

6.1 Stakeholder Workshops & Public Engagement

Landstary initiated the project with a workshop (13.02.20) for project partners and the working group. The key insight that emerged repeatedly and consistently that could contribute to the success of the Stour Valley Park, was *'meaningful and sustained stakeholder engagement'*.

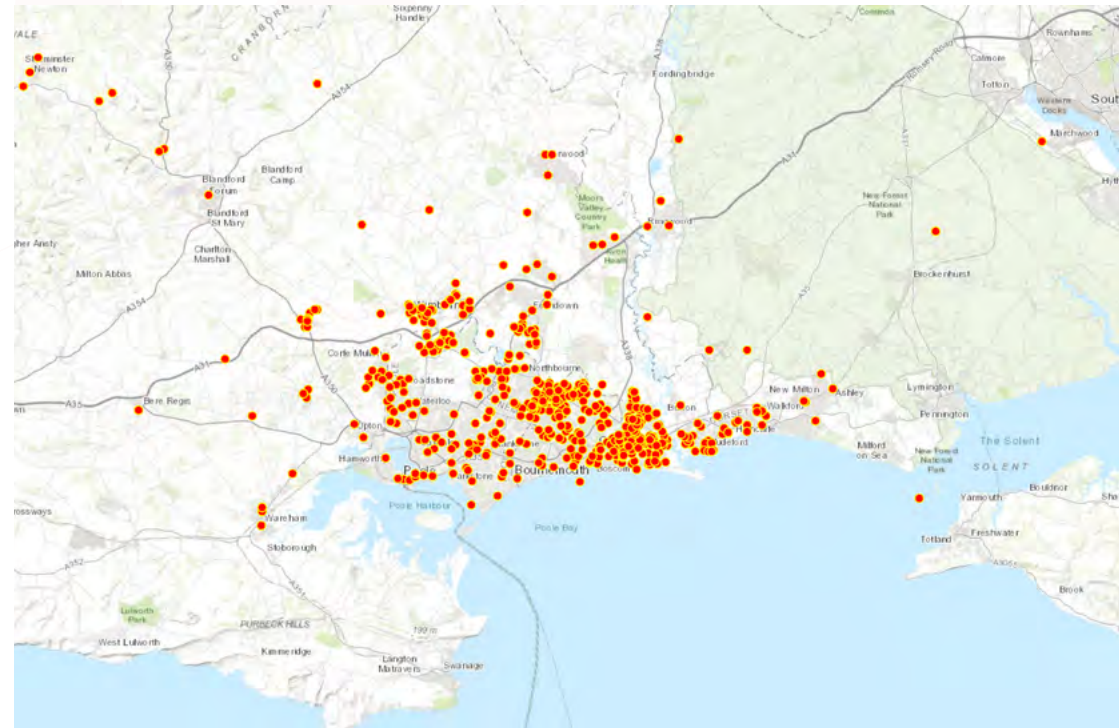
On this basis the working group mapped all relevant stakeholders in the locality, those who may be affected or could influence the project. These stakeholders were grouped into different classes and invited to a series of 5 'Targeted Workshops'.

3 public workshops were also held open to all participants and 2 workshops with all local Ward Councillors from the BCP and DC locality invited to attend. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions these events were all held online via remote conferencing software and digital whiteboard tools.

A survey form was set up using ArcGIS Survey123 Web application. At the date of publish (xx.xx.xx) 850 survey forms had been completed. This data also forms part of the evidence base.

Set out below are the summary results of the workshops. We have categorised the responses to line up with the 5 key themes.

Project Initiation Workshop
13.02.20
Credit: Megaphone Films



Snapshot of Survey Submission form locations

6.2 Stakeholder Workshops & Public Engagement - Natural Environment

Prominent Topics

Connection to Nature

There was a strong consensus amongst participants in public and focused sessions around the value of connection to nature. The opportunity to engage with the natural environment in a meaningful way was given high priority.

Pollution

There was strong consensus between groups around the need to deal with current levels of pollution. Nitrate runoff from agriculture, hydrocarbons from nearby roads, and effluent from water treatment sites were the most cited examples. There is a high degree of awareness around these issues among public groups as well as professional and expert stakeholders.

Participants made it clear that blame should not be laid upon farmers and landowners currently managing the land. Rather, the project should proceed by recognising them as stewards of the landscape and supporting them to develop more sustainable practices.

Desire for sufficient quality of water to allow safe wild swimming and watercraft activities.

Litter

All groups cited litter as an issue. Various groups called for a ban on plastics and disposable packaging in the area of the SVP. Presence of polystyrene pollution in waterways and discarded plastics

were highlighted. Unanimous call for more bins, in particular more bins for dog waste. Fly tipping has also been identified as a significant problem.

Designated areas

All groups highlighted the issue of shared pathways for pedestrians and cyclists. Many called for dedicated pathways to avoid conflict.

Areas should be identified for watercraft e.g. kayaking and boating, and potentially specific facilities like docks for these activities.

Biodiversity

Strong desire for re-establishment of native species, and intervention to secure presence of declining populations. Call for native trees to be planted, and riparian areas established. Wildflower and meadow areas desired. Desire for species including otters, beaver, salmon, brown trout, kingfishers, brown trout, sea trout, grayling, eels, insects particularly riverfly. Issue of invasive species such as signal crayfish and mink highlighted.

Education and Awareness

Lack of understanding identified as cause of issues. Calls for educational activities to be integrated into school curriculums, and open participation events for all ages to learn about local environment.

Citizen science

Consistent calls for citizen science opportunities, contributing to upkeep of environment and increasing community involvement/awareness.

Flooding

Call for natural flood defences. No future housing developments on floodplains.

Rewilding

Rewilding suggested as key component, either explicitly or through calls for areas off limits for humans, allowing for robust wild ecosystems.

Wardens / Rangers

Consistent calls for a greater presence of wardens and rangers in the Stour Valley Park area.

Further Topics

- * Removal of obstructions to river i.e. weirs, and adding of fish passes
- * Stopping of dredging
- * Open participation activities in natural environment desired
- * Desire to reduce number of golf courses and use land for park / natural environment
- * Erosion of riverbank
- * Invasive species such as himalayan balsam and need to inform public about them

- * Farmers supported and resourced to adopt regenerative agricultural practices
- * Renewable energy being generated in park

Key Testimony

Direct effects of climate change at the local level are visible to users of the river. Anglers have over time witnessed the increased seasonal changes to the river and the impact this has had.

Anglers put themselves forward as a 'corridor of communication' to the wider community. Suggested that they can support by providing baseline survey data regarding water quality.

Landowners and farmers expressed their frustration at being blamed for current pollution when they are making independent efforts to improve state of local environment. Public and other groups highlighted need to recognise that landowners and farmers are doing their best and need to be supported, rather than penalised.

6.3 Stakeholder Workshops & Public Engagement - Sustainable Transport Initiatives

Prominent Topics

Circular routes

Unanimous calls for more circular routes to be created within the SVP. Some suggestions for placing of routes or restoration of unused bridges e.g. in Little Canford.

Robust pathways

In current state, pathways are vulnerable to flooding or becoming muddy with seasonal weather. Current surfaces of paths lead to erosion and cannot cope with increased visitor numbers.

Disabled access

Unanimous calls for improved disabled access. Dedicated car parks suggested. Clear info on areas of disabled access required. Gates, stiles and fences identified as potential obstacles.

Connectivity

Access without need for personal cars desired – development of local public transport network and links, entry points via foot or bike required. Information on routes needs to be clearly accessible.

Information

A known destination – central hub – for maps and information on access and routes is needed.

Discouragement of cars

Strong desire expressed for reduction in traffic and number of cars used to visit site.

Car parking facilities

Some conflict over value of increasing number of free car parks to encourage wider range of visitors, or paid car parks to discourage presence of cars.

Issue identified over 'informal' parking in vicinity of Stour Valley.

Consistent concern over car parks being placed close to river, potentially impacting on environment.

Equitable access

Encourage demographics who disproportionately do not currently use park, to begin visiting.

Planning

Call for more cohesive communication between developers and planning decisions. Incorporation of park plans into local plans, to allow developers to include access routes etc.

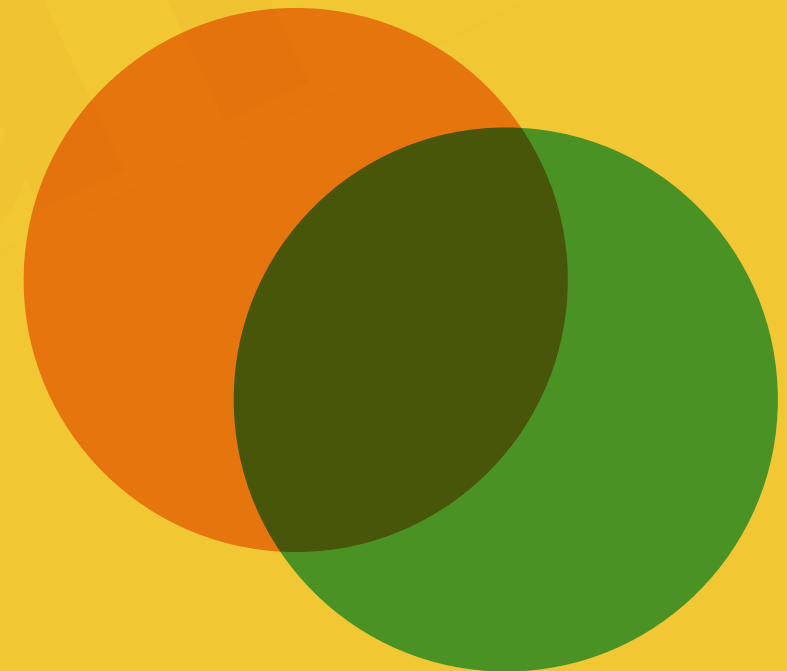
Further Topics

- * Off road mobility scooter availability
- * Bike hire in style of beryl bikes
- * Balancing access with areas 'left to nature'
- * Routing into urban areas to encourage visitors to towns from park, not just into park

Key Testimony

Angling trust may be willing to provide funding if access for disabled anglers can be improved.

Swell in visitors through lockdown has highlighted issues with overcapacity.



6.4 Stakeholder Workshops & Public Engagement - Green Economy

Prominent Topics

Support from business community

Communication and collaboration with local business community should be prioritised. Some ideas already being considered to support local environment. Desire to identify with and support project, for contribution by businesses to be visible to community.

Routing

Providing routes and increasing visitors into urban areas would be significant benefit to businesses. Considered circular routes and placement of businesses would be important.

Renewable energy

Calls for Stour Valley to provide renewable energy, and create jobs and skills in process.

Food production

Increasing local sustainable food production, and integrating visitor routes and activities with sites of food production. Linking producers with businesses selling and using produce.

Tourism

Tourism is vital to regional economy and needs to be considered in plan, versus desire for increased biodiversity potentially being affected by more visitors.

Sustainable livelihoods

Creation of local jobs. Existing farmers able to continue in environmentally and financially sustainable manner.

Coordination

Private parties including developers and business groups wish to be involved in decision making around policy and management in order to streamline

Further Topics

- * Jobs and training for young people
- * Sustaining rural character throughout park
- * Use of unsustainable materials by local businesses
- * Planning for peak visitor times so not over capacity
- * Busy roads
- * Diversification of business activities

Key Testimony

Current planning system in BCP and Dorset Councils is stifling good ideas. Many are being suggested but not able to come to fruition.

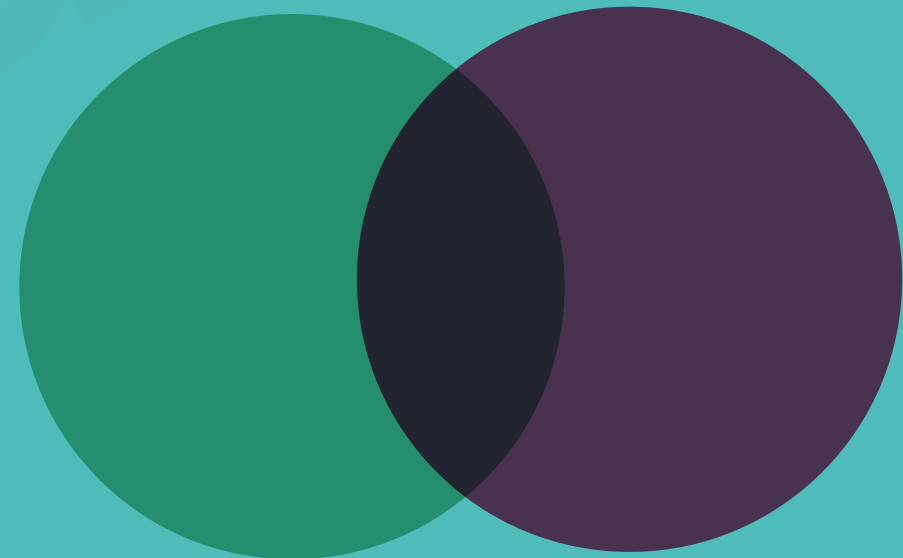
'Local plans need to identify initiatives like this and propose how they will be provided'

Developers can go beyond SANGS with housing and provide wetland, car parks etc.

Pace of delivery of projects needs to be accelerated – best done through clear and consistent communication between planners and developers

Pushing to get the park defined/allocated as recreational use, supported via high level planning policy to safeguard/secure this project.

Legitimacy for this project should be secured through published documents that can be used in the planning framework.



6.5 Stakeholder Workshops & Public Engagement - Health and Wellbeing

Prominent Topics

Linking community and environmental health

Contributions throughout all sessions made explicit or tacit links between the wellbeing of the regional environment, and that of the population within it. Participants called for an approach that places the health of ecosystems and levels of biodiversity on a level with the wellbeing of residents.

Mental health

The value to mental health of access to a healthy natural environment was highlighted consistently. This issue has become increasingly apparent through lockdown.

Outdoor activities

Opportunities for getting active outdoors. Guided walks, yoga, tai chi etc.

Quality local food

Good quality local food provided. Allotments and market gardens implemented to allow for community food pro-action, and gaining skills and awareness of food.

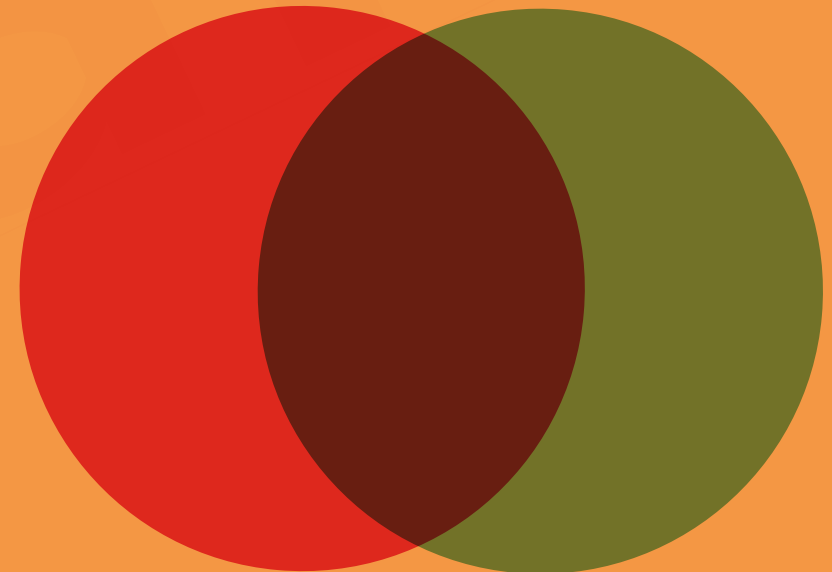
Further Topics

- * Use of park for exercise
- * Need for quiet areas
- * Forest bathing
- * Loneliness and depression

Key Testimony

This project could become Britain's first 'natural health park'. A project in which the links between mental health, general wellbeing and the environment are recognised and planned around. In this context the SVP could serve as a flagship project and potentially attract more funding streams.

Important marker of success will be use of SVP by sectors of community who currently don't take advantage of it. This will be tied to overall levels of wellbeing, and that of particular groups, including marginalised communities.



6.6 Stakeholder Workshops & Public Engagement - Cultural and Historical Legacy

Prominent Topics

Sense of identity / Pride in place

Developing a sense of identity related to the project region through ongoing involvement of the community in the planning process. Fostering a sense of pride through opportunities for the community to make direct contributions to the creation of the SVP.

Volunteering and community opportunities

Unanimous desire for the community to have more opportunities to contribute to the park. Suggested that this would increase viability of project, educate and spread awareness of natural environment among public, increase wellbeing.

Citizen science activities including gathering baseline data and monitoring state of environment consistently called for throughout sessions with public and professional/expert stakeholder groups.

Crafts

The creation and revival of local craft activities, perhaps prioritised as businesses present in the SVP. Integration with visitors to the area. Use of local materials. Training in craft traditions.

Sculpture trails

Numerous calls for sculpture trails being incorporated into the SVP.

Archaeological records

Records of human interaction with the River Stour going far back in time should be made visible and present in park.

Cultural activities

Opportunities for appropriate events such as theatre and musical performance within the SVP. Balanced with desire for safeguarded natural habitats.

Community cohesion

Bringing together different sectors of the community around shared goals and common activities through the SVP.

Further Topics

- * Quality museums attracting visitors
- * Intergenerational links through activities and opportunities
- * Forest bathing / seasonal and natural events
- * Communicating role of pre-industrial mills and potentially reopening them e.g. for renewable energy production

Key Testimony

If efforts are made to meaningfully involve the community throughout the project, then there is the potential for the SVP and surrounding communities to become exemplars of sustainable living.

Farmers and farming practices should be recognised as key part of local heritage, and supported to remain and be recognised as such.

Rural exodus is an issue, particularly with young people leaving the area. This focus on the state of the natural environment and its role in supporting local communities could go some way to addressing this.

