

**COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS WITH
SOUTHAMPTON PORT, THE SOLENT AND THE CITY'S RIVERS
A SUMMARY OF ISSUES
FROM A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE
2 JULY 2024**

SUMMARY

1. This report by Southampton Voluntary Services addresses issues related to the connections between Southampton's port and maritime sector with the local Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE). It also summaries some of the key issues that matter to local people around city infrastructure needs, such as the wish for improved housing, transport, health and care services, education and skills, affordable activities and development which meets people's needs.
2. Southampton has a strong community sector, with many voluntary groups, charities, social enterprises working hard to improve the quality of people's lives and the quality of the environment. However, there is a sense of disconnection for many people between the port and the wider city. There are considerable opportunities to improve dialogue and communication between maritime and port organisations and the VCSE sector, in order to build relationships and trust. There is a lot to learn from each other.
3. Port and maritime companies could work with local VCSE organisations on their Corporate Social Responsibility programmes for mutual gain. Shared activities such as the development of placemaking, heritage, arts, education and skills projects could help create strong partnerships.
4. Environmental issues matter a lot to local people, and nothing is more valued than the relationship with the water. There are opportunities to work together to improve access to waterside and increase biodiversity in even the most urbanised parts of the city. Potential collaboration could be progressed around big goals such as addressing pollution, and working together in the face of threats such as climate change and future sea level rise.
5. The recommendations of 2023's River Itchen Scrutiny inquiry must not be lost, including the key goals of healthy, resilient, vibrant and connected rivers.
6. There are opportunities for stronger supply chains, local procurement and social value approaches, that link port and maritime companies with local businesses, including social enterprises and charities.
7. Future priorities must be decided together, with collective action taken to make a difference.

BACKGROUND

About this report

8. This report is prepared to summarise issues related to Southampton's port and water from a community perspective. It is prepared as a Briefing Paper for the [Southampton Port City Forum](#), on 2 July 2024 organised by [Infrastructure for Port Cities And Coastal Towns network – iPACT](#)

The ***infrastructure for Port Cities And Coastal Towns network – iPACT*** – aims to identify people-focused, infrastructure-based solutions to the complex problem of improving social well-being and prosperity in coastal communities through resilient and sustainable regeneration.

About Southampton Voluntary Service

9. Southampton Voluntary Services works with, and advocates for, the city's Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector. We attend and run various forums across the city, listening to community perspectives on issues related to Southampton. We support and promote the development of community organisations. We are known as an "infrastructure body" offering advice and support to local VCSE organisations to help them grow and be strong. We are a registered charity.

About Southampton's community sector

10. The VCSE sector in Southampton is strong and diverse, undertaking activities to support people with their social, economic, education, health and wellbeing, housing, and cultural needs, as well as addressing environmental challenges. The community sector meets people's needs in an agile way (their ability to respond quickly was demonstrated well during Covid), helping people who are falling through the cracks. Communities and the organisations that emerge from community action often identify social and environmental issues at the earliest stages, before those issues become addressed through policy.

WHAT INFRASTRUCTURE MATTERS TO COMMUNITIES?

11. As part of iPACT work, Southampton Voluntary Services worked with Marie Harder and Annabel Chapman from the University of Brighton to organise and deliver a series of workshops to groups of people involved in community activity in the city using the WeValue approach. People were asked to identify their shared values as a group and then what they thought was needed in terms of infrastructure improvements in the city.

12. This is a short overview of the type of issues that people said needed to be improved:
- **Housing is of poor quality and unaffordable**, including rented housing. Social housing is limited.
 - **Transport is a big issue** – roads and pavements are in poor condition, there is a need for buses to be improved including reaching all parts of the city and running on time, more bus shelters etc Need for a park and ride. Public transport needs to be affordable.
 - **Access to health services** – it's really hard to get a GP appointment or see a dentist, mental health services are in crisis and long delays for autism assessments etc, plus a need for much better online health services
 - **Elderly services** including daycare and dementia services
 - **Police** on the streets
 - They want **people to care about their city**. People taking pride in the city e.g. picking up litter etc
 - **Solutions to be coproduced**, people want to be heard, rather than feeling done to
 - **More things to do**, cultural activities like festivals etc, community centres that are more than a place that hires out rooms. Activities should not be dependent on people spending money
 - **More investment in amenities** such as public buildings, libraries etc
 - **Pollution needs to be controlled**, including air pollution from the ships
 - **Education for all** including better school buildings, learning opportunities for all ages, apprenticeships, work experience, better provision for Special Educational Needs. Too many 16-18 year olds go out of Southampton for education.
 - **Activities for children and young people**, youth clubs, early intervention,
 - **Places for people to come together**, need greater capacity for community activity.
 - **Community groups are really worried about funding being cut.**
 - **Money for outreach workers** including for youth workers
 - **Potential to reuse existing** buildings and more community use of assets owned by private landlords
 - **Support for parents**, family and early support hubs etc
 - People shared a sense that the **whole system is broken** and that there is mismanagement of money
13. People were specifically asked about green spaces. They said access to green spaces and nature really matters to people for wellbeing and peace of mind, and they want more access to the water and views over the water. Parks are the lungs of the city and people are proud of the many of the parks in Southampton, but they can feel unsafe. Families and students are living in flats and they really need access to green space. There are opportunities for people to have access to allotments and take over green spaces for growing etc.

COMMUNITY ACTIVITY LINKED TO SOUTHAMPTON'S PORT AND WATER

14. Southampton's community organisations have been involved in numerous initiatives across the city related to the port and waterside. This short summary report cannot do this justice, but here is a flavour.

Friends groups and wildlife organisations

15. Southampton has a number of "Friends Groups" associated with local green spaces next to the water, such as Friends of Itchen Estuary, Friends of Chessel Bay, Friends of Riverside Park and Friends of Town Quay Park. Details here: [Park friends groups \(southampton.gov.uk\)](https://southampton.gov.uk/park-friends-groups)
16. [Friends of Chessel Bay](#) Local Nature Reserve, Southampton City Council and the Environment Agency have recently been focusing on plastic and other litter/waste materials (old pontoons, bits of boats, furniture, old appliances, general litter) which are washed into the bay on a daily basis.
17. The [Friends of Itchen Estuary](#) is very proactive in terms of exploring river issues, raising awareness and campaigning for improvements to the Itchen Estuary. They have been undertaking citizen science monitoring work, which has helped people understand issues concerning water quality and associated risks.
18. [Southampton National Park City](#) (SNPC) is a relatively new and proactive community organisation aiming to bring people closer to urban nature on the city's doorsteps. It hopes to achieve National Park City status for Southampton. In 2022, SNPC undertook a City-Wide consultation which showed local people's priorities were (1) Healthy Rivers (2) Clean Air, and (3) Quality Green Spaces.
19. SNPC advocates for improvements to green and blue spaces, both in terms of public access and to improve biodiversity. One of their strands of work is to improve biodiversity around the riverbank between Woodmill and Southampton Water, and they are keen to see the development of estuarine gardens. People say that having a seat and a view over the water really matters to them. SNPC organised a community involvement event in 2023 to engage people in discussion about the city and hear local people's views. They are advocating for the pier at Town Quay park to be fixed and for Mayflower Park, as an important green space next to the water, to be improved. They are recruiting SNPC champions to help improve local neighbourhoods and are planning a festival to celebrate their work in May 2025.
20. Groups such as [St Denys Boat Club](#) and [Transition Southampton](#) have hosted talks about water-themed issues. Transition Southampton has also been proactive with promoting people to imagine the future of the city, through their [Imagine Southampton events](#). The [Wessex Rivers Trust](#) works hard to protect Southampton's chalk streams of international importance and educate people about water quality, biodiversity and associated threats.

21. [Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust](#) undertakes really important research and biodiversity projects which generate considerable support and interest across the Solent area, and are crucial for inspiring the next generation to learn new skills and get involved, such as:
 - i. [Wilder Southampton](#), an initiative that gets people involved in helping wildlife to thrive and promote a healthier environment.
 - ii. [Solent Seagrass Restoration Project | Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust \(hiwwt.org.uk\)](#)
 - iii. Intertidal surveys [Intertidal Surveys | Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust \(hiwwt.org.uk\)](#)
22. [Southampton Natural History Society](#) undertakes work around biodiversity and collaborates with others.

Heritage and arts

23. Southampton people have responding to port and water-related issues with cultural activity in many ways in the past. There are too many heritage and arts projects to mention here. Projects include:
 - i. the reimagining and reopening of [Gods House Tower](#) to bring this waterside heritage building back into use as an arts venue;
 - ii. [Local Legends: Southampton a Place Portrait](#) reviving memories of the long demolished Art Deco Ocean Terminal;
 - iii. the powerful work through [Black History Month South](#) which includes many projects over the years linked to Southampton as a port;
 - iv. the range of community activity associated with [Mayflower 400](#) which marked 400th anniversary of the Mayflower ship setting sail;
 - v. [D-day Stories of the Walls](#) project, sharing stories from Second World War troops;
 - vi. celebrating the city's port heritage through public art such as the [murals in Holyrood estate](#), which were designed by The Media Workshop and artist Anna Vickers with the local community; plus
 - vii. smaller projects like [Take Me to the Sea](#), a crowdsourced exhibition to celebrate and explore Southampton people's connection with the water.

Maritime and water festivals

24. As well as the Southampton Boat Show, the city has put on a range of maritime and water-themed festivals, not least [All Aboard](#), a community-run festival on the water in the St Denys area. In the past, [Southampton Maritime Festival](#) gave people the opportunity to board ships and explore parts of the waterside that are usually out of bounds for everyone other than dock workers or those traveling by boat. Plus, previous initiatives, such as Skyride, gave the local community the chance to cycle through part of the docks as part of this mass bike ride.

Water based leisure and water safety

25. Southampton has some strong sports and leisure community organisations that help get people onto the water and enjoy time in boats and other watercraft. As part of the 2023 Southampton City Council Scrutiny Inquiry, a broad range of different users of the River Itchen

were identified, totalling over 20 groups, clubs or activities with an estimated 20,000 people active on the river every year. The Maritime Volunteer Service set up a [Southampton unit in 2023](#), to serve communities in times of need and emergency.

26. The [Jubilee Sailing Trust](#) was based in Southampton, operating tall ships and giving disabled people the chance to experience life on sailing boat. Sadly, the charity closed in 2023.

Support to mariners

27. Southampton has a long tradition of providing welfare to mariners, including the [Sailors' Society](#) which has its headquarters in Southampton and [Stella Maris](#) which operates a [seafarers club](#) in Southampton.

Other charitable links

28. The Southampton marathon, sponsored by ABP, has been encouraging people to be active for a number of years. Participants have raised considerable sums of money, some of which has been for Southampton charities.
29. There are range of other connections between Southampton's charities, community groups and maritime businesses. Most charities offer opportunities for people to develop their confidence and skills ready for work. [Princes Trust](#) and [Safe New Futures](#) are two organisations with a particular focus on helping people address the barriers they may have to taking on work opportunities. Organisations such as [Autism Hampshire](#) help organisations to be inclusive workplaces, with a range of training on offer.
30. To find out more about the range of services and activities available, [So:Linked](#) helps connect people with local community groups and organisations. Check out this online directory or contact 02380 228291 or email So:Linked Community Development Worker: Community@southamptonvs.org.uk

Dialogue, campaigning and Scrutiny Inquiry

31. In terms of promoting dialogue between the port and Southampton communities, a group of residents in the Freemantle area set up the [Western Docks Consultation Forum](#) to try and bridge the gap between the port and local people.
32. Other projects such as Clean Air Southampton have been involved in campaigning, highlighting the issue of air pollution and its link to the docks and port-based activity. The [Hythe Ferry](#) has been previously been under threat from closure and campaigns to keep it going have generated much public interest and support.
33. More recently, Southampton City Council set up a Scrutiny Inquiry for [Protecting, Preserving and Promoting the River Itchen](#) which spent time researching and discussing the issues that mattered to local people about the River Itchen. The Inquiry reported its findings in June 2023. The [final report is here](#) and the key findings involved the following:

SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL

Scrutiny Inquiry for [Protecting, Preserving and Promoting the River Itchen](#) 2023

A summary of recommendations

Developing **Strategic Management and Partnership Working** including the establishment of an Itchen River Forum, involving key stakeholders including community groups, setting clear objectives around monitoring and evaluation. Plus a recommendation to rejoin for the Solent Forum.

Promoting **A Healthy and Resilient River**, including sustainable drainage solutions and support community groups' campaign for Designated Bathing Status, the potential for oyster reefs and develop an accreditation scheme to "respect the river".

Promoting **A Vibrant River**, including working with the Solent Freeport and business organisations to develop a skilled workforce. Redevelopment of Itchen Riverside to achieve a high quality waterfront development, including public access to the waterfront, improved biodiversity and flood resilience.

The need for a **Blue Space Strategy** to address recreation use, infrastructure improvements and accessibility.

Through **A Connected River** approach, more opportunities should be sought to extend river access, with a clear Waterfront Policy in the emerging local Plan including the development of zero-carbon water-borne transport.

Through the inquiry, city leaders sent a strong message that public access to the waterfront is a priority.

Community involvement in consultations

34. Southampton City Council has undertaken many consultations over the years, which yield valuable insight into the issues that matter most to communities. For example, results can be viewed via an interactive map as part of the Council's "Green Grid" consultation: [Look Back at - Interactive Map - Natural Environment Southampton \(commonplace.is\)](#) which elicited a large number of comments by local people.

35. The [Southampton City Vision Local Plan draft plan 2022](#) yielded lots of detailed comments on the proposals for policies associated with the waterfront, marine sites and the port as well as associated issues such as climate change and pollution into rivers. In terms of response to port policy (EC4) people wanted to see benefits to the city from port activity, for environmental impacts to be addressed and a greater level of openness from the port's operators. People would like more amenities and attractions as part of the opening up of the waterfront. Respondents felt there are opportunities to improve Mayflower Park and Town Quay pier.
36. The City has worked with local stakeholders, including groups from the VCSE sector, on its plans to address the climate emergency, including the risks around tidal flooding, and published this through the [Green City Plan](#).

A SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES FOR COMMUNITIES

37. Southampton residents, and the community organisations that Southampton Voluntary Services work with, regularly tell us about their views associate the connection between communities and the port/coast. We summarise them as follows:
38. **ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE** People feel a strong sense of identity linked to the port, linked to journeys of all types, including migration and the city's myriad of international communities.
39. **COMMUNITY ACTION** Whilst Southampton people are known for putting the city and themselves down, community organisations are very proud of all they achieve to help towards a prosperous, thriving city. They provide important opportunities for local people, including offering a social safety net for individuals in poverty and who are suffering from disadvantage. They create a strong sense of belonging for many residents and a shared purpose when it comes to social and environmental action.
40. **HERITAGE AND ARTS** Communities recognise and want to mark Southampton's historical role as a port and the connection with the water, from Roman and Saxon times until the current day. This activity has helped create the feeling of belonging for many people in the city and a strong sense of place.
41. **DISCONNECT** However, people feel that there is a disconnect between the port and the city's communities.
"It feels like the port is part of the city that isn't part of the city."
The lack of public open space next to Solent water and the estuary exacerbates this sense of disconnect.
42. **DECISION MAKING** There is a sense that decisions made about and within the port in particular are made without community engagement or local people understanding what is happening, why and how this benefits the city communities. The regulation system that covers the port, means that the City Council is not so involved in decision-making and this leads to a lack of connection with democratic processes and scrutiny.

43. **ACCESS TO THE WATER** Communities would like to see more access to the waterside for Southampton residents including physically opening up access, creating quality places to spend time with associated amenities, and providing improved transport access to get there.
44. **THE IMPORTANCE OF GREEN SPACES** People really value the role that green and blue spaces have in terms of health and wellbeing, leisure, education as well as economic opportunities for local people. They really value the role that green spaces have in terms of improving access to nature, the potential for improving biodiversity and getting away from hustle and bustle of the city including the traffic. They want to see more places being made greener and more friendly to nature.
45. **DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORT ISSUES** are of great concern to local people. They want to see more affordable and sustainable means of getting around, and ways to get out of the city to the countryside and the sea. They feel there are too many traffic jams; the city feels quite dominated by vehicles and car parks. There is a concern that the most disadvantaged parts of the city have to cope with the worst impacts of travel and transport, such as noise and air pollution. Through planning, transport and other city decision-making, people want to see development that meets the needs of local people, which includes the importance of a green city, quality and affordable housing and having access to the amenities that help create an attractive and meaningful place to live. They want to see development that benefits the people in the city. They are excited about the potential opportunities that well-designed development can offer, including creating a strong sense of place and pride. There is a tension between wanting to see a thriving port and its associated industrial activities, with the public wish to feel a much stronger connection with the water.
46. **FINANCE AND EMPLOYMENT** People are proud of the city's port and water employment opportunities, and the international reputation that Southampton has as a result of its port status. But they often wonder if the city really does benefit that much economically from the port. There is a sense that jobs are in decline and profit from the port benefits international companies. Cruise passengers are directed away from Southampton all too often when they step off their ships and are taken to places such as Winchester and Stonehenge. Local people would like to know more about how the local port economy links to local people's social and environmental aspirations and work to ensure more money is kept in the city.
47. **SCIENCE AND EDUCATION** Local people feel proud of the development of science in the city, our two Universities, the opportunities around maritime education and water-related skills, and organisations such as National Oceanography Centre Southampton.
48. **ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES** There is a wish for environmental issues such as water quality marine plastic pollution, air and noise pollution generated by port and water-based/waterside activities to be addressed. They are concerned about pollution from upstream activity, water treatment works and surface water run off, and the subsequent biodiversity loss in Southampton's rivers, estuary and the wider Solent waters.
49. **FLOODING AND SEA LEVEL RISE** People are concerned about future flooding as a result of climate change and sea level rise. They feel vulnerable.

50. **PUBLIC HEALTH** People want to be able to spend time by, in and on the water in order to improve their physical and mental health. They want to see more public and green space next to the water; places for people to enjoy nature, be physically active and come together to undertake social activities. They want to feel safe, so waterside locations are designed well and overlooked. They don't want to be worrying that their health could be at risk as a result of poor water quality, microplastics and water-borne disease. They also recognise the importance of Southampton's water in terms of urban cooling with increasingly hot summers.
51. **MENTAL HEALTH** People express strong views about the links between access to the water and mental health. They see the connection to the water as really important for people's emotional health and sense of wellbeing. In Southampton, the Itchen Bridge too often attracts people who are feeling suicidal. In terms of how businesses operate, communities want to see all businesses, including maritime and port companies, working hard to support people's wellbeing at work and provide secure, well-paid jobs.

OPPORTUNITIES

52. Here are some opportunities that we, Southampton Voluntary Services, have identified:

DIALOGUE AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

53. There is potential for much **more dialogue** between port and waterside operators and local communities to help bridge the communities/port divide. People would like port decisions made *with* communities, understanding and responding to the issues that matter to local people. Whilst people are not keen on more "talking shops", ways to improve communication between communities and maritime businesses etc would be very welcome.
54. **A coproduced approach**, where communities and port and maritime business, work together as equals, should be adopted. This could also pave the way to explore and tackle inequalities and a range of issues in the city that matter to local people.
55. People say they want to be proud of their city **and be part of a shared vision and positive narrative for the city**. They regularly share their aspirations and ideas and want an "imagining the future together approach" to lead to practical and innovative solutions. This is not so much about creating a marketing strategy, but more about meaningful ways for people to come together to agree and respond to a shared vision.
56. Whilst community organisations are ambitious about potential partnerships, they recognise that starting small can be a good thing, **taking time to build trusting relationships**.

BLUE SPACES STRATEGY AND ACCESS TO THE WATERSIDE

57. **To progress the recommendations made through the River Itchen Scrutiny inquiry**, many of which are relevant not just to the Itchen but to all the main bodies of water and other the

maritime and port uses in Southampton. In doing so, this will respect the considerable contribution given to this Inquiry by community organisations and others involved.

- Strategic management and partnership working
- A healthy, resilient, vibrant and connected river
- A Blue Spaces Strategy

58. A concerted effort is needed to **improve access to the water and waterside, the public realm, and associated amenities** including simple initiatives such as more benches. There is the chance to work towards the goal of Southampton having accredited bathing waters. Improving access to the water is not just about having permanent access to the water and waterside. Generating temporary access opportunities through events and special occasions would also be welcome.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT

59. There are many more chances to **work together towards green city aspirations**. This would include **raising awareness of, and reducing pollution, climate change impacts, poor air quality, addressing biodiversity loss and other environmental harms** from port and other city activity. It is crucial to many community groups that local business are taking an evidence-based approach when it comes to environmental improvement. Through initiatives such as Southampton National Park City and Wilder Southampton, there are opportunities to improve biodiversity within the city. It's not just about large measures, but encouraging local champions (be they residents, workers, businesses, community groups etc) to take small steps.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND PARTNERSHIPS FOR MUTUAL GAIN

60. Community organisations are keen to develop **strong long term partnerships** with businesses. They would welcome a focus on Corporate Social Responsibility for port, maritime and other city business. This could include connections through workforce volunteering, supporting people to develop their confidence, skills and employment opportunities. There are also considerable opportunities to work together on heritage, environmental and arts activities.
61. Opportunities could also arise to channel **port and maritime corporate funding to local communities**, beyond the large-scale event support that organisations like ABP offer to the [Southampton Marathon](#). Small charities all too often get missed out of large sponsorship deals or big funding opportunities.
62. **Healthy employment practices** really matter to local communities, because without a culture of good quality work (and pay) and wellbeing at work, this puts more pressure on communities to pick up the pieces when things go wrong. Port and maritime businesses are encouraged to connect with Southampton City Council's initiatives around healthy workplaces. They can also connect with, and learn from, local community enterprises that are successfully creating inclusive employment approaches. Connections could be made with Southampton's many successful social enterprises to see what could happen for mutual benefit.

63. Port and maritime businesses could **help community organisations** with some of the issues they can struggle to find volunteers or skilled staff for, such as business planning, marketing, HR, property management, finance etc.
64. There are opportunities for **stronger supply chains, local procurement and social value approaches**, that link port and maritime companies with local businesses, including social enterprises and charities. There are considerable opportunities for greater links with [community wealth building and the Southampton Pound](#). See the recent film [Local is the New Global](#) commissioned by [Southampton Climate Action Network](#), and developed in partnership with Southampton City Council and Hampshire Chamber of Commerce. This explores the potential of [Doughnut Economics](#) in Southampton, using tools to ensure that social and environmental issues are baked into economic action.
65. There are many opportunities for **developing learning and knowledge together** across the maritime and community divide. More research and citizen science could be developed in the city, involving local people. People are keen to know more about topics related to the port and water, and want to be part of the solutions.
66. Future priorities must be decided together, with action taken to make a difference.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

67. We would welcome your thoughts on these proposals. Please get in touch

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