

Three Harbours Stakeholder Newsletter

Summer 2026



What's in store

It is difficult not to acknowledge the current series of heatwaves, drought and wildfires that are currently ravaging our habitats and species locally and globally. The urgency of our work will only increase from here on out. There is progress here, though greater pace and scale is needed. But the less glamorous work of putting in place systems and tools that help us accelerate restoration and recovery of the sea and landscape is where this partnerships focus remains. We need to pull together now more than ever so, please do get in touch if you want to get involved with any of this work.

Partnership updates

UK's largest oyster reef restoration

Seagrass health study results

Systems mapping work

Farming workshop

Langstone Environment Management Plan

Three Harbours WINEP update

Partnership updates (slightly boring bit)



We have been looking at options to ensure the partnership can fund its programme of work as it develops. This has its challenges but the convening power of the partnership may also provide opportunities for funding that individual organisations do not have. To explore different strategies is our next focus with the Executive Board.



The Horizon Payments for Ecosystem Services bid was narrowly unsuccessful. The work to simplify and incentivise farmers and landowners to introduce practices that benefit both nature and sustainable food production remains a high priority for this programme. As part of the systems mapping process (discussed later) we hope to identify where our collective effort needs to focus to leverage greater change that delivers win-win for farmers, nature and wider society.



As we are mid way into our first strategy, the Exec Board is reviewing the delivery of the strategic objectives. The review has considered where the partnership is delivering well and where there have been challenges. This has allowed the partnership to agree a more refined role in facilitating the work of partners in recovery and restoration instead of directly delivering on the ground restoration works. This is informing a reviewed set of objectives from this revised role that better suits the resources and strengths of the partnership. More to follow.





UK's largest oyster reef restoration

In May hundreds of volunteers got hands on with the Solent Seascape Project's native oyster restoration in Chichester Harbour. The volunteers gave their time to prepare 20,000 native oysters for deployment onto a newly built oyster reef, as part of the UK's largest subtidal oyster reef restoration project.

The large-scale effort forms part of the Solent Seascape Project, a major marine restoration initiative led by ocean conservation charity Blue Marine Foundation alongside Chichester Harbour Conservancy. The project is supported by the University of Portsmouth's Institute of Marine Sciences and the Manor of Bosham estate, owner of the seabed, to restore some of the Solent's most threatened coastal habitats.

For centuries, native oysters were part of everyday life across the Solent. Coastal communities relied on oyster beds for food, trade and employment, with evidence of oysters being harvested in the harbour dating back to Roman Britain. The restoration aims not only to recover a lost species, but to help reconnect the region with an important part of its maritime heritage.

Native oyster populations in the Solent have fallen by around 96% over the past century due to overfishing, disease, invasive species and declining water quality. Despite this decline, oysters remain one of the marine environment's most important "ecosystem engineers". A single oyster can filter up to 200 litres of water a day, helping improve water quality, while oyster reefs also create habitats for hundreds of marine species and help protect coastlines from erosion.

After careful cleaning by the volunteers to removed invasive species and pathogens, the 20,000 oysters were laid onto the new "reef" – a shallow mixture gravel and shell. With further phases of the project later this year and the next two years, there will be further opportunities to get involved in this hands-on marine restoration project. Find out more about the project at conservancy.co.uk.

Seagrass health study

As promised in earlier newsletters, we now have the results of our seagrass health study conducted by Fathom Ecology with funding from Natural England and Chichester Harbour Conservancy.

As is often the case, practitioners are looking for a straightforward answer so that we can plan interventions that will have clear measurable impact. Whilst this study does improve our understanding of seagrass population health across the Three Harbours, there is no clear explanation for differing conditions at the range of sites of seagrass populations. We know that populations in Chichester and Langstone have improved significantly, Medmerry has signs of colonisation but Pagham's seagrass beds are in decline.

The report states:

"The results indicate that no single environmental factor is likely to explain the contrasting trajectories observed across the Three Harbours region. Instead, the evidence suggests that seagrass condition is influenced by multiple interacting pressures, including nutrient enrichment, sediment biogeochemistry, porewater chemistry, contaminant exposure, hydrodynamic variability and biological interactions. The comparatively healthy Oysterbeds seagrass bed, the apparent annual fluctuations observed at Northney, and the severe long-term decline within Pagham Harbour collectively demonstrate that the factors governing seagrass resilience vary spatially and remain incompletely understood."

So what now? Firstly, a conversation amongst partners to discuss the findings of this report and compare with other emerging findings from other partners. We need to establish what questions remain to be considered, what ongoing monitoring is needed (potentially as part of the water quality monitoring programme) and what passive restoration activities could be taken now.

If you would like to be part of that discussion, please do get in touch.



Credit: Fathom Ecology

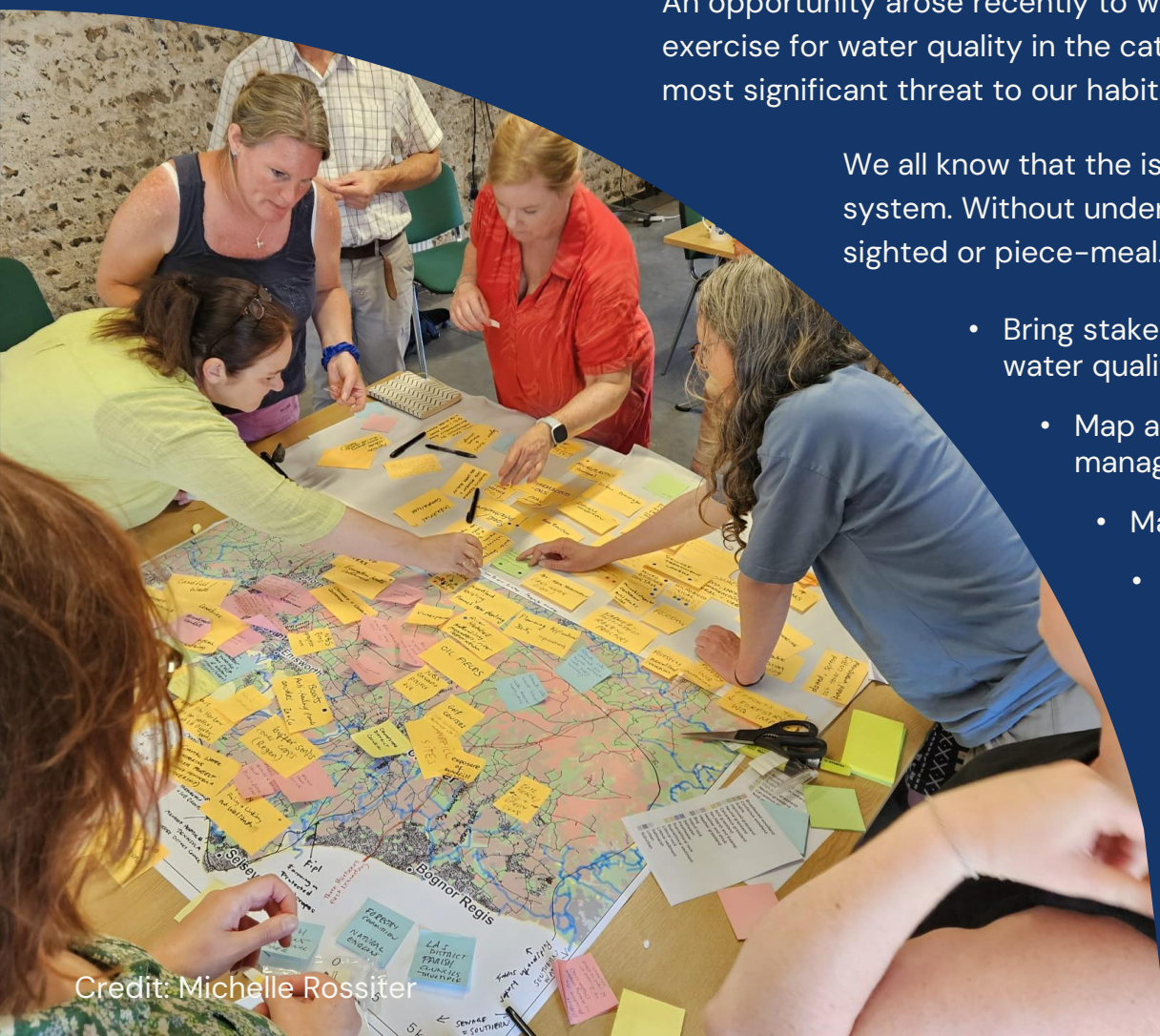
Systems Mapping

An opportunity arose recently to work with the University of Sussex to conduct a participatory systems mapping exercise for water quality in the catchments of the Three Harbours. It would have a specific focus on nutrients as the most significant threat to our habitats and ecosystems, particularly in the harbours.

We all know that the issue of water quality is hugely complex and there are many actors involved in the system. Without understanding the full picture, we risk operating in silos and taking action that is short-sighted or piece-meal. We hope this exercise will help us to:

- Bring stakeholders together around a systems map that we can all use as a tool for long-term water quality improvement across the catchment.
- Map all the land-based influences on WQ (deep dive) and links to water resource, water management and marine influences (broader brush)
- Map the key functions within the system and their interdependencies
- Identify who is doing what across the catchment to address water quality. Where do we duplicate/conflict?
- Identify where the gaps are. How can these issues be addressed?
- Where do we prioritise efforts for maximum benefit?

We have held the first workshop with key partners and now intend to run a further workshop to progress the mapping work. We will let you know what the findings are.



Credit: Michelle Rossiter

Farming workshop

Back in February, the Three Harbours held a farmers workshop to enable partners to showcase the nature-friendly projects, funding schemes and incentives that are now available. To hopefully encourage farmers to adopt those that makes business sense as well as being beneficial to the environment.

Hosted in the lovely Southend Barns for a double breakfast session we had speakers presenting at two slots from 8.30 and then again at 11.30 with wider partners hosting stalls with more information and advice.

Natural England set out the latest Catchment Sensitive Farming initiatives that are now available. This had been keenly awaited following a long period of uncertainty in government funding.

Chichester Harbour Conservancy explained the grants available through Farming in Protected Landscapes and case studies of how grants had been used so far under the scheme.

Southern Water had extended the geographic eligibility of its Farm Capital Grant Scheme and showcased this alongside the continued nutrient measures on offer.

The event was very well received and we have already started planning a repeat event next February.

Credit: Michelle Rossiter





Langstone's new Environment Management Plan

The EMP is the primary strategic framework for the management of environmental responsibilities within Langstone Harbour. It provides a coherent and accessible framework which brings together the Board's environmental duties, priorities, and approach to management in a single document.

The EMP is organised around a series of overarching themes and objectives which reflect the Board's statutory role and the pressures affecting the Harbour.

The EMP also provides clarity on roles and responsibilities. It distinguishes where the Harbour Authority has direct control or a lead function, and where outcomes are reliant on partnership working with other organisations. This is particularly important given the range of organisations with management or regulatory responsibilities within the Harbour.

Importantly, the Plan is supported by, and sits alongside, existing evidence, monitoring programmes, and strategies. It draws on current data and assessments to inform its priorities but avoids embedding overly detailed or time-sensitive information within the document itself. This ensures that the Plan remains current and fit for purpose over time, with supporting evidence able to be updated as required.

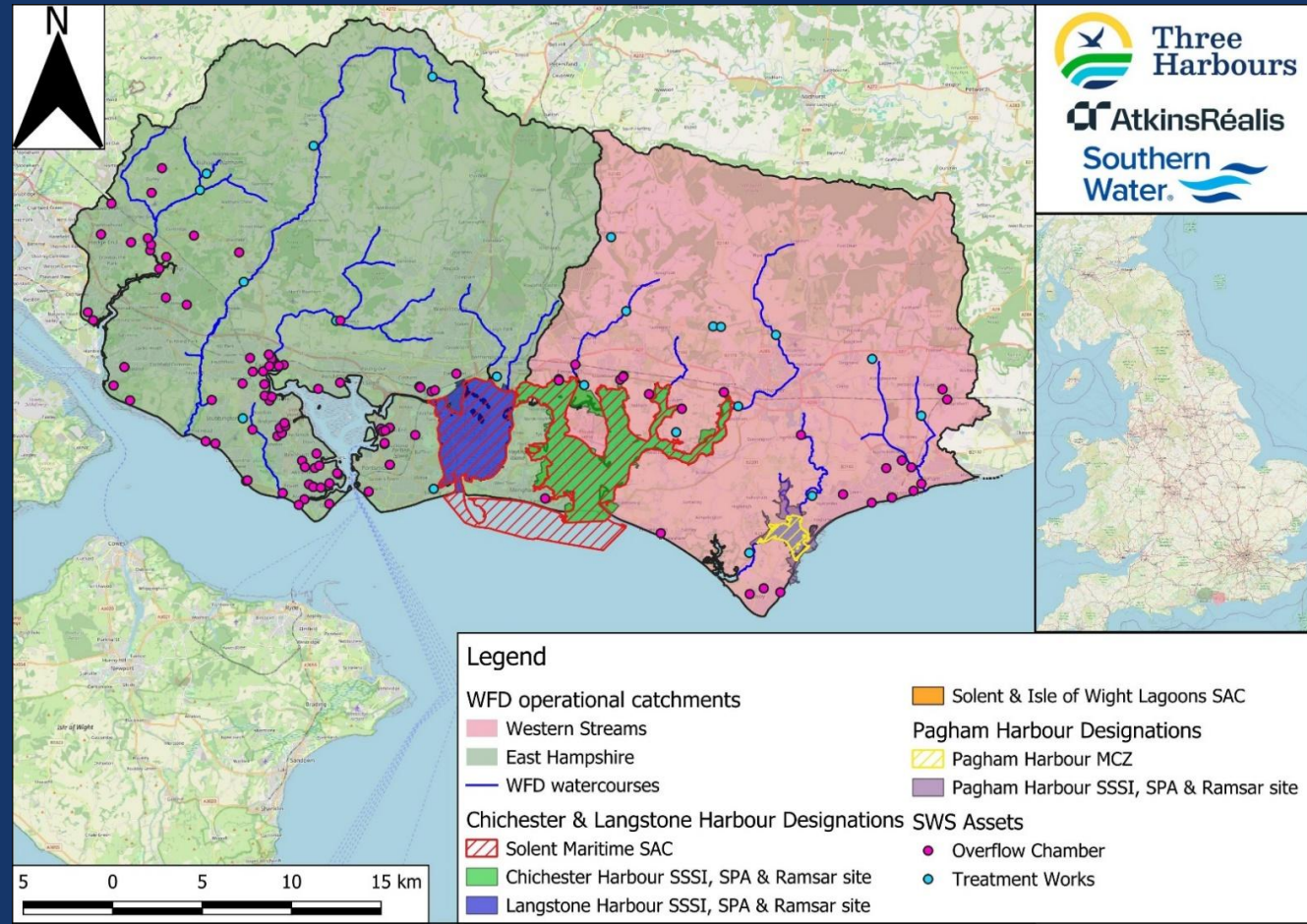
The EMP will function as the Board's primary strategic environmental document, providing a clear and consistent framework to support decision-making, engagement with regulators and partners, and future reviews of performance. In doing so, the EMP provides the Board with a robust, transparent, and policy-compliant basis for discharging its environmental responsibilities.

Three Harbours WINEP update

The full title is 'Three Harbours and Wider Solent 25 Year Environment Plan (YEP) Investigation' – snappy I know! We have introduced this piece of work before, but now it is shaping up nicely with the scoping report now delivered. Coming in at 220 pages, it provides a comprehensive review of existing evidence, monitoring activities, stakeholder perspectives and data gaps across the Three Harbours. Key findings from the scoping report are:

- There is extensive monitoring across water quality, hydrology, ecology and sediments, but this is spatially and temporally uneven and fragmented.
- Despite improvements since 1990s, nutrient loads from the wider coastal Solent remain dominant, and legacy nutrient stores in sediments continue to fuel macroalgal growth.
- The role of the groundwater nutrient flowing into the Three Harbours remains poorly understood, and represents a major evidence gap.
- The Solent is hydrodynamically complex due to its tidal exchange, double-high-water system and restricted harbour entrances. Demonstrating the need for localised high-resolution datasets to support future modelling.
- Stakeholder engagement emphasised the need for clearer communication on eutrophication drivers, greater integration of monitoring data, improved alignment between organisations and enhanced transparency around ongoing investigations.

We will share the report with stakeholders and, on its own, it is an enormously useful resource. The next stage will be to hold workshop(s) to draw partners around these findings and start to co-design the monitoring programme, seeking to consolidate data platforms and align existing projects to avoid duplication. Details of workshops will be shared with stakeholders in due course.



Thanks for reading

Hope you're managing to stay cool. Say a little prayer for all the other life we work so hard on behalf of... maybe a little rain dance!

If you didn't receive this email directly and would like to or would like to discuss any of the work, please email me at:

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