

## Southampton Scrutiny Panel - River Itchen

### Submission From British Canoeing



The River Itchen as it runs through Southampton, is unconnected, unkempt and uncared for. Paddlesport has seen a huge rise in participation over the last few years, due in part to the rise in popularity of Stand Up Paddleboarding (SUP).

British Canoeing is the national governing body for paddlesport in England, with 93,500 individual members, over 380 Affiliated Clubs and over 350 Commercial Delivery Partners.

The river does not currently present Southampton in its best light.

The non-tidal section from Gaiters Mill to Woodmill, through Mansbridge is a very popular section of the river, and has appeared in several national publications such as [Pub Paddles - the best short paddling trips in Southern England](#). The City has riparian ownership of both banks through the majority of this section, however there are several issues to highlight:

- Both the right river bank and the sluice gates at Woodmill require urgent attention. In 2018 the Environment Agency alongside partners started work on a plan to protect the river and its wildlife, replace the worn out structures, and develop the leisure use of the river through the development of a white water course - report attached. This plan would have secured the river bank helping with water volume and preventing sediment build up. The collapse of the Monks Brook Weir has led to significant sediment build up on the historic Salmon pool, to the extent that fishing is reportedly difficult, and paddling is now impossible due the silting of this historic pool.
- The city has not stated that there is public access to the section of the river bank owned by them. This hinders the publication of advice and guidance that would increase the opportunities for healthy outdoor exercise. There is an opportunity for healthy activity on the water, that can be driven through GP referrals such as the [Thriving Communities Project in Nottinghamshire](#), and elsewhere nationally.

The tidal section of the river again has significant use by paddlers, however the water quality is poor with few access points to the river. In 2019 Southampton City Council informed Southampton Canoe Club that they could no longer use Riverside Park to enable events to take place on the river. Until that point, the club ran a regional event drawing over 200 people to participate on the river, and when asked in 2019 to host the national club championship event with over 1000 paddlers, the event had to be run in Eastleigh.

This is about more than flood defence and provision, but how the river can be used to improve people's lives. A [study on happiness in natural environments](#) found that marine and coastal environments were the happiest areas. British Canoeing alongside Natural England have recently launched the [Paddlers Code](#) to sit alongside the Countryside Code, and link to British Canoeing's work on River Cleans and Environmental leadership.

Both [Portsmouth](#) and [Bournemouth](#) have blue space based strategies that help to give direction and engagement to how their blue spaces are used and cared for.

The Paddlesports clubs are unsure of the best way to grow within the city, or how to access support for several international athletes on performance pathways, with Olympic and international aspirations.

## **Appendix**

### **Paddlesport Commercial Venues**

- Woodmill
- SWAC
- Southampton University Watersports
- SUP Co.

### **Paddlesport Voluntary Organisations**

- Southampton Canoe Club
- St Denys Sailing and Rowing Club
- Southampton Sea Cadets
- Scouts (25th Northam, 13th millbrook & 9th Itchen South)
- Southampton University Canoe Club
- Southampton University Canoe Polo Club