Southampton ▪ Identify areas at risk of the Urban Heat Island effect ▪ Encourage residents in areas of low green infrastructure to green their neighbourhoods ▪ Make the population aware of the need to take exercise in the shade of trees or woodlands during very hot weather

Priority/ outcomes 4. Air Quality Management

- Poor air quality is caused by a variety of pollutants including chemicals such as nitrogen dioxides (NOx), sulphur dioxide (SO2) and ozone (O3) and tiny particles of un-burnt carbon.
- Much of the pollution originates from road traffic, although energy generation, aviation and industry all contribute. Not surprisingly, in Southampton the poorest air quality is found around road junctions that experience regular traffic congestion.
- To date, the main focus of air quality improvement work has been on improving engine efficiency and improving traffic flows. However, where this proves to be insufficient, vegetation can provide additional support.
- Vegetation can help to improve air quality both directly and indirectly. Plants, particularly trees, are able to absorb pollutants such as NOx, SO2 and ozone from the air. The large surface area and roughness of leaves, stems and branches is also very effective at intercepting tiny particles.
- Indirect benefits come from reduced energy usage where vegetation provides insulation and shading. Cooling of the air through evapotranspiration can also lower the production of pollutants such as ozone.
- Whilst trees and shrubs provide the greatest benefits, they are not suitable in all locations. On narrow urban streets or roof tops, green walls/facades and green roofs provide an effective alternative.

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Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
Improved air quality within Air Quality Management Areas. Improved background air quality.	Effective use of green infrastructure has improved the city's air quality and reduced pollutant levels to below national thresholds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implement our Air Quality Strategy ▪ Seek opportunities to increase the number of street trees ▪ Maintain shrub beds close to roads ▪ Seek provision of green walls and green roofs in new developments close to major roads. ▪ Secure the inclusion of trees and shrubs within landscape planting schemes ▪ Map trees and other vegetation within and adjacent to all Air Quality Management Areas and assess its suitability for air quality management. ▪ Identify potential sites for additional tree planting within Air Quality Management Areas ▪ Encourage local communities to identify places for new tree planting ▪ Secure sponsorship for a community street tree project ▪ Encourage householders to plant trees and shrubs in front gardens ▪ Encourage communities to adopt areas of shrub planting and help with its maintenance ▪ Develop simple messages explaining the role that vegetation plays in improving air quality

Priority/ outcomes 5. Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Ecosystems provide some obvious benefits for health including food, clean water, clean air and resources for industry. They also provide places for contact with nature leading to improved physical and mental wellbeing. Beyond this, ecosystems regulate many environmental processes which can be harmful to health for example management of water, moderation of extreme temperatures and reduction of air pollution.
- The idea of parks and green space being good for health can be traced back to Victorian times. Many of the parks in Southampton were established under the Public Health Acts of 1875 – 1925. Research has since shown that access to green space benefits both physical and mental wellbeing. Parks are particularly important in urban areas where populations tend to have higher levels of physical and mental ill health than their rural counterparts. Parks provide opportunities for physical exercise, which would combat the problem of growing inactivity and associated medical conditions such as obesity, Type 2 Diabetes and Cardio-Vascular Disease however, they need to be located close to where people live.
- Not everyone is able to take vigorous exercise however, gentle exercise can still provide benefits. The critical factor is contact with the green environment.
- Access to the natural environment also has indirect benefits through greater social contact and the development of good habits, e.g. better diet, that go with being active. It is particularly important for children enabling them to develop self-confidence and important social skills.
- In general, deprived areas have less green space which is of poorer quality than more affluent areas. This is a significant health issue as deprived communities tend to experience higher levels of ill health and, whilst the health of all members of society benefits from improved access to greenspace, the health of individuals in the lowest socio-economic groups benefits the most.

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Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
<p>The general health and wellbeing of the city's residents has improved as people spend more time out and about in parks and green places. A range of different green infrastructure is meeting the needs of residents; whether they want to engage in vigorous exercise or to simply sit and unwind.</p>	<p>Green infrastructure across the city is providing opportunities for residents get outside and take more exercise. There are also tranquil places for people to relax and unwind.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implement our Health and Wellbeing Strategy ▪ Establish a joint project between the Parks Service and Public Health Team to encourage people to make greater use of parks and green spaces ▪ Ensure footpath network is accessible ▪ Ensure developments increase the level of green infrastructure enabling people to walk or cycle from home to local park along tree-lined streets ▪ Identify areas of low green infrastructure provision and high levels of ill health to enable targeting of greening initiatives. ▪ Get out and about campaign - Get people to post details of their favourite walks in the city ▪ Provide information about walking routes around parks ▪ Provide a map of all the footpaths, public and permissive across the city

Priority/ outcomes 6. Physical Wellbeing (Recreation)

- Physical inactivity is a growing problem which is thought to be at the route of many common health problems including obesity and heart disease and is a major concern for general health and wellbeing. There is a growing need to reverse the trend of increasing inactivity in order to improve the health of residents and reduce costs for the National Health Service.
- Green infrastructure provides a diverse range of opportunities for activity including, walking, cycling and gardening. In addition, recreation within green spaces has been shown to be more beneficial than equivalent exercise indoors as a consequence of the body's positive response to natural places.
- Not all green spaces will be able to accommodate the full range of activities whilst some activities, for example cycling and play areas for small children, may conflict. The challenge will be to maximise the range of activities that can be provided by each green space without damaging the sites' features or detracting from the quality of experience.
- Education material and supported activities such as guided walks, green gyms or Park Runs, may be helpful in encouraging more people to become more active.

Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
<p>There has been an increase in the number of people taking regular exercise. A range of opportunities for physical exercise within green space is available and meets the needs of all members of society, 'something for everyone' Health problems related to inactivity are (reducing) declining in prevalence.</p>	<p>Residents have access to a variety of green infrastructure, close to their homes, which provides opportunities for a wide range of recreation activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implement our Health and Wellbeing Strategy ▪ Maintain green spaces so that residents and visitors feel safe and keen to use them, making sure they contain well-maintained infrastructure (ie. seating/ way markers, interpretation signs) ▪ Ensure that appropriate protection is afforded to public open space ▪ Work with University of Southampton students to gain a better understanding of recreational use of the city's green spaces ▪ Develop a programme of activities across the seasons, such as guided walks, volunteering opportunities ▪ Develop material, accessible through mobile phone apps that, provides people with information about the facilities and wildlife they can expect find at different greenspaces

Priority/ outcomes 7. Social Cohesion

- Access to good quality green space can play a significant role in community cohesion which is closely linked to health and quality of life benefits for individuals.
- The presence of green space has been shown to draw people outside which provides opportunities for social interaction and helps to break-down barriers. This can be especially helpful when trying to tackle mental health problems. Improved access to green space can be particularly helpful for groups such as seniors, children, ethnic minorities and disabled people which tend to experience higher levels of social exclusion.
- The presence of community 'Friends of' groups provide people with an opportunity to come together to share a common interest. Events and activities such as guided walks organised by community groups can encourage people to be more active whilst conservation projects result in positive improvements to the local environment and generate a sense of achievement.
- Higher levels of social interaction are thought to be the reason why good quality green space has been found to reduce crime and violence levels.

Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
<p>There is an increase in the number and range of park centred community activities providing opportunities for all residents to get involved.</p> <p>There is an increase in residents' feeling of safety when visiting their local park. There is a reduction in crime levels within communities surrounding parks.</p>	<p>Sufficient good quality green space which provide opportunities for residents to meet their neighbours and engage in community projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify tasks that are suitable for community conservation projects ▪ Provide training and support to enable communities to undertake practical action ▪ Work with communities to identify their aspirations for their local green spaces and the barriers to achieving those aspirations ▪ Provide support to communities that either run or would like to set up 'Friends of' groups ▪ Help 'Friends of' groups to develop information packs about their local green space for dissemination to the local community

What Do Our Residents Say?

- Consultation with residents and city users over their thoughts on existing GI in the city resulted in one of the most well responded to consultations that the council has ever run, with over 2,500 responses
- The most important priorities in local areas and the city centre are parks, open spaces, nature and conservation and better access to the coast/shoreline. Concern about the environment and climate change were sighted as the most important challenged faced by the city (City Vision 2020)
- 98% of people would like more nature and wildlife in the city
- 84% of people enhance their outside space for wildlife, the majority of people do this by planting wildlife friendly plants, having a pond and not mowing to encourage insects, hedgehogs and birds
- The majority of the city's residents are involved in improving the city's wildlife, with just 18% of people not taking any measures to make any improvements
- 89% of residents feel that using native species (local and natural) for planting is important for encouraging wildlife and improving habitats and that plants and trees used in landscaping, should be chosen to be of benefit to wildlife
- 91% of residents say that street tree planting improves the character of an area
- Nearly half of residents mentioned The Common as being their favourite green space in the city due to its close proximity to where they live and being able to walk there. Riverside Park was cited as the next most visited green space. St James Park received an overwhelming amount of positive comments (85% of residents said they felt positive about this park). Mayflower Park received the largest number of negative comments.
- 91% of residents said they would like to see more green spaces in the city and that they would like the green spaces to be better maintained, providing better access but also better facilities (such as seating, toilets, interpretation signs, way markers) and more information to be available to advertise those spaces and how to get to them, especially the smaller ones
- Asked about what would encourage people to make use of their green space more, the majority of people cited more wildlife, peace and tranquillity, biodiversity and better management
- People feel that as a city near to the sea, access to the waterfront should be improved, particularly on the west side of the city. People said they felt the rivers and coast were almost "ignored"
- Many people have concerns about safety and lack of any apparent management of green spaces, resulting in them feeling run down, neglected and therefore more prone to vandalism

Delivering our strategy.

Green Grid

GI needs to be provided across the city. However, to ensure it is resilient, it needs to form a network. A network of the key GI in the city has been identified through work with Geodata; this network is called the Green Grid. The Green Grid pulls together delivery of all the priorities listed in this Strategy and the Biodiversity Strategy. The Green Grid is where the two strategies meet; it is most important GI and biodiversity sites. It is our key recreational network and our key connections. There will be a standalone document describing the Green Grid.

- We will ensure that all of the council's activities are in line with this Strategy. Irrespective of what portfolio the land falls within, schools, housing, corporate etc, we will ensure our land management practices are consistent and designed to build a network of good quality, linked green infrastructure across the city.
- Development design, including green and blue infrastructure, will be guided by the Green Grid map and adopt the Public Realm and Green Space Factor toolkits, delivering green areas and providing links where needed.
- Working with neighbouring LPA's, we will protect and enhance green links between Southampton, Eastleigh, the New Forest and Test Valley.
- Partners involved, including: Southampton National Park City, Southampton Common and Parks Protection Society, Southampton Natural History Society, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, SO18 Big Local, Pollinating Peartree, Sholing Valley Study Centre, Green Volunteer Network, Friends of Groups, Natural England, adjoining Local Planning Authorities, Environment Agency, officers within the council, residents and the commercial sector.
- Explanation of data to be gathered or used to assess progress.
- Reporting, monitoring, updating process to be in place.
- Produce Ward-level maps to show where green infrastructure is needed to "fill in the gaps" and Ward-level green infrastructure Action Plans of how and when that will be achieved. These maps and Action Plans will be developed in partnership with the community to ensure residents feel engaged in the process and have a feeling of ownership.
- Working collaboratively, we will create and manage sustainably by reducing our use of pesticides and plastic. We will reduce unnecessary reliance on resources such as water, chemicals or machinery where possible. We will reduce our CO2 emissions (becoming net zero in 2035) and embed a culture of "sustainability" in all council actions across all of our service areas.

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BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY - DRAFT

VISION: HALT THE DECLINE OF BIODIVERSITY,
PROTECT AND RE-CONNECT OUR HABITATS,
RESTORE SPECIES POPULATIONS

Executive Summary

- Our vision is to halt the decline of biodiversity in Southampton, strengthen habitat connections and to improve the condition of our valuable semi-natural habitat. As our statutory Biodiversity Duty, we will deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and ensure our plans for habitat restoration integrate measures from the Hampshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).
- Human health ultimately depends upon ecosystem products and services. Environments rich in wildlife benefit wellbeing through emotional, social and psychological benefits.
- Biodiversity contributes to climate stability and carbon storage, up to a fifth of all soil carbon in the UK is locked away in grassland. Biodiversity provides nature-based solutions to help protect our city from climate change related impacts, including radical alterations in our weather pattern causing drought, flooding, extreme temperatures and in turn, changes in phenology (timings of natural events such as birds nesting and leaves appearing on trees)
- In England, we have lost over 15% of species since 1970, there has been widespread loss and degradation of habitats across England dating back many centuries, from which, our wildlife has not recovered. 97% of wildflower meadows were lost between the 1930s and 1984. Four UK high temperature records were broken in 2019 and there was a 12% increase in above average rainfall with significant flooding events. There has been a 41% decrease in species' populations since 1970. The majority of people in the UK acknowledge that nature is under threat and needs urgent action to protect and restore it (Guardian article Sept 2022).
- Southampton's biodiversity is extremely rich, diverse and valuable. It includes nationally and internationally important habitats such as coastal shingle, mudflat, chalk rivers, ponds, grassland, wet meadow and ancient woodland.
- Our semi-natural habitat is under threat through both direct loss (generally from development pressure) and degradation in their condition (due to a lack of management and pressure arising from our increasing population).
- This Strategy sets out key priorities relating to habitats and wildlife within Southampton, identifies the main issues and challenges and outlines how we will tackle those issues.
- As a Council, we have a legal duty to consider biodiversity across all of our functions to help halt the loss of biodiversity and seek opportunities to reverse the decline of habitat loss, species diversity and species abundance.

Our Approach

- The timeframe for the Biodiversity Strategy covers the period from 2023 to 2028, after which time, it will be reviewed.
- The council will improve our knowledge of Southampton's biodiversity by undertaking systematic surveys of our habitats and species. The results of surveys will help identify key species and ensure our land is being managed appropriately.
- We will update our Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), providing a record of our ecological baseline, identifying key species and habitats, setting clear goals of what we want to achieve, when and how we will go about it.
- We will increase knowledge and understanding of species requirements and wildlife legislation with increased levels of training for our staff.
- We will continue to develop our understanding and appreciation of the crucial benefits (ecosystem services) that are delivered by a healthy city ecosystem and ensure ecosystem service benefits are understood by all our key staff and decision makers.
- We will ensure that our Local Plan Framework, guiding development in the city, sets out policies for the conservation of important international, national and local wildlife sites, features of biodiversity importance and species. The statutory requirement for BNG will be included in our Biodiversity policy. We will set high standards for all future development, ensuring that the right habitat/green infrastructure is delivered in the right location. To support our Biodiversity policy, Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) will provide further information in relation to nutrient neutrality, mitigation for recreational disturbance, and, where and what type of BNG will be required within Southampton.
- Wildlife needs a network of linked habitats. We will retain existing habitat links, strengthen those which have become fragmented and create new ones. Links will be strengthened, both within the city and also into adjoining districts, creating a robust Green Grid.
- Collaborative working. Council departments will work together, ensuring our Biodiversity Duty and our approach to land management protect, enhance and connect habitats across the city. We will work with others on joint biodiversity related initiatives including Hampshire's LNRS and Southampton National Park City. We will work with people studying, working and living in the city, helping forge relationships across communities to encourage people to access, explore and make improvements to their local green spaces. Increasing opportunities for outdoor physical activity and improving mental health and at the same time, benefiting wildlife. Collaborative working on various city-wide projects will be key to making connections between parks, open spaces, the Greenways and other important sites and habitat. Our new Rangers, working with the Ecology team and Maintenance Operation team, will ensure the city's habitats are appropriately managed. We will make improvements in all our semi-natural spaces for wildlife and for people. Our Wilder Community Officers will work closely with residents, helping to engage and empower communities to take action for nature in order to help Southampton become greener and wilder. Our Community Campaigns Officer will continue to work with volunteers on habitat restoration projects.

Focus

We are developing a Green Grid to help us recognise and safeguard existing green infrastructure and identify how to maximise benefits through introducing more. The Green Grid will set out key green connections in the city, both existing (such as our Greenways) but also aspirational links which we have identified as crucial for ensuring a better connected, greener and healthier city for people and wildlife. A Green Grid policy will be included in our Local Plan Review, helping to guide well-designed development and setting high standards for green infrastructure to be delivered. This policy will be supported by a Green Grid Map showing current and proposed connections. The Green Grid Delivery Plan will identify projects, on the ground, that will be delivered to help create and strengthen connections across the city. The Green Grid Strategy will provide information on how the Green Grid will be implemented by the council. This Biodiversity Strategy is not a standalone document, it is directly connected to the Green Grid Strategy and its aims align with those within that Strategy.

The Biodiversity Strategy provides a statement on how Southampton City Council will protect, enhance, connect and create areas of nature conservation value within Southampton. We will manage land and structures within our portfolio to protect and enhance habitats and species consistent with our statutory duties. We will secure dedicated resources within the council to deliver improvements in semi-natural habitat in the city.

As well as engaging with external stakeholders, we will engage with our own staff to ensure that we are working collaboratively and delivering benefits for wildlife whilst undertaking our statutory duties. We will ensure all the work we undertake as a council (management of our land, housing, schools and other built structures) aligns with wildlife legislation and best practice guidance, making sure we protect habitats and species whilst going about our day-to-day activities.

Our Local Plan Review will include clear policies that ensure development in the city is well-designed, delivers no less than 10% BNG and aligns with the aims of Hampshire's LNRS.

We will work with all sectors of the city, including engaging with as many residents as possible, to design and deliver plans to create green links. Together we will green the grey, tree line our streets, incorporate sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and help inspire others to support wildlife.

We have identified five key priorities:

- Priority 1: Protect, Enhance and Connect our Ecological Network
 - Increase the area of habitat located between core sites in the ecological network to act as stepping-stones for species moving between core sites.
- Priority 2: Engage in a Programme of Habitat Management Work to Achieve an Overall Improvement in Habitat Condition
 - A programme of habitat management and monitoring work will lead to an improvement in the condition of habitats on the city's semi-natural greenspaces.
- Priority 3: Increase Species Diversity and Improve Species Populations
 - Identify species which are declining and/or at risk and put in place a programme of conservation management to reverse the decline
- Priority 4: Identify and Deliver Opportunities for the Creation and Enhancement of Habitats
 - Update our knowledge of biodiversity in the city. Ensure all Council land is managed with biodiversity in mind. Retain extent, improve quality (where

needed) of statutory and non-statutory designated land of nature conservation. Help increase the quality, diversity and extent of habitats outside of Council land ownership.

- Priority 5: Priority/ outcomes 5. Increase Resilience of Biodiversity to Safeguard Ecosystem Service Delivery
 - Healthier habitats which are more resilient to climate change

Setting the Scene

- Southampton's geographical position, relatively warm climate, underlying geology and its position between two rivers (the Test and Itchen) has resulted in a city with a diverse range of habitats and species.
- The city supports a wide variety of notable habitats including coast, mudflats, rivers, ponds, wet meadows, heathland, grassland and woodland. Some of these habitats are of significant importance and protected under national and international legislation including Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, Ramsar sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The city also supports 66 Sites of Importance of Nature Conservation.
- The city has a relatively large extent of non-designated habitat, with 49 parks and 1,140 hectares of green open space, including the Common which has over 17 million visitors each year. In total, 20% of the city is classified as publicly accessible green space.
- Southampton neighbours the New Forest National Park, Southampton Water, the Solent and the range of protected habitats within them.
- The Southampton BAP, which updated the 1992 Nature Conservation Strategy, is now over 16 years old. Since the publication of the BAP, there have been significant changes to legislation (the Environment Act, 2021), policy and guidance. The 2021 Environment Act is very ambitious. Its implementation will halt the decline of nature by 2030 and requires all new development to deliver a minimum of 10% BNG. The duty of delivering BNG is the responsibility of Local Planning Authorities. Local Nature Recovery Strategies will be created to help build a Nature Recovery Network across England.
- Southampton City Council realises the importance and urgency of halting the global decline in species. The council is committed to improving and increasing the greenspace across the city, playing its part in halting the loss of biodiversity at a local level. We realise the importance of acting without delay; stopping the decline and fragmentation of biodiversity in the city needs to be addressed urgently. Making important changes to the way we deal with our natural environment now will have lasting physical and mental health benefits for the city's population and make the city a more attractive place to work, live and visit. To improve our residents' wellbeing and ensure that wildlife and habitats can persist for future generations, we want to make the city as green as possible. The Council cannot protect and enhance biodiversity on its own; we will need the help residents and visitors.
- We acknowledge there is a balance between the inevitable future growth within the city and the associated pressures that brings, in particular, to designated sites in Southampton and the surrounding area such as the New Forest National Park.
- The key drivers of biodiversity loss in Southampton include climate change, development, pollution (both on the land and in our watercourses), population related impacts (such as habitat degradation/erosion/disturbance/recreation), 'Permitted Development' changes (such as car parking resulting in additional hardstanding), and inappropriate/lack of management of habitat. Small-scale, incremental encroachment on small incidental spaces and private gardens is eroding the city's green network for both people and wildlife. Fragmentation of the green network is affecting the services (benefits) that a healthy, well-connected ecosystem can deliver.

What Do Our Residents Say?

In March 2022, we ran a consultation around a Southampton Green Grid. We asked people what they thought about the city's greenspaces and these are some of the most commonly raised responses:

- There is widespread affection and appreciation of the green spaces in Southampton, and a sense of pride, but people feel that the quality of these spaces has declined in recent years. The Greenways in particular were mentioned as amazing places for wildlife but that better management of these sites is imperative
- Concern about the environment and climate change have been cited as the most important challenges faced by the city. People expressed concern that further development will be detrimental to the extent and quality of our green spaces. (City Vision 2020)
- 98% of respondents would like more nature and wildlife in the city
- 84% of respondents enhance their outside spaces for wildlife, reducing mowing to encourage pollinators, planting pollinator-friendly species, constructing ponds and enhancing gardens for wildlife such as birds and hedgehogs
- 89% of respondents feel that using native species (local and natural) for planting is important for encouraging wildlife and improving habitats and that plants and trees used in landscaping should be chosen to be of benefit to wildlife
- 91% of respondents said that street tree planting improves the character of an area
- Nearly half of respondents mentioned The Common as being their favourite green space in the city due to its close proximity to where they live and being able to walk there. Riverside Park was cited as the next most visited green space
- 91% of respondents said they would like to see more green spaces in the city. The remaining 9% said they would like to see the existing green spaces better maintained and improved
- Asked about what would encourage people to make more use of their green space, the majority of people cited more wildlife, peace and tranquillity, biodiversity and facilities such as toilets/cafés. People also asked for better signage, transport connections and generally better access
- St James Park received an overwhelming number of positive comments (85% of respondents said they felt positive about this park). On the contrary, Mayflower Park was the most mentioned park that is in need of significant improvements.

Priority/ outcomes 1. Protect, Enhance and Connect our Ecological Network

Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
Increased protection of existing habitats	Ensure that all existing habitat is safeguarded and being managed appropriately.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure policy framework is strong enough to safeguard areas of habitat from inappropriate uses. ▪ Change management regimes used on council owned land to improve habitat condition ▪ Create areas of buffering habitat to protect principal biodiversity features

Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
Increased habitat connectivity	Increase the extent of habitat located between core sites in the ecological network to act as stepping-stones for species moving between core sites.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ On council land create areas of new habitat to link up existing patches ▪ Use the planning system to deliver new habitat within developments ▪ Ensure landscape planting includes species of recognised value to wildlife ▪ Education campaign around 'wildlife friendly' gardening and landscaping ▪ Create 'stepping-stones' for wildlife – through introduction of new green infrastructure ▪ Plant trees along roads and streets ▪ Ensure SuDS features support biodiversity

Priority/ outcomes 2. Achieve an Overall Improvement in Habitat Condition

Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
<p>Improved habitat condition</p>	<p>Understand the existing condition of our habitats.</p> <p>A programme of habitat management and monitoring work will lead to an improvement in the condition of habitats within the city’s semi-natural greenspaces, whilst also ensuring that our open spaces are safe places for the public to enjoy and receive benefits from.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Habitat Management Plans will be written for each semi-natural greenspace site. ▪ Annual work programmes will be developed. These programmes will be implemented by a team of suitably skilled and experienced staff. ▪ Additional resources, including volunteers and Community Payback participants, will also be involved, ▪ A monitoring programme involving surveys of habitats and species will be put in place. ▪ We will work with our internal teams to implement Habitat Management Plans.

Priority/ outcomes 3. Increase Species Diversity and Improve Species Populations

Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
<p>Improve species diversity and species populations</p>	<p>Identify species which are declining and/or at risk and put in place a programme of conservation management and initiatives to reverse the decline.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify key species within the city ▪ Review habitat requirements for key species ▪ Develop conservation management plans for key species ▪ Implement conservation management plans and increasing opportunities for wildlife such as nesting birds, roosting bats, hedgehogs ▪ Review general management practices and ensure they are consistent with good conservation practices ▪ Establish a programme of species monitoring and recording ▪ Only use pesticide in situations where all other alternatives have been considered inappropriate (eg. designing them out of schemes, reduce weed removal in general, use mechanical removal methods).

Priority/ outcomes 4. Identify and Deliver Opportunities for the Creation and Enhancement of Habitats

Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
<p>Create and enhance habitats</p>	<p>Update our knowledge of biodiversity in the city. Ensure all our land is managed with biodiversity in mind. Retain extent and improve condition, where needed, of land protected by statutory or non-statutory nature conservation designations. Help increase the quality, diversity and extent of habitats outside of our land ownership.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Update our local BAP ▪ Identify suitable sites/projects for BNG funding ▪ Work with other teams within the council to deliver habitat enhancements on our land ▪ Working with other landowners to develop and deliver habitat enhancements ▪ Biodiversity initiatives to encourage residents to create opportunities for wildlife in their gardens

Priority/ outcomes 5. Increase Resilience of Biodiversity to Safeguard Ecosystem Service Delivery

Outcome/focus	What do we want to achieve?	How will we achieve this?
<p>More robust biodiversity</p>	<p>Healthier habitats which are more resilient to climate change and human pressure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensuring we have sufficient protection buffers around our more sensitive sites to reduce disturbance of wildlife and habitat ▪ Ensure no further loss of habitat ▪ Education. How can people help improve space for wildlife? Why it is important to ensure we don't drop litter, allow dogs to foul/chase wildlife ▪ Right species. Climate adaptable planting and planting species of value to local wildlife ▪ Ensure ecosystem services are delivered in locations where they are needed

Delivering our strategy

- Southampton's wildlife can only effectively be protected and enhanced with the support of both the Council and the community acting in partnership. Fortunately, there is already a very high level of public support and interest. Encouraging and supporting communities to enhance their local green spaces for the benefit of wildlife also has the potential to deliver benefits across other Council priorities and strategies, such as improving health and wellbeing. The Council will continue to encourage and support communities to improve their local green space for nature.
- The Council will update its BAP; the BAP will act, in part, as an implementation plan for this Strategy and will have clear aims and how those aims will be delivered, including a set of annual actions and monitoring.
- The delivery of this strategy will require the Council to manage its land for the benefit of biodiversity, wherever possible. We will alter grassland mowing (grounds maintenance) regimes to ensure this habitat is managed to benefit wildlife. Our Ranger Team will work closely with our Grounds Maintenance Teams to identify further habitat that can be managed for wildlife. We will work closely with all our teams to ensure we seize the opportunity to improve biodiversity with all our sectors of work (including highways, landscape, schools and housing), providing clear advice in the form of advice/guidance notes to ensure a consistent, joined up approach. All habitat creation activities will take account of any potential conflicts of interest within the council (ie. tree planting must take account of potential impacts relating to sightlines/underground services/archaeology etc).
- The aims and objectives of our Greenspace Strategy, Biodiversity Strategy, Green Grid Strategy and Tree Strategy (to be developed) will all align. This will ensure that our efforts are consistent, joined up and delivered in the right way and in the right locations.
- We will continue with our rolling programme of species-specific and habitat surveys to record and monitor the ecological baseline of the city; the data from these surveys will inform Habitat Management Plans for our semi-natural sites (such as the Greenways and waterbodies). Our Rangers will implement these Habitat Management Plans, over time, improving the condition of all our semi-natural habitat.
- Planning policies and Development Management will deliver some of the priorities within this strategy. Green Grid Policy, Biodiversity Policy and Supplementary Planning Documents to support our Local Plan will ensure appropriate BNG (no less than 10%) is delivered in the right parts of the city. Planning Policy will ensure that future development includes high quality green infrastructure such as green roofs/green facades.
- The Council will continue to work with statutory agencies such as Natural England and the Environment Agency, together with partners such as the Forestry Commission, neighbouring Local Authorities and with academic institutions.

- support organisations who are working with and supporting communities to improve green spaces, habitat and species diversity such as Parks Friends groups, SO18 Big Local, Green Volunteer Network and Southampton National Park City. We will support the efforts of local and national nature conservation groups such as People’s Trust for Endangered Species, Southampton Natural History Society, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Hampshire Bat Group and Hampshire Swift Society.
- Biodiversity will be a consideration as the council undertakes tasks as part of its regulatory and statutory functions.
- All our day-to-day activities (including the actions of those within our supply chain, including sub-contractors) will be compliant with relevant environmental and wildlife legislation and best practice guidance. We expect development and contractors to work to the highest standards; we will make sure we lead by example. Internal wildlife awareness training will be delivered to all relevant staff across the various council departments.
- We will reduce our use of pesticides, ensuring we only use pesticides in situations where all other alternatives have been considered ineffective. Where possible, using non-chemical and manual and mechanical means of managing invasive plants.

How will we measure success?

We will:

- Increase the amount of land designated as Local Nature Reserve (LNR), aiming to meet the Natural England ANGSt target of at least one hectare of LNR per 1,000 people
- In accordance with Part 6, Section 103 of the Environment Act 2021, monitor and report on of the amount of BNG secured via planning
- Improve the condition of our semi-natural habitat and aim for “favourable conservation status” for all of our designated sites
- Increase overall species diversity, restored and improve species populations. We will set clear and specific targets within our updated Southampton BAP
- Ensure continued compliance with relevant habitat and species related legislation whilst carrying out our duties

Detail about what specific targets we are setting in order to see how biodiversity is fairing in our city, will be published in our updated BAP. This document will be reviewed and updated regularly for the duration of this strategy. We will also develop a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPI’s) to measure our successes of habitat restoration and management and seek to identify means of measuring habitat connectivity through implementation of our GG.

This Biodiversity Strategy will contribute to an overall improvement in the health of the city. The wider benefits of a more natural environment are well recognised, helping with carbon storage, flood alleviation, noise reduction, improved air quality and, people’s health and wellbeing. We anticipate that making our city greener, more attractive and therefore a nicer place to live and work, will also result in economic benefits for Southampton.

[END]

Agenda Item 9

DECISION-MAKER:	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE		
SUBJECT:	SCRUTINY INQUIRY PANEL – PROTECTING, PRESERVING AND PROMOTING THE RIVER ITCHEN IN SOUTHAMPTON		
DATE OF DECISION:	8 JUNE 2023		
REPORT OF:	CLLR SAVAGE CHAIR OF THE SCRUTINY INQUIRY PANEL - 2022/23		
<u>CONTACT DETAILS</u>			
Author:	Title	Scrutiny Manager	
	Name:	Mark Pirnie	Tel: 023 8083 3886
	E-mail	Mark.pirnie@southampton.gov.uk	
STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY			
None			
BRIEF SUMMARY			
<p>From October 2022 to March 2023 the Scrutiny Inquiry Panel undertook evidence gathering sessions as they conducted the Protecting, Preserving and Promoting the River Itchen in Southampton inquiry. The final report, approved by the Inquiry Panel in April 2023, is attached as Appendix 1. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) are requested to consider, and approve, the final report of the Inquiry Panel and forward it to the Executive for consideration and further action.</p>			
RECOMMENDATIONS:			
	(i)	The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee is recommended to consider and approve the final report of the Scrutiny Inquiry Panel and forward it to the Executive for consideration and further action.	
	(ii)	To delegate authority to the Chair of the Committee to approve any minor amendments arising from considerations raised at the Committee's meeting on 8 June 2023.	
REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS			
1.	In accordance with the Council's constitution, this Committee must approve the final report of a scrutiny inquiry before it is referred to the Executive for consideration and further action.		
ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED			
2.	Not applicable.		
DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)			
3.	The OSMC, at its meeting in September 2022, requested that the Scrutiny Inquiry Panel undertake an inquiry focussing on protecting, preserving and promoting the River Itchen in Southampton.		
4.	The set objectives of the inquiry were:		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
5.	The Scrutiny Inquiry Panel undertook the inquiry over 6 evidence gathering meetings and received information from a wide variety of organisations. This included 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.
6.	Evidence was also provided by Southampton City Council officers representing various departments and from numerous voluntary, community and recreational groups who are passionate about the River Itchen in Southampton.
7.	The final report contains a number of recommendations designed to improve the protection, preservation and promotion of the River Itchen in Southampton. The conclusions and recommendations are summarised in Appendix 2.
8.	The Committee needs to consider whether the report adequately responds to the inquiry objectives outlined in the Terms of Reference shown within the attached report.
9.	The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee procedure rules within the constitution require that within two months of the date of this committee approving a final inquiry report, the Executive will consider the report and submit a formal response to the recommendations contained within them. If this Committee is minded to accept the final report, then the document will be presented to the Executive on 13 June 2023 for further action.
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Capital/Revenue/Property/Other</u>	
10.	In practice any future resource implications arising from this review will be dependent upon whether, and how, each individual recommendation within the Inquiry report is progressed by the Executive. More detailed work will need to be undertaken by the Executive in considering its response to each of the recommendations set out in the Inquiry report.
11.	During the Inquiry a number of potential sources of funding were identified that could help to deliver certain recommendations. These include the Nitrogen Neutrality Scheme.
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:</u>	

12.	The duty to undertake overview and scrutiny is set out in Part 1A Section 9 of the Local Government Act 2000.
Other Legal Implications:	
13.	None
RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS	
14.	If the OSMC decide that the Inquiry report has not met the terms of reference set by the Committee then this may require the Panel to reconvene to address the concerns raised. This would result in a delay in the Executive's response to the recommendations, and, potentially in implementing agreed actions.
POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS	
15.	In the 2022/2030 Corporate Plan, under the goal of 'A proud and resilient city', a key objective is to create cleaner, more attractive, and welcoming green and open spaces, to improve the experience of those living, working, studying and visiting Southampton. Implementing the recommendations within the attached inquiry final report would help to deliver this objective.
KEY DECISION	No
WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	None directly as a result of this report
<u>SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION</u>	
Appendices	
1.	Protecting, Preserving and Promoting the River Itchen in Southampton Inquiry – Final report
2.	Protecting, Preserving and Promoting the River Itchen in Southampton Inquiry – Conclusions and recommendations
Documents In Members' Rooms	
1.	None
Equality Impact Assessment	
Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality and Safety Impact Assessments (ESIA) to be carried out?	No
Data Protection Impact Assessment	
Do the implications/subject of the report require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) to be carried out?	No
Other Background Documents	
Equality Impact Assessment and Other Background documents available for inspection at:	
Title of Background Paper(s)	Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)
1.	None

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



Scrutiny Inquiry Panel

PANEL MEMBERSHIP – 2022/23

Councillor Savage (Chair)

Councillor Moulton (Vice-Chair)

Councillor A Bunday

Councillor Cooper

Councillor White

Scrutiny Manager – Mark Pirnie



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Chair's Introduction



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

*'Urban and rural populations consistently gather, grow and prosper around a healthy river.'*¹

This has been a fascinating inquiry which has resonated with residents and has generated significant public interest. Before the inquiry commenced a survey on the River Itchen in Southampton received an unprecedented 728 responses within a two-week period.

The response to the survey, and the inquiry in general, relates to the strong connection between the River Itchen and Sotonians, and the sense of the river giving the city its identity.

Southampton is blessed with having two globally rare chalk streams and a tidal estuary. The River Itchen that runs through our city is a prized asset that should be cherished and nurtured but, despite numerous positive developments that will help to protect, preserve and promote the river, such as the emerging City Vision Local plan, the River Itchen Flood Alleviation Scheme, the Plastic Pollution Partnership Project and the proposal for water taxis on the river, there is view that the River Itchen in Southampton is under appreciated and is taken for granted, and that identified threats leave the health of the river in the balance.

The health of the River Itchen is of paramount importance. A healthy river leads to a more vibrant river and a better-connected river contributing to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the city. An unhealthy river, however, is an eyesore that detracts from the character and natural beauty of a city and diminishes the wealth, health and wellbeing of its residents.

Numerous contributors have outlined their ambitions for the River Itchen in Southampton to be a healthy, resilient river, with a well-designed and distinctive waterfront, connecting people with places and habitats, that supports a thriving economy. Now is the opportunity for the City Council and key partners to lead by example, to adopt a common approach towards managing the river sustainably that focuses on investing in the health of the river and a high-quality river environment, rather than exploiting the river. By implementing the recommendations identified in this report we can make the ambitions of our communities a reality and have a river that people want to be beside, exercise on and in, and live alongside.

I would like to thank all those who gave evidence to the inquiry; the tremendous work of our community groups and volunteers who work tirelessly to support the River Itchen in Southampton; and members of the Panel for their commitment and support throughout the inquiry. For that I am genuinely grateful.

¹ [5667 Thames21 5 Year Plan](#) – Foreword from Debbie Leach, Thames21 Chief Executive

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

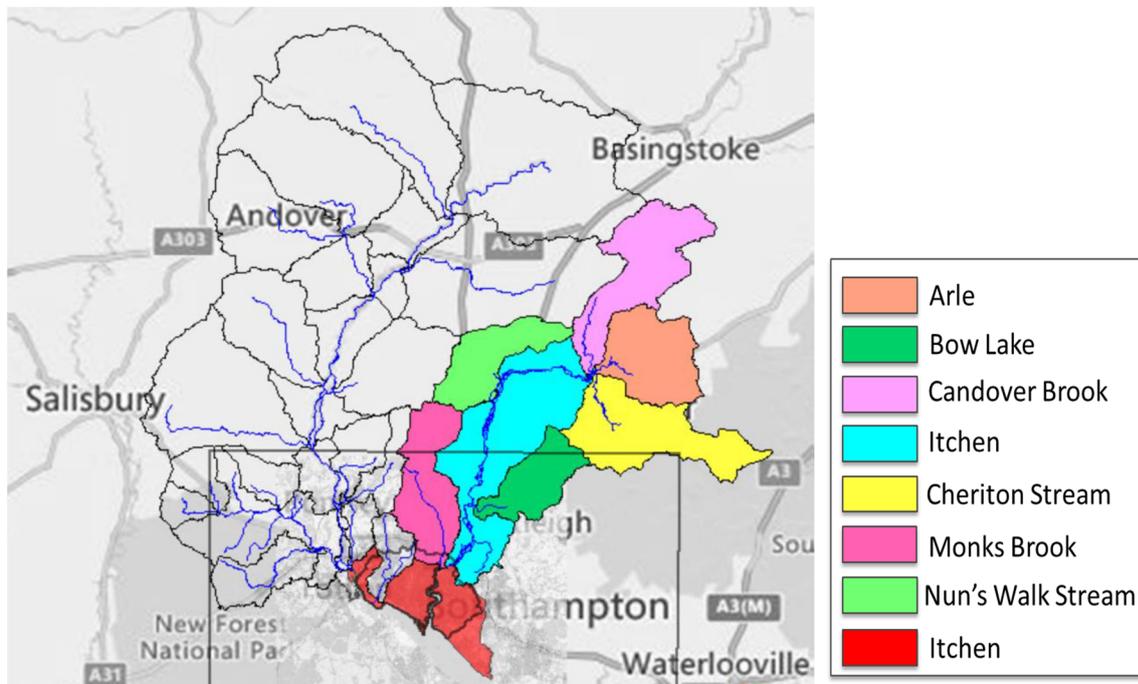
Commerce, Business South, British Canoeing, Glasgow City Council, Thames21 and Solent Forum.

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.



Crown Copyright and Database Rights 2022. Ordnance Survey 100019679 © Environment Agency 2022

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:

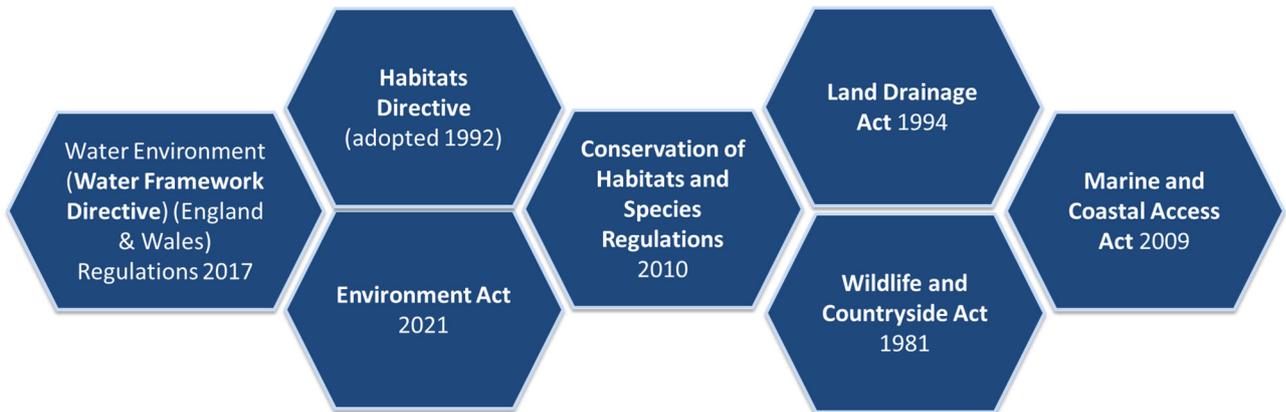


Figure 3 – Key Directives, Acts of Parliament and Regulations covering the River Itchen

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"> • Realise potential and unlock development • Promote a new approach to growing the place • Activate the water 	<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"> • Support a higher density and a mix of uses • Promote climate responsive design • Create a distinctive townscape, and protect and enhance historic character 	<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"> • Create seamless walking and cycling routes • Cluster activities and link people to jobs, town centres, services and public transport • Bring people to the river 	<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"> • Advocate climate readiness • Create a network of open spaces • Promote nature-based solutions

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.²
40. Graham Horton, Thames Solent Team Manager at Natural England, provided the Panel with a summary of the environmental importance of the River Itchen:

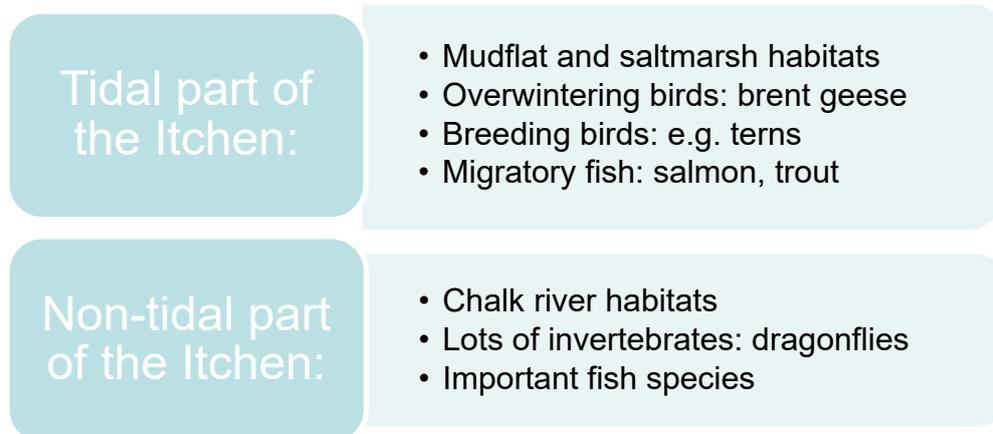


Figure 5 - Environmental importance of the River Itchen summary

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

² [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.³ 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.

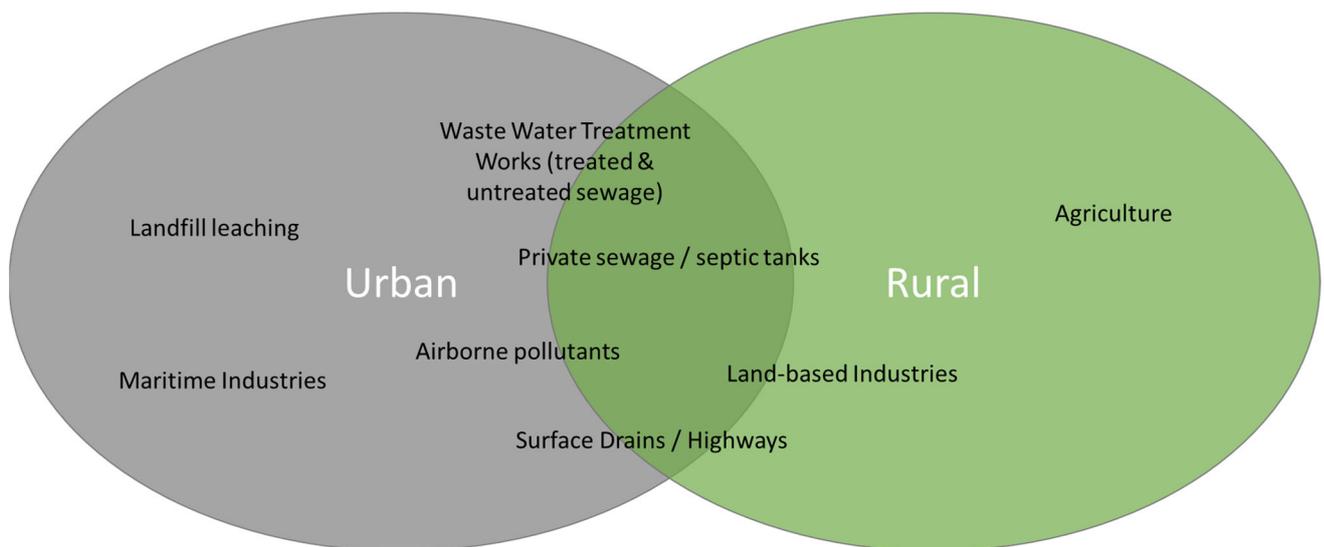


Figure 6 - Pollution sources affecting the tidal River Itchen

- 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".

³ [Test and Itchen Abstraction Licensing Strategy \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://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.'*⁴
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.

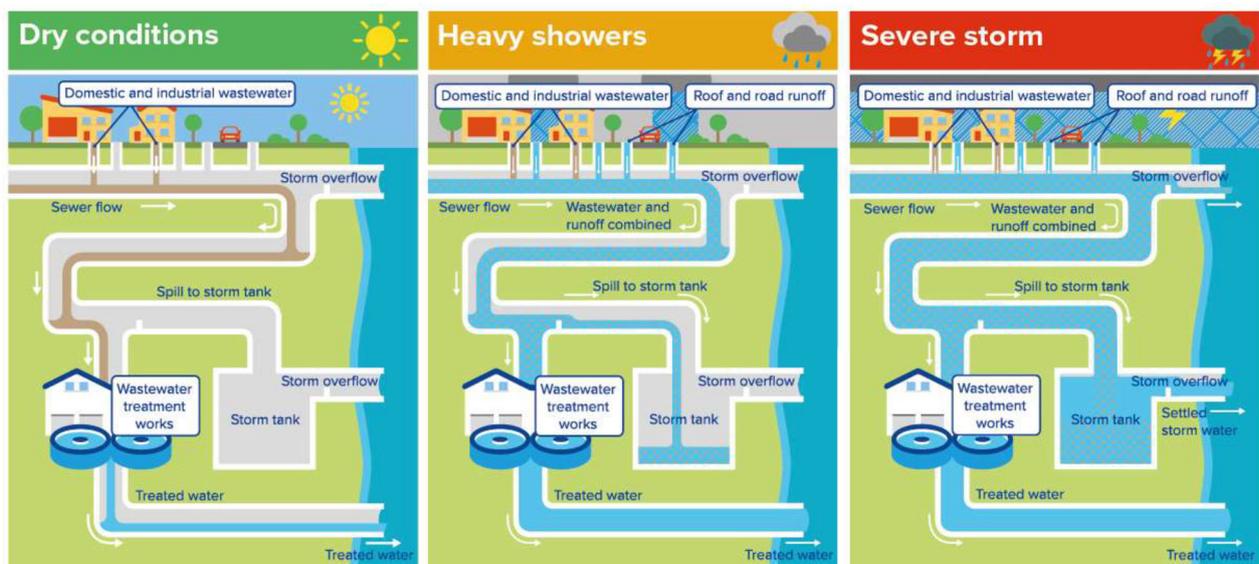


Figure 7 - An explanation of storm overflows

⁴ [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.

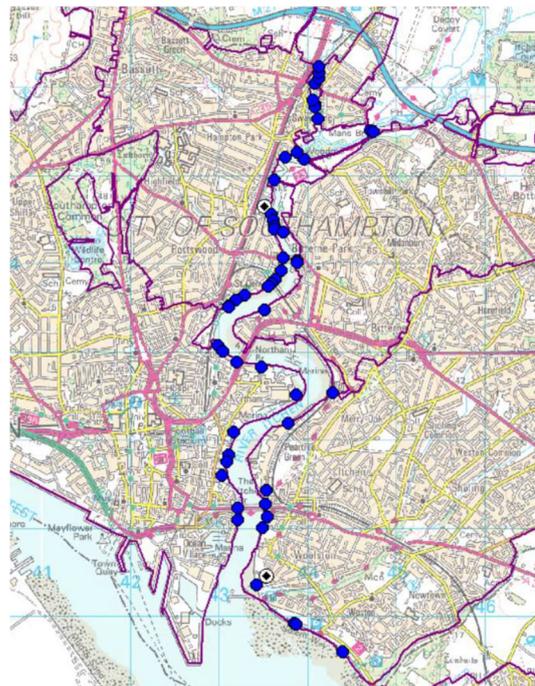


Figure 8 - The location of surface water outfalls into, and near to, the River Itchen in Southampton

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 change⁵, 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.⁶
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.⁷
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.⁸

⁵ [Estuaries | WWT](#)

⁶ [Climate change and extreme weather | Greenpeace UK](#)

⁷ [Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services | IPBES secretariat](#)

⁸ [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.⁹
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.¹⁰

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

⁹ [Draft Local Plan with Options - Environment \(southampton.gov.uk\)](#) (Biodiversity from p134)

¹⁰ [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.¹¹
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

¹¹ [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.¹² 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.

¹² [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.

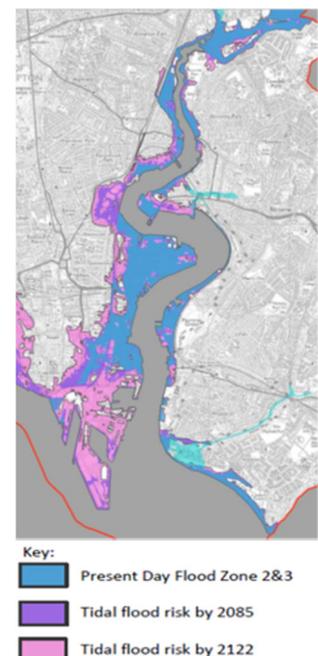


Figure 14 – Tidal flood risk in Southampton

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.

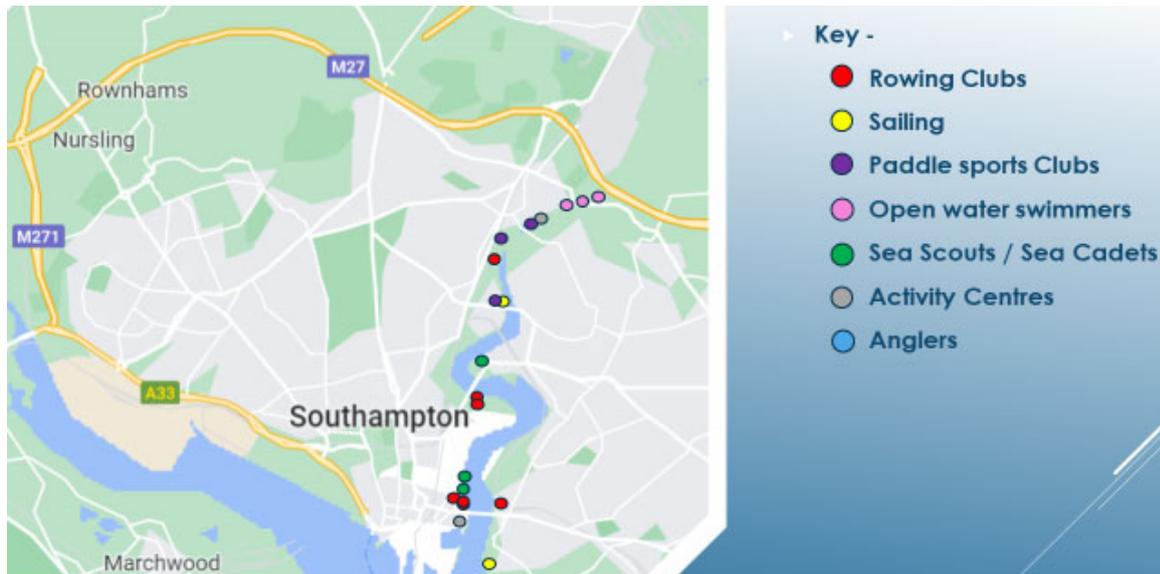


Figure 15 - Location of water sports clubs and activities associated with the River Itchen

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.'*¹³

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.¹⁴ 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 Strategy¹⁵ 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

¹³ [Draft Plan with Options \(southampton.gov.uk\)](https://www.southampton.gov.uk) – p65

¹⁴ [Solent LEP Local Skills Report 2022](#)

¹⁵ [Maritime 2050 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://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.

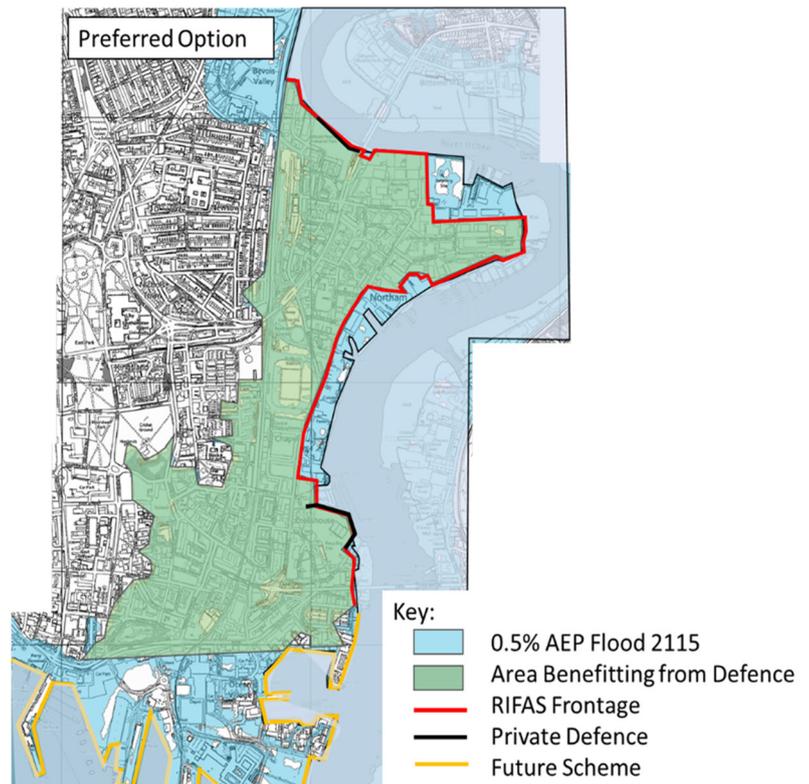


Figure 16 - RIFAS preferred option

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.

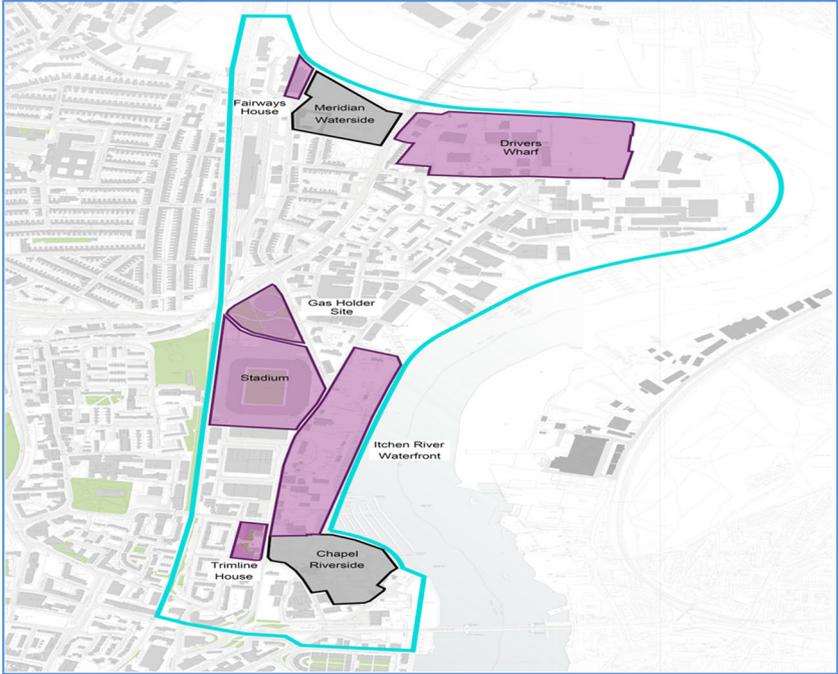


Figure 17 - Itchen Riverside focus of development

- 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.¹⁶ 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'.¹⁷

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.

¹⁶ [Estuaries | WWT](#)

¹⁷ [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.’¹⁸

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.’¹⁹

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

¹⁸ [Draft Local Plan with Options - Development Principles \(southampton.gov.uk\)](#) - p219

¹⁹ [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.

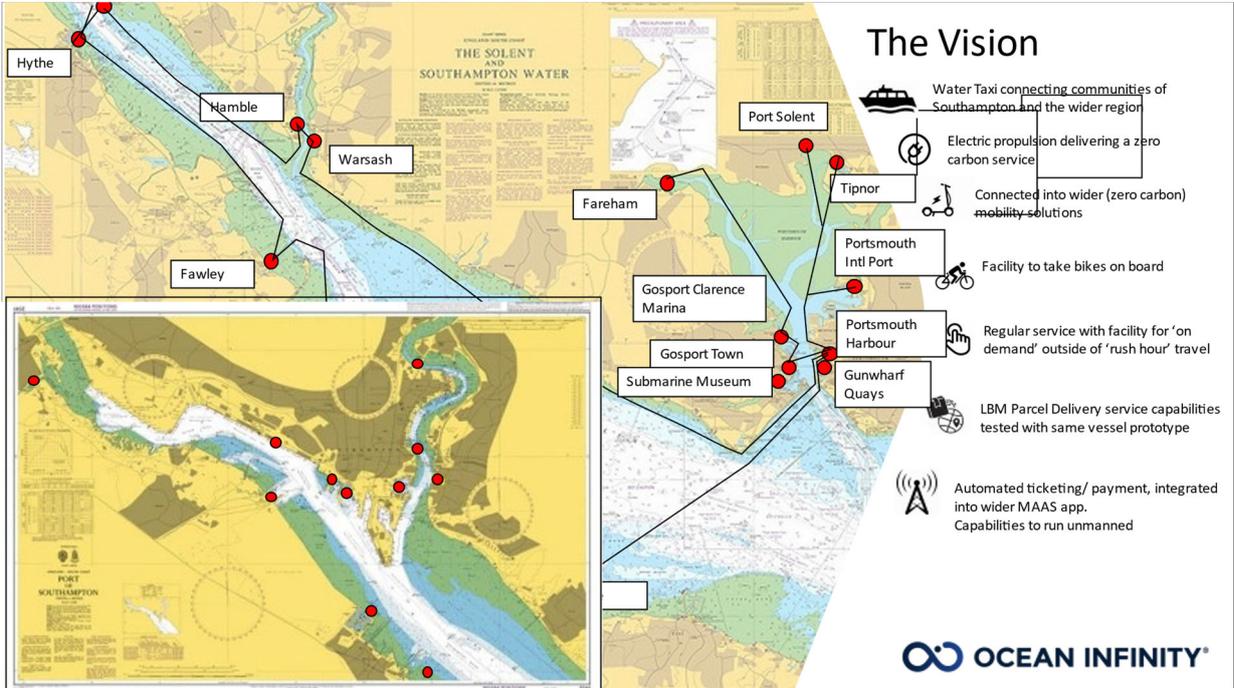


Figure 21 - A vision for a water taxi service connecting Southampton and the Solent

- 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.’²⁰*
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.

²⁰ [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.



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 4th 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.²¹

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.

²¹ [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.'*²²

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:

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

DATE	MEETING THEME	EVIDENCE PROVIDED BY
19/01/23	Flood Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dave Martin – Flood and Coastal Risk Management Partnership & Strategic Overview Team Leader, New Forest, Test & Itchen, The Environment Agency • Blake Jones – Project Executive, RIFAS, The Environment Agency • Sam Foulds – Flood Risk Management Team Leader, SCC • Cara Brims – Flood Risk Officer, SCC
16/02/23	How can more people enjoy the river?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lindsay McCulloch - Natural Environment Manager, SCC • Graham Linecar - Secretary of Southampton Commons and Parks Protection Society (SCAPPS) • Mark Pirnie - Scrutiny Manager, SCC • James Hinves - National Club Development Manager, British Canoeing • 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.
02/03/23	Exploring Good Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lindsay Pratt - Principal Planner, Glasgow City Council • Debbie Leach - Chief Executive, Thames21 • Karen McHugh - Solent Forum Manager
20/04/23	Agree final report	

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](#)

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Protecting, Preserving and Promoting the River Itchen in Southampton - Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

In his presentation to Southampton's historical Court Leet on 4th 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.'*¹

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.

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.

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.

A healthy river therefore leads to a vibrant river and potentially a better connected river.

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.

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.

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

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

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.

This will contribute significantly to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the city as the foreword to Thames21 5 year plan explains:

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Recommendations

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

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:

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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

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:

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.

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DECISION-MAKER:	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE		
SUBJECT:	MONITORING SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE		
DATE OF DECISION:	8 JUNE 2023		
REPORT OF:	SCRUTINY MANAGER		
<u>CONTACT DETAILS</u>			
Executive Director	Title	Executive Director – Corporate Services	
	Name:	Mel Creighton	Tel: 023 8083 3528
	E-mail	Mel.creighton@southampton.gov.uk	
Author:	Title	Scrutiny Manager	
	Name:	Mark Pirnie	Tel: 023 8083 3886
	E-mail	Mark.pirnie@southampton.gov.uk	
STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY			
N/A			
BRIEF SUMMARY			
This item enables the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee to monitor and track progress on recommendations made to the Executive at previous meetings.			
RECOMMENDATIONS:			
	(i)	That the Committee considers the responses from the Executive to recommendations from previous meetings and provides feedback.	
REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS			
1.	To assist the Committee in assessing the impact and consequence of recommendations made at previous meetings.		
ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED			
2.	None.		
DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)			
3.	Appendix 1 of the report sets out the recommendations made to the Executive at previous meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC). It also contains a summary of action taken by the Executive in response to the recommendations.		
4.	The progress status for each recommendation is indicated and if the OSMC confirms acceptance of the items marked as completed they will be removed from the list. In cases where action on the recommendation is outstanding or the Committee does not accept the matter has been adequately completed, it will be kept on the list and reported back to the next meeting. It will remain on the list until such time as the Committee accepts the recommendation as completed. Rejected recommendations will only be removed from the list after being reported to the OSMC.		

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Capital/Revenue</u>	
5.	None.
<u>Property/Other</u>	
6.	None.
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:</u>	
7.	The duty to undertake overview and scrutiny is set out in Part 1A Section 9 of the Local Government Act 2000.
<u>Other Legal Implications:</u>	
8.	None
RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS	
9.	None.
POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS	
10.	None
KEY DECISION	No
WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	None directly as a result of this report
<u>SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION</u>	
Appendices	
1.	Monitoring Scrutiny Recommendations – 8 June 2023
Documents In Members' Rooms	
1.	None
Equality Impact Assessment	
Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality and Safety Impact Assessments (ESIA) to be carried out?	No
Data Protection Impact Assessment	
Do the implications/subject of the report require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) to be carried out?	No
Other Background Documents Equality Impact Assessment and Other Background documents available for inspection at:	
Title of Background Paper(s)	Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)
1.	None

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee: Holding the Executive to Account

Scrutiny Monitoring – 8 June 2023

Date	Portfolio	Title	Action proposed	Action Taken	Progress Status
09/03/23	Transport and District Regeneration	Enhanced Bus Partnership	1) That consideration is given to inviting various community and user groups, and Non-Executive Members, to attend the Enhanced Partnership Working Group or Forum.	Invitations to the EP Forum to include community and user groups where appropriate.	
13/04/23	Transport and District Regeneration	Petition - £1 bus fares	1) That the Administration extends the promotion of the national £2 bus fare offer through the range of communication channels available to the Council.	<p>Since the start of the £2 bus fare, the offer has been promoted as part of the Cost-of-Living campaign and messaging. This campaign has run across all council channels offline and online. In addition, My Journey Southampton has been promoting the offer from the start of the year and continues to do so across a paid for online and offline campaign funded by National Highways. See below.</p> <p>From April to June the council will continue to promote the £2 bus fare using Help for Household branding.</p> <p>This is all in addition to Bluestar promoting the offer across all their channels.</p> 	

Date	Portfolio	Title	Action proposed	Action Taken	Progress Status
			<p>2) That consideration is given to exploring the creation of a salary sacrifice scheme to increase bus patronage and reduce the cost of bus travel.</p>	<p>Council has been engaging with workplaces in promoting ticketing options for cheaper travel on buses including seasonal / annual passes. The Council also supports offerings via Solent Go ticket offers for multi operators.</p> <p>It would be up to individual businesses to provide support for discounted loans or offers for seasonal / annual passes, which via the Workplace Travel Network, the Council can make this suggestion.</p>	
			<p>3) That, to reduce the cost of travelling by bus for Southampton residents, the Council seeks to maximise the amount of grant funding it receives from the Government and ensures that any submission for funding is targeted to ensure the greatest chance of success.</p>	<p>Noted. This will be considered if any future funding opportunities become available to the Council.</p>	