

# The Special Qualities of Chichester Harbour

Chichester Harbour was designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1964. The reason it meets the criteria for the designation is because the landscape has a number of exceptional features, called special qualities. When these are considered in combination, they collectively define what is distinctive and significant about Chichester Harbour compared with other parts of the countryside. The Landscape Character Assessment, refreshed in 2019 and available to download from the Conservancy's website, describes in detail the landscape of Chichester Harbour.

The 10 special qualities are in no particular order and they should be read as an integrated set.

- The unique blend of land and sea – especially the combination of expanses of open waters, narrow inlets and intimate creeks.
- The frequently wooded shoreline.
- The flatness of the landform, unusual among AONBs, accentuates the significance of sea and tide and of distant landmarks across land and water.
- The open water of the central area of the Harbour.
- The overall sense of wilderness within the seascape.
- The particularly strong historic environment and heritage assets.
- The picturesque harbourside settlements.
- The wealth of flora and fauna, and notably the vast flocks of wading birds add to the richness and diversity of the landscape.
- The unspoilt character and unobtrusive beauty.
- The very special sense of peace and tranquillity, largely engendered by the gentle way the AONB is used and closeness to nature that is experienced.

## Protecting the Special Qualities

For many years, Chichester Harbour Conservancy and its partners have looked after these special qualities so they can safely pass from one generation to the next while being conserved and enhanced and consistent with the range of environmental designations.

The combination of pressures outlined in the following tables demonstrates that Chichester Harbour needs to be actively managed. The management measures being taken by Chichester Harbour Conservancy and its partners are crucial for the long-term protection of the AONB.



### Sea Level Rise and Climate Change

*Potentially affects all the special qualities.*

#### THREATS



- In 2013, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projected that global sea levels would rise between 0.53 metres and 0.98 metres by 2100.
- If this is correct it would have a dramatic impact on Chichester Harbour, most likely affecting the sailing clubs, coastal footpaths, harbourside buildings and dwellings, lowland farming and network infrastructure (roads, power supplies, telephone lines, etc.).
- The length of natural coastline in the Harbour is decreasing as a greater number of hard shoreline defences are installed. This causes coastal squeeze - the loss of saltmarsh habitat - and affects the natural setting of the AONB.
- Coastal footpath erosion in particular may result in the permanent loss of access routes around the Harbour.
- Habitats and wildlife will also be affected by climate change. Species will change and the advent of new diseases may impact on populations.
- Hotter, drier summers may result in increased levels of tourism, which will need to be managed.
- Warmer, wetter winters may result in increased instances of flash flooding and storm events.

#### OPPORTUNITIES



- Working closely with Local Planning Authorities to protect the AONB, using the National Planning Policy Framework, Local Plans, the Chichester Harbour Management Plan, Neighbourhood Plans, Village Design Statements, and Supplementary Planning Documents.
- Working with universities and the Environment Agency to understand better the impacts of climate change.
- Encouraging measures to mitigate the rate at which climate change will take place, such as small-scale renewable energy and the use of electric vehicles.
- Working closely with the Highways Authorities, landowners and Natural England to protect the footpath network, including the England Coast Path.
- Planning ahead to rollback footpaths where they may be entirely lost to coastal erosion.
- Deploying Volunteer Rangers (Harbour Watch) to regularly assess the condition of footpaths and shoreline defences.
- Advising anyone considering installing or replacing shoreline defences to take account of the Chichester Harbour 'Sustainable Shorelines: General Guidance' document.
- Ongoing species research to monitor change of habitats and wildlife.
- Working with tourism providers to manage increases in the number of visitors.
- Adapting and/or improving existing buildings and other infrastructure to prepare for flash flooding and storm events.



## Pressures from Development

*Potentially affects all the special qualities.*

### THREATS



- Over 300 planning applications are submitted every year in and directly around the AONB.
- New major developments in and directly around the AONB, such as extensive housing sites, industrial parks, and large-scale renewable energy infrastructure, are likely to have an overall detrimental impact on the protected landscape.
- Growing trend towards larger and more prominent harbourside detached houses, detracting from the natural beauty.
- The impact of incremental developments is resulting in the gradual urbanisation of the countryside.
- Chichester Harbour is sensitive to recreational disturbance, particularly to overwintering birds but also to other species such as harbour (common) seals, grey seals and water voles. Increased disturbance can reduce time wildlife spend feeding and resting. Walking, dog walking, personal water craft, shooting, bait-digging and one-off aggravating behaviour on the harbourside, such as building works and occasional parties with loud music, can have a detrimental impact on wildlife.
- High levels of light pollution have a detrimental impact on humans and wildlife.
- Marine businesses are part of the historic environment of the Harbour. They need to be financially sustainable and are subject to wider economic uncertainties.
- Once a marine business ceases to operate, it may never return, especially if the site changes to dwellings.
- Neglected, derelict or ill-managed sites detract from the natural beauty.
- Unauthorised developments require swift and effective enforcement action due to the environmental sensitivities of this nationally and internationally important landscape.
- The roads around the Harbour often get heavily congested during peak times, resulting in air and noise pollution and a sense of dissatisfaction for locals and visitors.

### OPPORTUNITIES



- Working closely with Local Planning Authorities to protect the AONB, using the National Planning Policy Framework, Local Plans, the Chichester Harbour Management Plan, Neighbourhood Plans, Village Design Statements, and Supplementary Planning Documents.
- Investing developer contributions through Bird Aware Solent to help educate people about recreational disturbance affecting the Special Protection Area.
- Seeking a long-term solution to the A27 Chichester Bypass that does not detrimentally affect Chichester Harbour.
- Working together to better manage seasonal traffic congestion.
- During seasonal peak traffic times towards West Wittering, dispersing tourists to other destinations on the Manhood Peninsula.
- Investigating the potential for new cycle routes around the Harbour.
- Encouraging use of public transport, the Salterns Way, and the uptake of electric vehicles.

## Water Quality and Marine Pollution

*Potentially affects all the special qualities.*

### THREATS



- New housing developments add pressure on the Waste Water Treatment Works.
- Instances of heavy rainfall puts pressure on Waste Water Treatment Works leading to storm discharges into Chichester Harbour. This affects water quality, which results in excessive nitrates and the growth of macroalgal weed. This is a problem for habitats, wildlife, water users and local people.
- Impacts of bacteria from storm discharges and other inputs causing failures of the classification of shellfish and bathing waters.
- Agricultural run-off from farms within the catchment also has a large detrimental impact on water quality.
- Pollution washes into the Harbour from the Solent and further afield, which is difficult to have any direct control over.
- Chichester Harbour is affected by marine pollution, and in particular from plastics. Other forms of litter also frequently wash-up on the strandline along with occasional instances of land-based fly-tipping.

### OPPORTUNITIES



- Working closely with Local Planning Authorities to protect the AONB, using the National Planning Policy Framework, Local Plans, the Chichester Harbour Management Plan, Neighbourhood Plans, Village Design Statements, and Supplementary Planning Documents.
- Working with Chichester Water Quality Group, which includes Southern Water, to influence the Chichester Local Plan and use it to manage small developments in the catchments of the Harbour so as not to compromise water quality ensuring that Chichester Harbour is protected and enhanced.
- Working with the Arun & Western Streams Catchment Partnership towards a healthy groundwater, river and marine system where all interested sectors, groups or individuals may contribute towards protecting and restoring the natural environment to benefit people and wildlife now and in the future.
- Working with the Arun & Rother Rivers Trust to protect, conserve, and enhance the rivers, streams, watercourses and water impoundments. Conserve and improve biodiversity and increase awareness of the need and importance of a healthy river environment.
- Working with universities, Solent Forum, and the Sussex Marine & Coastal Forum, to better understand the issues of plastic pollution, and with communities and partners (e.g. the Clean Solent Seas and Shores project) to reduce litter pollution and improve water quality.
- Deploying Volunteer Rangers (Harbour Watch / Conservation) to collect rubbish washed-up in Chichester Harbour so it can be properly disposed of.
- Working with local authorities to swiftly address instances of fly-tipping, and where there is evidence of the culprit, to seek prosecution.



## Noise Pollution

*Potentially affects the special sense of peace and tranquillity.*

### THREATS



- Chichester Harbour is affected by noise pollution from accumulative harbourside building works and occasional parties with loud music.
- Low flying paramotors are a source of noise pollution in the spring and summer and may also cause recreational disturbance.
- Private helicopters, remote control helicopters and the increasing popularity of drones are also sources of noise pollution and may contribute to recreational disturbance.

### OPPORTUNITIES



- Working closely with Local Planning Authorities to protect the AONB, using the National Planning Policy Framework, Local Plans, the Chichester Harbour Management Plan, Neighbourhood Plans, Village Design Statements, and Supplementary Planning Documents.
- Working with the Civil Aviation Authority.

