

REPORT TO:	Planning Policy Committee 26 September 2024
SUBJECT:	The Three Harbours Strategy 2024-2028
LEAD OFFICER:	Zac Ellwood (Interim Head of Planning Policy)
LEAD MEMBER:	Cllr Gill Yeates (Chair of Planning Policy Committee)
WARDS:	Pagham and Wards in western Bognor Regis
CORPORATE PRIORITY / POLICY CONTEXT / CORPORATE VISION:	
<p>The recommendations supports:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the Wellbeing of Arun; • Supporting our environment to support us; and • Fulfilling Arun’s economic potential. 	
DIRECTORATE POLICY CONTEXT:	
<p>Engagement with the Three Harbours Strategy will help to support the quality and function of the natural environment and supporting biodiversity, while also helping to address climate change issues and promoting economic growth in a sustainable manner.</p>	
FINANCIAL SUMMARY:	
<p>There are no direct financial implications arising from this report and the implementation of the recommendations does not require budget or resources to be allocated. The draft Strategy identifies various potential funding avenues for delivering the various projects and initiatives including government grants and schemes, mitigation schemes including offsetting carbon and nutrients, private investment and philanthropic contributions. As a partner, there will, inevitably, be some officer time involved for Arun District, which would be met through existing allocated budgets.</p>	

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. This report is intended to introduce members of the Planning Policy Committee to the ‘Three Harbours Strategy’ document (hereafter referred to as ‘the Strategy’). It also seeks agreement from the Committee for Arun District Council to become a formal signatory to this new Strategy, in partnership with a number of other local authorities, institutions and environmental and conservation groups across the region such that the council can influence the future of this important resource.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

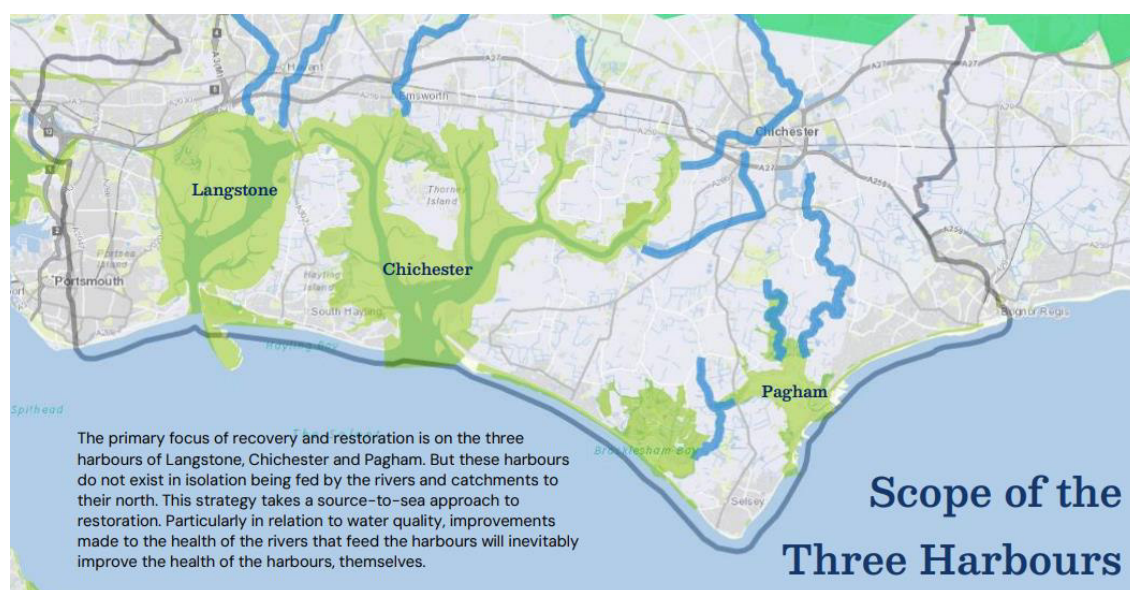
2.1 Planning Policy Committee resolves to: -

- i. Consider the Final Draft of the Three Harbours Strategy document (2024-2028); and
- ii. Agree that Arun District Council should join the Three Harbours partnership and become a formal signatory to the Strategy.

3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 3.1. The Strategy relates to the harbours of Langstone, Chichester, and Pagham, and their respective hinterlands, and covers the period 2024 to 2028. These three harbours provide an internationally important mosaic of wet grassland, intertidal, and coastal habitats which are crucial for wildlife and a key resource for people, but which face a number of environmental challenges and are in decline.
- 3.2. The geographical scope of the Strategy covers an area bounded to the west through Portsea Island and to the east through Bognor Regis (see map at Figure 1 below).

Figure 1 – Map showing geographical scope of the Three Harbours Strategy



- 3.3. The catchment area was set by the partnership based on the natural capital baseline conducted by NatCap in 2022 and incorporates land within the jurisdiction of four local authorities, Portsmouth City Council, Havant Borough Council, Chichester District Council and, of course, Arun District Council.
- 3.4. Both Hampshire County Council and West Sussex County Council, as first tier authorities, are also members of the Three Harbours Partnership (hereafter referred to as ‘the Partnership’). The Partnership was born from the Harbours Summit which brought together leaders from over twenty organisations. Aside from the relevant local authorities, other partners include the Environment Agency, Natural England, RSPB, Southern Water, Portsmouth Water, and Sussex Nature Partnership, together with Harbour Boards and other interest groups. The three broad target areas of focus for the Strategy identified by the Partnership are water quality, biodiversity and carbon capture.

- 3.5. Due to an unfortunate oversight on behalf of the Partnership, the Strategy has been worked up without the involvement of Arun District Council, despite one of the three harbours in question falling within our district (namely Pagham). The council was not informed of the initiative at the time of inception in 2021 and, to-date, the council has had no opportunity to input into the vision and mission statements, or to the draft Strategy itself. The work of the Partnership was only recently brought to officers' attention, in June 2024, when we were sent what is labelled as being the 'Final Draft' of the Strategy as part of a general mailing list to a raft of stakeholders.
- 3.6. The above, notwithstanding, it is considered of importance that Arun District Council engages with the process and that Arun is now identified as an important partner organisation, so that, going forward, we can be involved in discussions around the future of Pagham Harbour and its surroundings and how this interacts with the wider catchment area. There is no direct financial commitment from Arun required at this stage, although there will be inevitably be officer time involved, which would be met through existing budgets.
- 3.7. The Strategy is intended to be finalised in Autumn 2024. Hence, the reason for bringing this report to the Planning Policy Committee at the earliest possible date.

4. THE THREE HARBOURS STRATEGY

- 4.1. As set out in the Executive Summary, there are three broad target areas of focus for the Three Harbours Strategy:
- Water quality
 - Biodiversity
 - Carbon capture.
- 4.2. To seek to address these key areas of focus, the partnership has developed both a 'vision' (to capture the future they wish to see in 2050) together with a 'mission' statement setting out how they intend to deliver the actions that will be necessary achieve this vision, as follows:

Vision

“We envisage a healthy and thriving water environment where restored and connected sea and landscapes are resilient to a new climate reality, enabling people and nature to adapt and flourish – together.”

Mission

“Reverse the decline and help nature thrive across Chichester, Langstone and Pagham Harbours, through the expertise, network and resource of the Partnership.”

- 4.3 The draft Strategy includes a High-Level Plan, the main initial focus of this being around community and stakeholder engagement and delivering flagship projects for each of the three harbours in question.

- 4.4 In coming up with this action plan, lessons learned from various cases studies of similar programmes/approaches have been considered. These include a joint Environment Agency and Natural England scheme for Poole Harbour aimed at reducing nitrogen and phosphorous discharge to levels that support ecological restoration by 2030, and the 'Weald to Waves' project which has been brought about by a local farmer in Arun District working with other landowners across Sussex to seek to create a nationally significant wildlife corridors of over 100 miles and 20,000 hectares, linking Ashdown Forest in the High Weald, following the Arun, Adur and Ouse rivers to the sea at Climping, Shoreham and Newhaven. The project also seeks to promote more sustainable farming practices and a reduction in pollutants and to encourage community engagement/understanding.
- 4.5 Another initiative looked at was the Medmerry Nature Reserve project, which was designed to help protect local communities from flooding, whilst creating new intertidal areas for wildlife, replacing habitat that had been lost elsewhere along the Solent. This an example of a nature-based solution that provides multiple benefits to nature, local communities and the economy whilst also inspiring landscape scale climate adaptation and mitigation.
- 4.6 The High-Level Plan included within the Three Harbours Strategy envisages 10 key outputs by 2028 (this being the end of the current Strategy period). In summary, these are to:
1. Work with partners to establish a collaborative public engagement programme exploring new methods to connect with, educate and empower diverse members of the local community - providing greater ambition and emphasis specifically for Langstone and Pagham. This includes exploring the use and viability of a standing citizens assembly to engage local communities on the most challenging issues related to climate adaptation and nature restoration that intersect with community needs.
 2. Engage broader stakeholders such as landowners, farmers, business owners and community projects to explore the role they could play in delivering the strategy.
 3. Explore recognition of the entire low-lying area of the Three Harbours as an important, integrated, natural asset, achieving the landscape scale required to maximise its full environmental assets.
 4. Begin establishing an integrated blueprint for water quality recovery building on the existing work of partners ((including developing a Landscape Recovery bid to DEFRA).
 5. Develop and begin delivery of at least three flagship projects across the Three Harbours that support landscape scale restoration (including investigating opportunities for seagrass restoration or introduction at Pagham and Medmerry building on the work already taking place in Langstone and Chichester harbours).

6. Develop further opportunities and support partner activities to drive habitat restoration that aligns to the priorities identified in the integrated recovery plan.
 7. Integrated recovery plan – Mapping of all partnership projects (not solely Three Harbours) and potential restoration opportunities to provide an overview to inform improved collaboration and decision-making.
 8. Embed the restoration ambition within the emerging LNRS (Local Nature Recovery Strategy) and use the stakeholder engagement required to evolve the LNRS as an opportunity to communicate the Three Harbours partnership and attract greater buy-in.
 9. Provide materials and tools that simplify and streamline collaboration with broader stakeholders particularly farmers and landowners. This could include: guidance, information, and sign posting on locally available funding schemes and projects for farmers and landowners in a way that is easily accessible and user friendly.
 10. Build partnership arrangements, funding strategies and programme management capabilities (including creating a dedicated website for the Partnership).
- 4.7 It is clear from the above that, whilst a lot of work has gone into producing an overarching strategy and action plan, the various tangible projects/initiatives aimed at delivering the 'vision' and 'mission' are mostly at an early stage, whereby there is still an opportunity for Arun District Council to shape the programme.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 It is, clearly, very disappointing that the Three Harbours Strategy has been drawn up over the past few years without any engagement from the Partnership with this council. It is also rather surprising given that one of the three harbours in question is Pagham Harbour, which lies squarely within our district. Nevertheless, whilst we are not able to influence the overarching strategy document itself, there are still good opportunities for Arun to be involved in this initiative going forward.
- 5.2 It is considered that the most effective way of ensuring closer engagement and involvement is for the council to sign up as a partner to the Three Harbours Strategy. Doing so would not have any direct financial or significant resource implications for Arun but it would mean the council is at the table for strategic discussions and that the local communities most affected can have an influence on future planning for Pagham Harbour and its wider catchment area.
- 5.3 The Planning Policy Committee is, therefore, asked to endorse the Three Harbours Strategy 2024-2028 and to agree that Arun is included as a signatory/partner organisation in the final, published document.

6. NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 Subject to endorsement of the draft Strategy by the Planning Policy Committee, officers will confirm to the Partnership that we wish to add Arun District's name/logo to the 'Our Partners' list on Page 3 of the Strategy – see [Duty to co-operate - planning policy | Arun District Council](#).
- 6.2 Further engagement with Arun District Council and the applicable Ward Councillors/Parish and Town Councils will thereafter take place in line with the provisions of the High-Level Action Plan. A request will also be made for Arun representatives (officer and/or member level) to join relevant Working Groups set up to build and refine the programme of work and the integrated plans.
- 6.3 Further work to establish and clarify resourcing needs will be determined as the plans firm up, but it is important to note that joining the Partnership does not commit the Council to any financial involvement.
- 6.4 The Partnership's stated intention is to review the Strategy in 2028 and, following this, every 5 years thereafter, in line with sister programmes and the government's Environment Improvement Plan 2023.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The draft Strategy has been shared with the Pagham Ward Councillors by officers, but it is believed that no attempt was made by the Three Harbours Partnership itself to directly engage with either Councillor or the Parish Council.

8. OPTIONS / ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

- 8.1 An option considered was to decide not to engage with the Partnership in relation to the Three Harbours Strategy – Whilst the Strategy has been drawn up without any input from Arun District Council, or direct engagement with us, it is clear from the High-Level Plan that the programme of work is still at the relatively early concept stage and the various initiatives therein have not been worked up to any significant degree at this stage. Therefore, if Arun signs up as a partner organisation, we will have the opportunity to influence the various work strands, particularly those relating to Pagham and its environs. This will also ensure that the communities most affected will be included in future stakeholder engagement.
- 8.2 No other options or alternatives were considered.

9. COMMENTS BY THE GROUP HEAD OF FINANCE/SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 9.1 To follow.

10. RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1 None identified.

11. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP HEAD OF LAW AND GOVERNANCE & MONITORING OFFICER

11.1 There are no governance or legal implications arising for the recommendation in this report.

12. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

12.1 There are no human resource implications arising from this report.

13. HEALTH & SAFETY IMPACT

13.1 There are no direct health and safety impacts arising from this report.

14. PROPERTY & ESTATES IMPACT

14.1 There are no direct implications for council property.

15. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) / SOCIAL VALUE

15.1 The proposals may have a positive impact on community health and wellbeing through engaging with stakeholders and the public on the Strategy to address specific needs of sections of the community.

16. CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT/SOCIAL VALUE

16.1 Two of the key areas of focus for the Strategy relate to biodiversity and carbon capture, which both tie in closely with the council's declaration of a climate emergency on 15 January 2020 and pledge to be carbon neutral by 2030. There are clear links to the published 'Climate Action and Biodiversity Work Plan 2024-25' and to the 'Carbon Neutral Strategy.' Engagement with the Three Harbours workstreams is considered likely to lead to positive outcomes in terms of climate change and environmental impact.

17. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

17.1 There are no direct adverse implications for crime and disorder.

18. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT

18.1 There are no direct adverse implications for human rights.

19. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION / DATA PROTECTION CONSIDERATIONS

19.1 There are no implications arising from this report and the recommendation.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Background Paper 1: Three Harbours Strategy 2024-2028 Final Draft (Post-consultation version draft v.09) - [Duty to co-operate - planning policy | Arun District Council](#)