



Leeds  
CITY COUNCIL

# scrutiny



Environment, Housing  
and Communities

## 'River Cleanliness' Draft Inquiry Report



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# Outcomes and Recommendations

## **Desired Outcome – To Enhance Public Awareness through signage**

Recommendation 1 – To consider a method to identify access points to water within LCC ownership where appropriate signage could be erected to advise the public of the suitability of recreational use of the water at that site.

## **Desired Outcome – To Enhance Public Awareness, Responsibility and Involvement**

Recommendation 2 – To consider developing a public awareness campaign/local information campaign to ensure a commonality of messaging and to reinforce education on 'what is in your water' and build an understanding that for people to enjoy the water there are areas of responsibility for them.

## **Desired Outcome – Enhance local decision making**

Recommendation 3 – Enhance local decision making through supporting good working relationships between water operators and Local Residents/Interest Groups.

## **Desired Outcome – Working with local landowners to encourage planting on river banks**

Recommendation 4 – Work with local landowners to encourage planting on river banks to mitigate effects of run-off and /or possible pollutants entering the water and to provide natural soak away.

## **Desired Outcome – Raise the profile of the issue with our local authority partners**

Recommendation 5 – Share the Inquiry Report with our colleagues in neighbouring authorities.

## **Desired Outcome – National focus on public health in waterways**

Recommendation 6 – Encourage Central Government to place a greater focus on water monitoring to support public health and safety at sites used for recreation.

## **Desired Outcome – Consideration of whole drainage and sewer system network within the planning application process.**

Recommendation 7 – Support opportunities to review existing sewer and drainage infrastructure during the new build planning process.

## **Desired Outcome – Accountability and collaboration at a national level**

Recommendation 8 – Engage with central Government to encourage a place for local representation on national decision making and advisory bodies.



# Introduction and Scope

## Introduction.

1. Leeds City Council was first alerted to local concerns relating to river cleanliness in November 2019 when a meeting of full Council received a deputation from Mr M Barrow on behalf of Beneath British Waters which focussed specifically on plastics and rubbish entering the River Wharfe and more broadly, river cleanliness. The deputation raised the issue of raw sewage being pumped into the river at Wetherby and Boston Spa and the potential health impacts that has on those using the river as well as referencing issues experienced in Ilkley, Addingham and Otley.
2. Leeds City Council's Director of City Development published the Council's response to the Deputation on 21st January 2020. ([decision details and documents here](#)).
3. On 9<sup>th</sup> January 2020, Wetherby ward Councillors made a request to the Scrutiny Board Environment, Housing and Communities to investigate issues related to river cleanliness in Wetherby; and on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the Board determined to hold an Inquiry to provide Scrutiny Board Members with an opportunity to take an overview of river cleanliness – using the River Wharfe as a focus both for Leeds and neighbouring Districts.
4. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, work to commence the inquiry paused, but in July 2020 a scoping meeting took place to shape future work sessions and determine appropriate invitees – the findings and queries arising from that meeting informed the

Terms of Reference for the River Cleanliness Working Group.

## Best Council Plan.<sup>1</sup>

5. When embarking on the Inquiry, the Board kept in mind the strategic and outward looking Scrutiny function that focuses on the best council objectives and sought to ensure that the work of the Group promoted the ongoing engagement with communities and individuals, as well as with the Councils strategic partners.
6. The Board also acknowledged that Leeds' Best City ambition has the Leeds Climate Emergency declaration as a key driver and locality working as a core principle. The work of the Group aimed to sit within the Sustainable Infrastructure priority – seeking to support work on:
  - Improving air quality, reducing pollution and noise; and
  - Improving the resilience of the city's infrastructure and the natural environment, reducing flooding and other risks from future climate change

## Scope of the inquiry.

7. The purpose of our inquiry set out in the Working Group's Terms of Reference, was to establish an understanding and make an assessment of the issues and, where appropriate, make recommendations on the following areas:

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<sup>1</sup> [Best Council Plan 2020-2025](#)



# Introduction and Scope

- Can the amount of sewage discharged be quantified/measured in order to determine whether too much waste is discharged into the rivers? (In effect, above the limits permitted by relevant licences) (referencing the Wharfe at Wetherby and Boston Spa but recognising the regional network as well). Can we receive assurance regarding the prescribed limits and data/information on the causes of any specific incidents?
- Consideration of what a modern society would expect of river cleanliness and what is tolerable from a public health point of view;
- Rivers for the future –
  - discuss what could be done differently from the current arrangements;
  - identify reasons for change or no change; and
  - indicate a reasonable and achievable timescale for change and progress.
- To consider the water testing information anticipated through the Ilkley Rivers Group and to understand the work required, agencies involved and a likely timeframe to support the request for bathing status made by the Ilkley Clean Rivers campaign group.

## Desired Outcomes, Added Value and Anticipated Service Impact.

8. The overarching aim of our Inquiry was to better understand the issues raised in the Deputation and by local ward Councillors; to achieve a broad understanding of the roles of the

responsible authorities tasked with managing our local water ways; to understand the parameters in which responsible authorities work; and to identify what support the Scrutiny Board could provide to achieve the best outcomes for users of the River Wharfe.

9. We heard from our valued partners who manage the local water ways; and from local Ward Councillors and senior officers of the council.
10. We also felt it was essential to hear from local action groups and residents to present their view of the current issues and future work to secure litter and waste-free waters.
11. We were very fortunate to receive a wealth of evidence from external participants and wish to record here our thanks to them for sharing pertinent and timely documentation to support the Working Group, their engagement provided invaluable support to the Inquiry process.
12. The Scrutiny Board was pleased to note the issues remain very much live, with a further question tabled at Council on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2020 *“Will the Executive Board Member for Environment & Active Lifestyles commit to improving river cleanliness throughout the Leeds district?”*
13. The Scrutiny Board also welcomes the news that since the conclusion of the Working Group, Bathing Status<sup>2</sup> was granted on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2020 to that area of the River Wharfe which runs between Ilkley Main Bridge and

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<sup>2</sup> [DEFRA 22 12 2020](#)



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Beanlands Island at Ilkley. It is a popular swimming and paddling spot for both local residents and visitors to the area.<sup>3</sup>

## Equality and Diversity.

14. The Equality Improvement Priorities 2016 to 2020 have been developed to ensure that the Council meets its legal duties under the Equality Act 2010. The priorities will help the council to identify work and activities that help to reduce disadvantage, discrimination and inequalities of opportunity to achieve its ambition to be the best city in the UK.
15. Equality and diversity issues have been considered throughout this scrutiny inquiry and the individual, organisation or group responsible for implementation or delivery of the recommendations arising from this inquiry should also give due regard to equality and diversity and where appropriate, an equality impact assessment will be carried out.

## Discussion and Findings.

16. The Working Group recognised two main threads of the work and issues discussed relating to river cleanliness; firstly health – both human and ecological and secondly, rubbish and sewerage. Acknowledging the scale of work required by multiple partners, agencies and the public, discussions concentrated on short term wins and long term aims to seek to address the issues raised.

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<sup>3</sup> [Ilkley Clean River Campaign](#)

17. In general terms, everyone recognised the problems of rubbish and pollution entering the river, whether that be from agriculture, industry, careless disposal of rubbish by the public or from regulated discharge from water treatment works permitted within national legislation. Discussions acknowledged that the public is less aware than the Group would like.
18. The Group acknowledged that technically, rivers and water courses were cleaner now than the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries; however we considered the question “does it feel right”? The Group considered evidence showing rubbish/sewage in flowing waters but learned that no laws are being broken; however we considered the questions “are the laws right – and in the Twenty First Century, can we develop a better way for dealing with sewage?”
19. The Group felt there was disconnect between the responsible authorities/water companies and the public/river users. The Group agreed that more should be done to raise public awareness, working with partners to develop key standard communications.
20. We are determined that the work undertaken in these sessions should make a difference in the long term. The Group was keen to promote the idea of building for the future; to ensure that rivers were restored as blue space features in residents lives and for them to be protected in much the same way as Greenspaces and that the work of the Group could be used as evidence





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to promote greater consideration nationally of those two themes.

21. During the Inquiry, we considered documentation provided by invitees as detailed at page 17 of this report and received a wealth of verbal evidence supported by the documentation.

## Current Position

22. The Group discussed the current sewer and drainage infrastructure; noting that some of the issues experienced could be attributed to parts of the infrastructure dating from the last century. The Group was surprised to learn that, although new residential developments are required to install sustainable drainage systems as part of the planning application approval process, often that new system connects at the development boundary straight into an existing and old drainage network. The Group discussed how that could be seen as a design weakness and contribute to ongoing issues in existing drainage networks.
23. Importantly, the Group discussed funding a new approach to connecting new to old in order to upgrade old networks at the point that new build drainage systems connected. We also discussed opportunities for collaborative working between developers and service providers to upgrade existing infrastructure to ensure it is future proofed with the capacity to support new developments. Consideration was given to the use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), Section 106 funding and the current criteria for that spend at Leeds and Bradford Councils. The Group was

mindful that CIL monies supported other city priorities and that a change to the CIL priorities would require consultation and agreement. Additionally the Leeds CIL priorities would be reconfirmed by Executive Board on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2020.

24. We learned that most of the country is supported by a Combined Sewerage Network – where household, industrial and agricultural uses utilise the same sewerage system. When an event occurs – such as high rainfall, that system and the Combined Sewer Outlets (CSO's) can be overwhelmed. There are approximately 2000 permitted storm overflows in Yorkshire, 98% have had Event Duration Monitoring (EDM) monitoring installed by Yorkshire Water which monitor spill frequency, not volume monitoring. The Group noted the report from the LCC Flood Officer that although an obvious answer would be to separate sewage systems supporting household, commercial, industrial, and agricultural sources; that task would be enormous involving huge, expensive engineering requirements. Work to alleviate the pressure on CSOs remained a focus for YW however investment was guided by legislation and for investment in the rivers, the triggers are either poor water quality or the number of spills.

## Legislation and Framework

25. The Group heard the view that all English rivers failed to meet quality tests for pollution amid concerns over the scale of sewage discharges and agricultural and industrial chemicals entering the water system. Figures released by the Environment Agency



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show for the first time that no river has achieved good chemical status, suggesting pollution from sewage discharge, chemicals and agriculture are having a huge impact on river quality; just 14% of English rivers are of good ecological standard. Water companies in England discharged raw sewage into rivers on more than 200,000 occasions last year – revealing that untreated human waste was released into streams and rivers for more than 1.5m hours in 2019.

26. Countries are legally obliged to treat sewage before it is released into waterways and the European Court of Justice has ruled that discharges of untreated human waste are permitted only in “exceptional circumstances”<sup>4</sup>. In the first session the Group heard that local Wetherby ward Councillors and Mr Barrow had undertaken a trip to a sewage works where they saw first-hand the processes involved and an incident of sewage being discharged into the water course in what they termed as a non-exceptional circumstance. We also viewed underwater footage from Beneath British Waters documenting the discarded rubbish and objects which it was suggested could only originate from sewage discharge.

27. This reinforced our desire to ensure existing messages raise public awareness that everything flushed away from domestic properties can

and does at times end up in our precious rivers.

28. We received evidence that the Environment Agency worked within the existing legislative framework. Within the regulations, EA set parameters to review the ecological status of the rivers. Importantly, public health issues would only be reviewed if a stretch of water received Designated Bathing Status – as sought by the Ilkley Clean River Group.

29. The Group acknowledged the criteria for assessing river cleanliness had changed over time, developing to take into account new ways of working and new chemicals/environmental threats. For example, the mark of clean rivers used to be the number of variety of healthy fish, now the mark of clean rivers is recreational use. The Group acknowledged that for investment in rivers and water courses, monitoring had to take place against the current criteria – the triggers being poor water quality or the number of spills recorded.

30. We noted that two key pieces of European Union (EU) legislation governed the work of YW - the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive and noted the example provided of the removal of phosphorous being a key driver for YW investment at water treatment works, the solution being pipe based and not necessarily an ecological outcome. We received reassurance that the Water Industry will be governed by existing legislation post 31 January 2021; but noted that any changes to the standards will be open to the Government to amend,

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<sup>4</sup> [CaseC-301/10 European Commission v United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland \(Council Directive 91/271/EEC — Collecting systems — Urban waste-water treatment — ‘Sufficient performance’ and ‘best technical knowledge not entailing excessive costs’\)](#)





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once the UK has left the European Union.

31. In order to place greater focus on the recreational use of Britain's water ways, the Scrutiny Board would welcome discussions with Central Government to place a greater focus on water monitoring to support public health and safety at sites used for recreation. The Scrutiny Board note that a welcome consequence of this would be improvements to the ecological health of the water way.
32. We welcomed the undertaking provided by representatives of Yorkshire Water to take forward issues around public health and safety as far as they could as landowner, noting that a financial commitment would need to be included within Yorkshire Water's future budget plans. Engagement with Central Government specifically on this matter would raise the profile of the issue and we noted the support for sharing the findings of the Working Group with Central Government to inform any future discussions on what could be achieved with the right funding in place and the benefits and improvements to overall water quality.
33. The Working Group supported the suggestion this Scrutiny Board write to local Leeds MPs to advise them of the findings of the Working Group and to seek their support for the actions outlined in this report.
34. Discussion focussed on the complexity of the issues of responsibility and ownership. Members were keen to understand where responsibility for implementation would lie if initiatives or recommendations were identified or proposed.
35. Infrastructure responsibility falls to the service provider, in the case of the River Wharfe, Yorkshire Water owns the infrastructure. However the river itself tends to be in the private ownership of whoever owns the bank at either side or both sides of the river.
36. The Water Framework Directive sets out the responsibilities and the plans within the WFD are essential to bring organisations together and work collectively.
37. In the second session the Group received a presentation from the Environment Agency on the Yorkshire Water Framework Directive – which provided the latest picture of Yorkshires water quality. The WFD provides the framework to assess the environmental quality of water bodies. The EA produces a river based plan every 6 years and we considered monitoring information from 2019 and were able to compare it with data from 2016, noting the range of ecological evidence gathered and the method of classification informed by all the elements measured. Over time, the classifications are updated to ensure they remain fit for purpose and include modern chemicals. It was noted that all rivers within Yorkshire & the Humber fail their classification.
38. The Group heard that all the actions necessary to address water quality were contained within the regulations governing the water industry. The EA set out its aim for Yorkshire's water courses to achieve a Good/Moderate rating by 2027. To achieve that



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Good/Moderate rating the EA works on water quality assets and improvements. The presentation outlined several programmes of works, including environmental programmes working with partners, and a catchment programme working with the farming community.

39. Discussions revealed that the WFD did not equivocally include the requirement for the monitoring of faecal bacteria in water courses, which is important to achieve Bathing Status and for the safety of recreational bathing.

## Advisory Signage

40. Noting that local water courses were popular for recreation, we considered the merits of ensuring additional advisory signage is erected at popular water access points. We noted that, where LCC was owner of sites which included the river banks, then the Council as landowner would be responsible for the erection and maintenance of signage. We noted that should Ilkley be granted Bathing Status, DEFRA would determine the signage to be erected at the relevant sites. We then considered appropriate wording for additional signage at other sites – not only to advise of the health risks associated with wild swimming in very cold water, but to also reference the possible impact of entering water which may not be rated ‘Good/Moderate’ and may contain harmful bacteria.

## Ilkley Bathing Status

41. The application made for Bathing Status on a stretch of water in Ilkley was used to provide a real example of

how legislation provides the framework for managing the river, its recreational use and public perception of our waterways. Representatives of the Ilkley Clean Rivers (ICR) Group and the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust provided detail on the scientific monitoring undertaken through the [i WHARFE project](#) to assess the quality of the water – against different criteria to that used by YW/EA under the legislation they are governed by.

42. The Group heard that the UK is atypical in the EU as other EU countries are peppered with inland bathing sites which are regulated, the UK has 6. However there were hundreds of unregistered sites being used for bathing – if they were registered they would have to be monitored and regulated and made fit for purpose.
43. For the Bathing Status application, the ICR Group had to demonstrate public usage at Ilkley, this ranged from 40 to 1600 people using the river, then consultation took place with 520 responses being received. The testing work showed that every time it rained; sewage had been released into the water.
44. The stretch of water at Ilkley in question was described as a steep sided catchment with infiltration from Ilkley Moor and Ilkley Tarn. Solutions to support the grant of Bathing Status were discussed – if that infiltration was removed and done through surface water, spills could be reduced by 15-20%. As the Tarn is a Bradford Council asset, YW would need to work with Bradford and the EA. In Ilkley, YW believes there may be opportunities to



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move flow from CSOs – but it would require funding, modelling, appraisals and very complex work. YW works to a 5 Year Plan which is approved by OfWAT and the EA, and customers have to support any proposals for investment.

45. A solution could also be to separate the sewage system in order to take household water away from surface drainage.
46. We learnt that the river spill framework provided a tool to indicate problems. For example, if 60 spills per year were recorded at a site, this would provide the EA with a reason to investigate, but the outcome of that investigation would take into account whether the water receiving the spill maintained good ecology.
47. Anything that runs off the land or from storm drains will get into the river. The investment for bathing status will be in the region of £50m for farming to move livestock away from the river and £200m for water companies to get the bacteria levels down.
48. The Group heard that although a 20% reduction in spills would bring the number of raw sewage discharges from 201 to 161, this was still considered to be over the amount permitted within the Storm Overflow Assessment framework. So infiltration is the start but only the start. Reference was made to the Urban Waste Water Directive which sets out that it is only legal to put raw sewage into the river under exceptional circumstances. In Ilkley, the public understood that to mean real storms a couple of times a year. The Group

were provided with the European Court Ruling to support a view expressed that Article 10 should be construed as requiring that the treatment plants should, as a rule, be capable of treating all of the waste water produced, in normal conditions, in a given locality.

## Monitoring and Testing

49. We were very grateful to the representatives of the i-WHARFE Project who shared a pre-publication report “Improving water quality on the River Wharfe from Oughtershaw to the Ouse: a citizen science project” at the first session. The report detailed the faecal bacteria data from samples collected during the Big Science Check at the River Wharfe on the 24th August 2020. The report detailed the 60 sampling sites, the river flow and levels on the day at each site and the evaluation process testing for E. coli and Intestinal Enterococci (IE) undertaken. Only designated bathing areas have faecal monitoring.
50. The conclusions of the report informed discussions on four issues:
  - The proposition that the high concentrations of faecal bacteria found in the main river were caused by proximity to the outflow of treated effluent from Sewage Treatment Works (STWs) rather than to the outfall from Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs). The treated effluent from the sewage works does have a high concentration of bacteria and highlighted the need to treat the final effluent - perhaps with UV disinfectant or UV light beds similar to those used to deal with sea effluent. The grant of Bathing Status would drive YW investments in the area.



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- The evidence suggested faecal bacteria in the river were also derived from diffuse agricultural sources. Discussions acknowledged the costs involved in locating other land to move cattle away from water sources and considered other measures which could be implemented to provide protection to the water – such as planting on river banks.
- The evidence which suggested that downstream decreases in faecal bacteria concentration recorded between some sample sites indicated bacterial die-off occurring in the water. The Group was keen to understand more about the faecal bacteria die-off rates and how that occurred as bacteria travelled through the water, it was noted that further work was needed to identify where on the system die-off controls could be located.
- The data showed that on the sampling day some of the sites popular for recreation had high levels of faecal bacteria contamination.

51. We discussed how this investigative work could be supported in the future, particularly to undertake a repeat citizen testing day further along the Wharfe.

## Public Interest and Awareness

52. Having considered the Ilkley case study and technical evidence, discussions naturally highlighted public awareness – both in terms of careful disposal of rubbish at home and outside and when using rivers and water courses for recreation. Despite work undertaken by the operators to increase public awareness; we found that there appeared to be some gaps in public understanding/use of the

rivers and we felt the Council was ideally placed to promote awareness of what residents can control themselves and how to report pollution or incidents to the Environment Agency hotline. Equally local Parish and Town Councils could be a source of support.

53. Appropriate signage at favourite sites would be useful, not just advising of cold water (for wild swimmers) but to advise that sites were not designated for bathing status so that the public can make an informed choice to use a site.

## Climate Change and Impact

54. When considering the evidence relating to the impact of weather conditions on spills and the Ilkley case study we concluded that as the climate becomes warmer and wetter for longer periods each year, the ability of the existing drainage and sewer infrastructure will be degraded. In reaching that conclusion, we referenced the evidence which had shown spills occurring in light rain and we drew on our own experiences of incidents of very localised flooding in the city's wards.

55. The work of the Inquiry would aim to support measures to improve the current situation and if appropriate, guide consideration of how to future proof the infrastructure to preserve the rivers and water courses and avoid incidents of localised flooding.

56. We were also mindful of the city's growing population; which acted as a driver for the very real need for new-build housing. We were however keen to highlight the impact of residential and commercial building on the city's



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flood plains and adjacent to or on river banks. As we experience a warmer and wetter climate, the natural ability of floodplains and rivers to accommodate run-off and heavy rain can be undermined by increased areas of hard-standing associated with new build residential or commercial premises.

## Collaborative Working

57. We were pleased to learn that with the Ilkley Bathing Status application, good working relationships were already established between all interested parties. Legislation requires close liaison between YW, the EA and DEFRA and we were pleased to note the level of engagement with local residents supported by YW and EA. Additionally, the Wharfe Flood Partnership looks at Sustainable Urban Drainage systems (SUDs) and involves all relevant Councils and the Partnership arose out of the work on flooding. At Addingham, the Wharfe Flood Partnership is working on SUDs and a farm water management plan and we noted the opportunity to consider expanding that work to include Otley and Ilkley.
58. Although we were assured that the right officers with the right experience and remit were involved in the day to day work, one weakness was identified – the need to raise the profile of the issue amongst senior Members and Officers of Councils to ensure that improving and protecting water courses in our districts became an ambition to match the ambition of the EA and YW.

## Governance and Accountability at a National Level

59. Whilst acknowledging the collaborative working already undertaken between the responsible authorities and local interest groups, our discussions identified one area where it seemed critical that local voices should be heard – governance and accountability. We learnt that DEFRA has a Storm Overflow Task Force, with oversight within the remit of the EA; however the Task Force membership contains only representatives of the EA and water industry, but no Local Authority or public representatives. We would encourage central Government to consider expanding the membership of such bodies to include representatives of local authorities and the public.
60. We felt that through our discussions, to implement a collaborative approach, we identified an important role for the public to play in the scrutiny of decisions on resource allocations. Whilst acknowledging that legislation provides the framework for funding priorities, we felt that at a national level, public scrutiny would be an important step in real accountability. We also had to have regard to discussions during the Inquiry on whether the costs of long term infrastructure improvements, such as those outlined to achieve Bathing Status throughout Yorkshire, should be passed onto the public.





# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Recommendations.

61. When looking to the future, we were each tasked with answering the question “what should our priorities be?” The Working Group recognised two main threads running through our discussions on river cleanliness; firstly health – both human and ecological and secondly, rubbish and sewerage. Acknowledging the scale of work required by multiple partners, agencies and the public, we identified two main groups of actions – “Short term wins” and “Long term aims” and these have shaped our recommendations.

## ‘Short Term wins’ – Signage and advice

### **Recommendation 1 To Enhance Public Awareness through appropriate signage**

- a) The Directors of City Development and Communities and Environment to consider a method to identify access points to water within LCC ownership where appropriate signage could be erected to advise the public of the suitability of recreational use of the water at that site; and
- b) The Directors of City Development and Communities and Environment to seek to identify informal, popular river access points not in LCC ownership and where possible, to identify and engage the landowners to consider the erection of appropriate signage advising the public of the suitability of recreational use of the water at that site.

## ‘Short Term Wins’ - Focussing on the issues at large

### **Recommendation 2 To Enhance Public Awareness, Responsibility and Involvement**

The Directors of City Development and Communities and Environment to consider developing a public awareness campaign/local information campaign to ensure a commonality of messaging and to reinforce education on ‘what is in your water’ and build an understanding that for people to enjoy the water there are areas of responsibility for them.

A public awareness campaign/local information campaign, developed in conjunction with LCC Communications Team, relevant service providers, partner authorities and WYCA would ensure a commonality of key messages either through a new approach or through the promotion of existing campaigns run by Yorkshire Water/the Environment Agency.

Additionally, consideration to be given to the role of Community Committees and the Environmental Champions in encouraging residents’ interest in the blue spaces in their locality.





# Conclusions and Recommendations

## 'Short Term Wins'- Enhance Local Decision Making

**Recommendation 3 – Enhance local decision making through supporting good working relationships between water operators and Local Residents/ Interest Groups.**

To ask the Director of Communities and Environment to consider how the Community Committee network and locality Environment Champions can support local involvement early in the decision making process by emphasising the lines of communication between decision makers (Industry operators and the Environment Agency) and residents/local interest groups; and encourage connection with Town and Parish Councils where appropriate.

## 'Short Term Wins' - Raise the Profile of the issue with our Local Government Partners

**Recommendation 5 – Share the Inquiry Report with our colleagues in neighbouring authorities.**

Although we are reassured that the right officers with the right experience and remit are tasked with the day to day work, we seek to raise the profile of the issue amongst senior Members and officers within our local authority partners. To ensure that our ambition to support improvements and protect the water courses in Leeds and the wider district matches the ambition of the EA and YW, we intend to share this Inquiry Report with our colleagues in neighbouring local authorities.

## 'Short Term Wins' – working with landowners

**Recommendation 4 - Working with Local Landowners to encourage planting on River Banks.**

To ask the Directors of Communities & Environment and City Development to identify sites of run-off not in LCC ownership and to build on existing relationships with landowners to encourage planting on water banks to mitigate effects of run-off and /or possible pollutants entering the water and to provide natural soak away.



# Conclusions and Recommendations

## **'Long Term Aim' – National focus on public health in waterways**

**Recommendation 6 – Encourage Central Government to place a greater focus on water monitoring to support public health and safety at sites used for recreation.**

- a) In order to place greater focus on the recreational use of Britain's waterways, the Scrutiny Board would welcome discussions with central Government to place a greater focus on water monitoring to support public health and safety at sites used for recreation. The Scrutiny Board note that a beneficial consequence of this would be improvements to the ecological health of the water ways.
- b) Engagement with central Government specifically on this matter would raise the profile of the issue and the Scrutiny Board would welcome the opportunity to share the findings of the Working Group with the Minister to inform any future discussions on what could be achieved with the right funding in place and the benefits and improvements to overall water quality.
- c) Additionally, the Chair of Scrutiny Board Environment Housing and Communities to write on behalf of the Board to local Leeds MPs to advise them of the findings of the Working Group seeking their support for the actions outlined in the Inquiry report.

## **'Long Term Aim' – Consideration of whole sewer and drainage system network within the planning application process**

**Recommendation 7 – Support opportunities to review existing sewer and drainage infrastructure during the new build planning process.**

To ask the Director of City Development to consider the Working Group's view that new housing developments; although they include Sustainable Drainage Systems should provide opportunities to review the existing connecting drainage system and improve connections to or improve the existing connecting sewage system to ensure it has the capacity necessary to support the new build. Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems currently feature as a requirement for new developments but developers should be encouraged to place a greater focus on the existing infrastructure and connectivity and consider collaborative working with service providers/operators to upgrade existing infrastructure to ensure it is future proofed with the capacity to support the new development.

Additionally, the Director of City Development to consider whether the existing Leeds Local Plans sufficiently address the Working Group's concerns relating to the impact on water quality of commercial/agricultural activity and building on or near to river banks and water courses.



# Conclusions and Recommendations

## **'Long Term Aim' – Accountability and Collaboration at a National Level**

### **Recommendation 8 - Engage with Central Government to encourage a place for local representation on national decision making and advisory bodies.**

The Directors of Communities and Environment and City Development and/or the Chair of the Scrutiny Board to formulate an approach to Government expressing the Inquiry findings that

- a) Collaboration with and inclusion of the public, water users and interested parties within the national decision making framework would benefit and strengthen future decision-making processes.
- b) Expansion of the membership base of the existing national scrutiny bodies (or taskforces such as the Storm Overflow taskforce set up by DEFRA with the Agencies and the water companies) to include the public, water users and interested parties. This would enhance the visibility and therefore transparency of those bodies.
- c) A mechanism for decision makers to engage with the public and action groups would ensure that the public have a voice in decisions, priorities and funding priorities affecting them and the water in their locality.



# Evidence

## Monitoring arrangements

Standard arrangements for monitoring the outcome of the Board's recommendations will apply.

The decision-makers to whom the recommendations are addressed will be asked to submit a formal response to the recommendations, including an action plan and timetable, normally within two months.

Following this, the Scrutiny Board will determine any further detailed monitoring, over and above the standard quarterly monitoring of all scrutiny recommendations.

## Reports and Publications Submitted

### ➤ LEEDS CITY COUNCIL SUBMISSIONS

- Deputation to Council November 2019 – speech of Mr M Barrow
- Response to the Deputation from the Director of City Development 21st January 2020
- Extract from the minutes of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities) held 9th January 2020; 6th February 2020 and 5th March 2020.

### ➤ BENEATH BRITISH WATERS SUBMISSIONS

- Beneath British Waters – documentation from Mark Barrow
- Film footage – the River Wharfe (session 2)

### ➤ ILKLEY CLEAN RIVERS/i-WHARFE PROJECT

- iWharfe project – Project description
- iWharfe project – Count - counting people paddling, playing and swimming in the Wharfe
- iWharfe project – Zone 5 Big Health Check
- iWharfe project – Project flyer
- Statistical analysis

### ➤ ENVIRONMENT AGENCY SUBMISSION

- Environment Agency – “Regulating for people, the environment and growth, 2018”
- Environment Agency - Water and sewerage companies' performance 2019
- Environment Agency Water Framework Directive – Yorkshire – session 2

### ➤ YORKSHIRE WATER

- Report to the Working Group 28<sup>th</sup> October - Yorkshire Water's interaction with rivers
  - • The wastewater treatment process
  - • Environment Agency rating
  - • Appendix A - Yorkshire Water's response to Ilkley bathing water consultation
  - • Appendix B - Copy of EDM Return Yorkshire Water Annual 2019
  - • Appendix C - Copy of Wharfe 12-24 data
  - • Appendix D - Pollution Incident Reduction Plan 2020-25



# Evidence

## Dates of Scrutiny

Scrutiny Board Meeting – Agreeing terms of reference/Session 1 – ‘date’  
Scrutiny Working Group Meeting – Session 1 - 28<sup>th</sup> October 2020  
Session 2 - 25<sup>th</sup> November 2020  
Scrutiny Board Meeting – March 2021

## Witnesses Heard

Councillor Mohammed Rafique (Executive Member for Environment and Active Lifestyles) (session)  
Councillor Linda Richards, Wetherby ward (session1)  
Councillor Alan Lamb, Wetherby ward  
Councillor Norma Harington, Wetherby ward

Mr David Parrish, (Flood Risk Management Team), LCC City Development (session 1)  
Mr Jonathon Moxon, (Flood Risk Management Team), LCC City Development (session 2)  
Ms Kirsty Breaks-Holdsworth, Flood Risk Officer, City of Bradford MDC (session 2)  
Mr Mark Barrow, Beneath British Waters (session 1)  
Mr Tim Myatt, Corporate Affairs Adviser, Yorkshire Water  
Mr Richard Emmott, Director of Corporate Affairs, Yorkshire Water  
Mr Graham Weston, Wastewater Treatment and Sludge Manager, Yorkshire Water (session 1)  
Dr Martin Christmas, Area Environment Manager - Environment Agency  
Professor Rick Battarbee, Ilkley Clean Rivers Group/ i-Wharfe Project  
Kathleen Roberts, Ilkley Clean Rivers Group/ i-Wharfe Project (session 1)  
Professor Becky Malby, Ilkley Clean Rivers Group/i-Wharfe Project (session 1)  
Charlotte Simons, Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust / i-Wharfe Project

**Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities)  
Inquiry Report River Cleanliness  
March 2021  
Report author: Helen Gray**



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