



# Developing a 10 year Chalk Stream Restoration Plan for the River Ems

## Community Stakeholder Survey Report

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December 2022



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# Executive Summary

To inform and engage the local community in a 10 year Chalk Stream Restoration Plan for the River Ems, an online survey was created by ARRT. This survey went out for public consultation between 28<sup>th</sup> October and 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022. Key take outs were as follows:

- 206 people responded of which most (70%) visit the river at least once a week where they undertake a variety of activities such as exercising, walking their dog, volunteering and socialising. 44% come to watch wildlife.
- Respondents are passionate about areas along the length of the Ems which they both visit and appreciate. Areas that are particularly popular include Brook Meadows Nature Reserve, Westbourne's River Street and surrounding areas, the stretch between Westbourne and Emsworth, and Walderton. Many different animal, fish and bird species were mentioned by respondents, with water voles and kingfishers being the most popular of those found in the area.
- Respondents have varying views about what areas are best for nature with many citing the busy and 'managed' Brook Meadows Nature Reserve. Conversely, others thought less disturbed areas away from humans were best. Nearly a third believe that all of the river is important for nature. Others felt that it is where there's water.
- 81% of respondents believe the health of the River Ems is declining and this is of great concern. Of those who believe the river is declining, 86% cited reduced water flow/levels as the key symptom. This is intrinsically linked to other observations including the loss of wildlife, and to increased silting and overgrowth by weeds. 14% of Respondents also referred to an increase in littering and pollution. In general, respondents are saddened and angry about the loss of water and wildlife which is evidenced throughout the survey in their comments.
- Respondents identified that the provision of water is the main issue impacting the health of the River Ems, closely followed by human impacts. The actions of water companies were singled out in many comments.
- 16% had experienced flooding to their home or land in the past, but the majority thought this had improved over recent years.
- Respondents are keen to stay informed about the 10 year Chalk Stream Restoration Plan with 73% providing an email address and 68% expressing an interest in other activities including a river walking tour, webinar or further survey.
- When given an opportunity to provide any final comments, many respondents expressed their support for a 10 year Restoration Plan. Some were hopeful and cited an opportunity to pull different groups and individuals together to help. Others were less optimistic, suggesting that unless root causes are tackled, a unique area and its wildlife will be lost forever.

# Introduction

The River Ems is a rare chalk stream, one of only 260 in the world. 85% of all chalk streams are found in the South of England. Their rarity means they are of global importance.

## **What makes chalk streams so special?**

Chalk streams and rivers are fed from groundwater [aquifers](#) so they have clean, clear water at relatively stable water temperatures. These unique conditions support a wonderful diversity of plants, mammals, insects and fish. The River Ems for example is home to the critically endangered European eel, as well as water voles, sea trout, bats, dormice and many specialist insect species.

## **Current pressures**

For its wildlife to thrive, the River Ems needs a strong flow of good, clean water. However, it faces a number of pressures including: the need to use the regional chalk aquifer to supply water to southeast England, the impact of climate change, river modifications and management, water quality and pollution, and invasive species.

## **Restoring and protecting the River Ems**

The River Ems needs urgent ecological, social and economic improvements including [sustainable abstraction](#) to ensure its long term river health. A 10 year Chalk Stream Restoration Plan will explore what these improvements might be and how they'll be funded. It's essential this plan is developed collaboratively with the community.

## **Who we are**

The [Arun & Rother River Trust](#) is one of 60 River Trusts in England. We care for rivers by repairing river banks and flows, restoring habitats and species, and by monitoring river health. We also engage communities and campaign on river issues. This 10 year Chalk Stream Restoration Plan is being developed in partnership with Portsmouth Water who are licensed to take water from the River Ems to provide drinking water. Water abstraction licenses like this are in place on other chalk streams across the chalk landscape. All are having an impact on chalk stream ecology to varying degrees.

# Engaging the local community

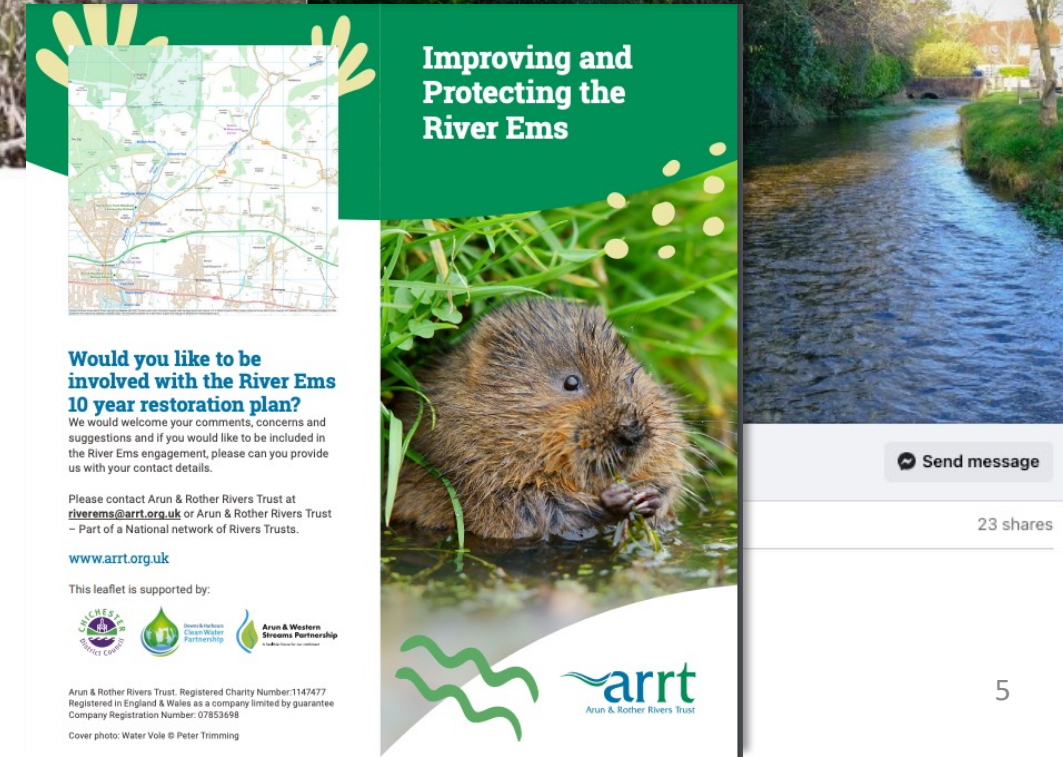
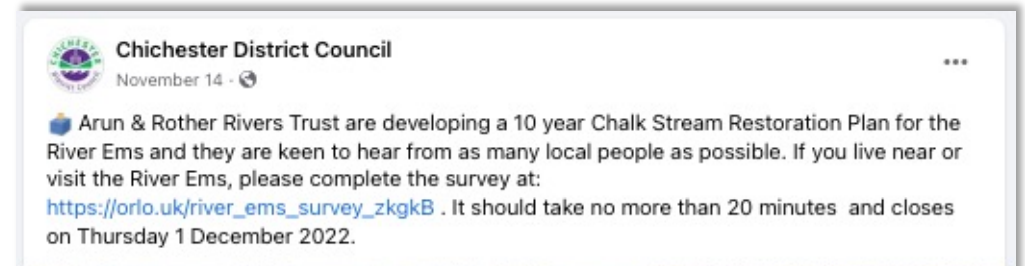
An online survey was created to engage the local community in the 10 year Chalk Stream Restoration Plan process.

It was promoted to local residents via a leaflet, the ARRT website, via affiliated social channels (such as those of local councils) and by email to local community groups.

The online survey went out for public consultation between 28<sup>th</sup> October 2022 and 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022 and achieved 206 responses.

## The survey sought to:

- Explain why a 10 year Chalk Stream Restoration Plan is needed for the River Ems and what it will involve;
- Canvass views from local people about how they interact with the river and what they value most about it;
- Glean if local people have seen a decline in the health of River Ems over time and what they think the causes might be;
- Ask if they'd like to be involved in the process going forward and in what ways.



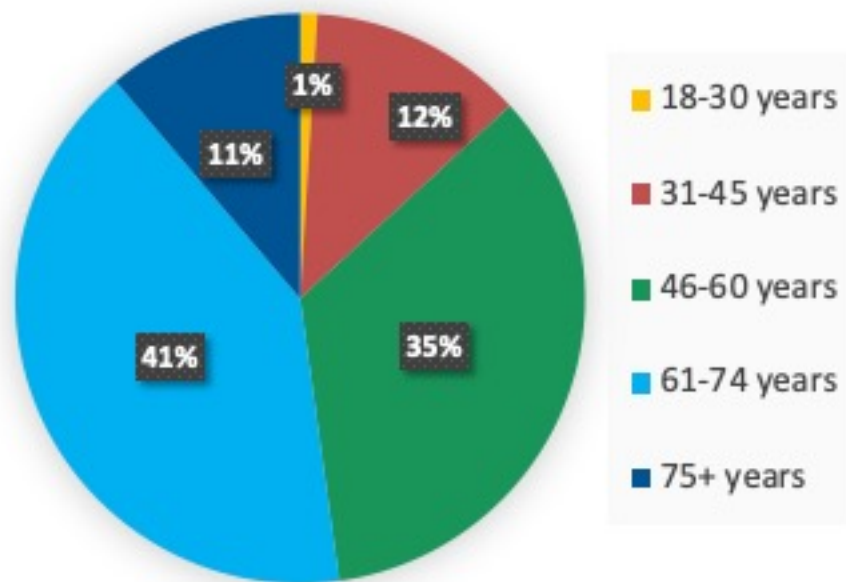
# Survey questions and answers

# We asked respondents to tell us about themselves

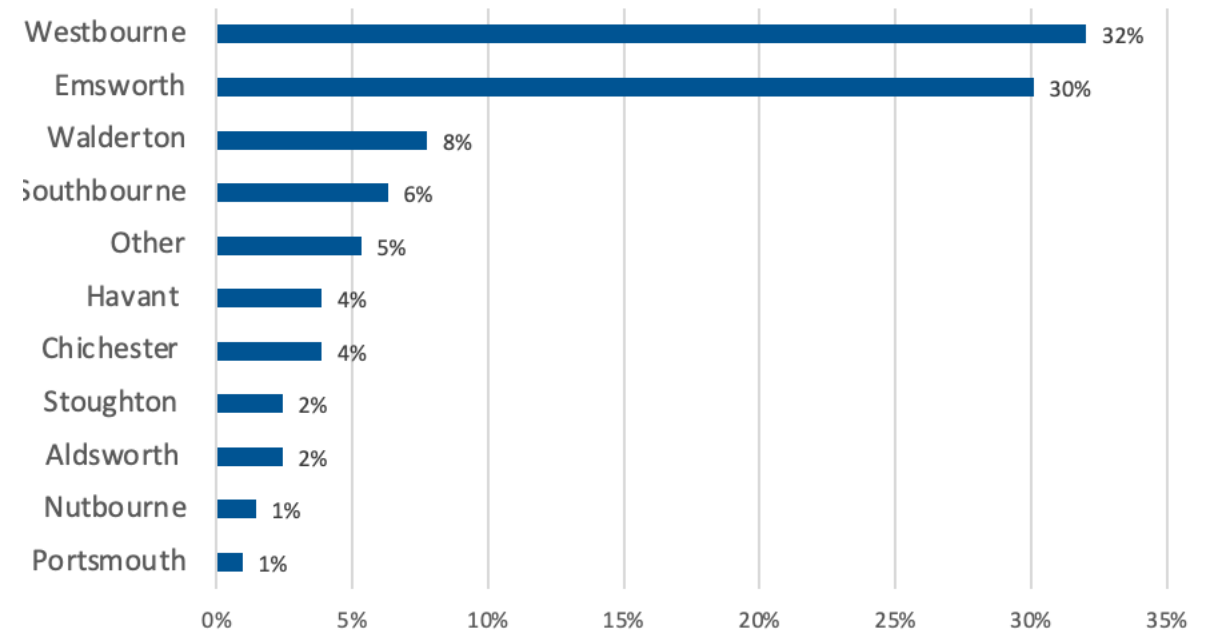
- Nearly two-thirds of respondents are between 46 and 75 years old.
- The vast majority (94%) are white.

- 62% of respondents live in or near Emsworth or Westbourne.
- A small number of respondents come from further afield such as Arundel, Exeter, Midhurst, Southampton and Oxford

### How old are respondents? (%)



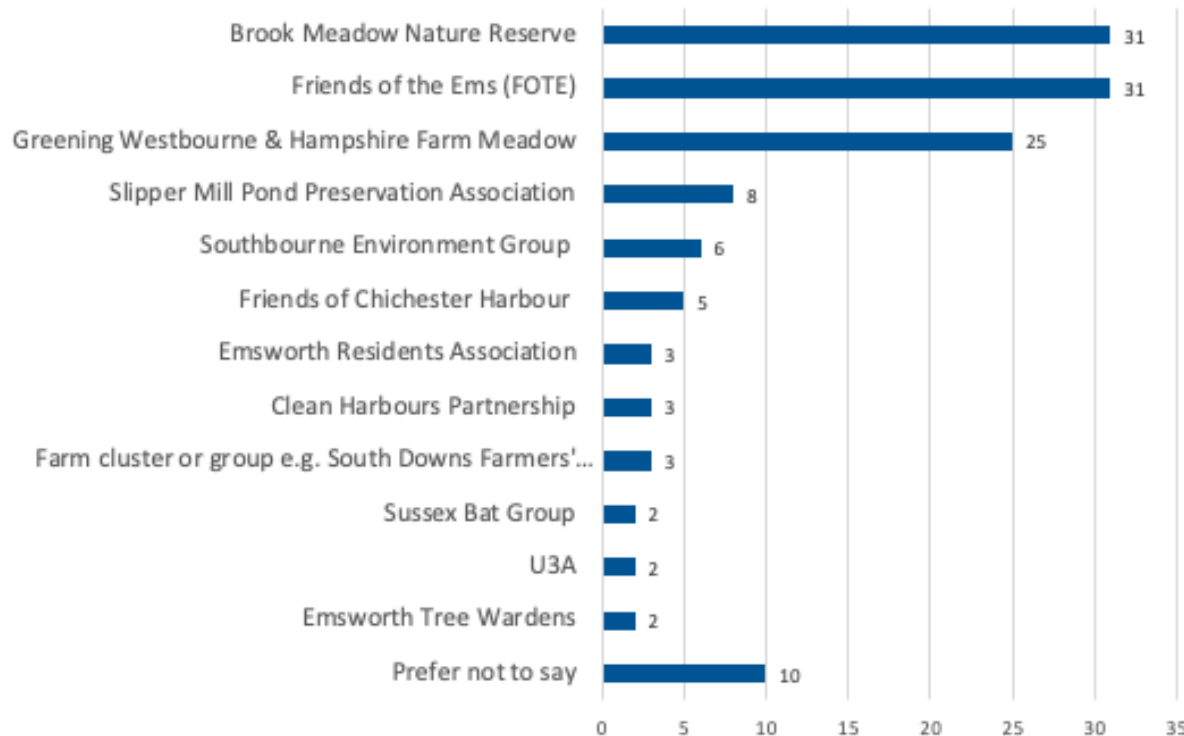
### Where do respondents live? (%)



# We asked if they were members of any community groups

- Half of respondents are in one or more community groups.
- 28% of respondents are members of Brook Meadows Nature Reserve and/or Friends of the Ems.
- The majority of groups mentioned are nature or climate focused.

Which community groups are respondents members of? (number of mentions)



Other groups mentioned include:

*Angling Trust & Fish Legal, Bosham Association, Chichester Wildfowlers Association, Emsworth Community Land Trust, Emsworth Forum, Emsworth Mums, Friends of Maybush Copse, Hampshire Bat Group, Hampshire Conservation Volunteers, Havant Climate Alliance, Manhood Wildlife & Heritage Group, Markewll's Wood Watch, Mayday Action Group, PeCan Climate Action, Peter Pond, Save Long Copse Lane, Solent Outdoor Swimmers, South East Climate Alliance, Southbourne Parish Council, Southbourne Parish Neighbourhood Plan, Southbourne WI, Transition Chichester, Weald Action Group, WemsFest, and Westbourne Weekend CIC.*

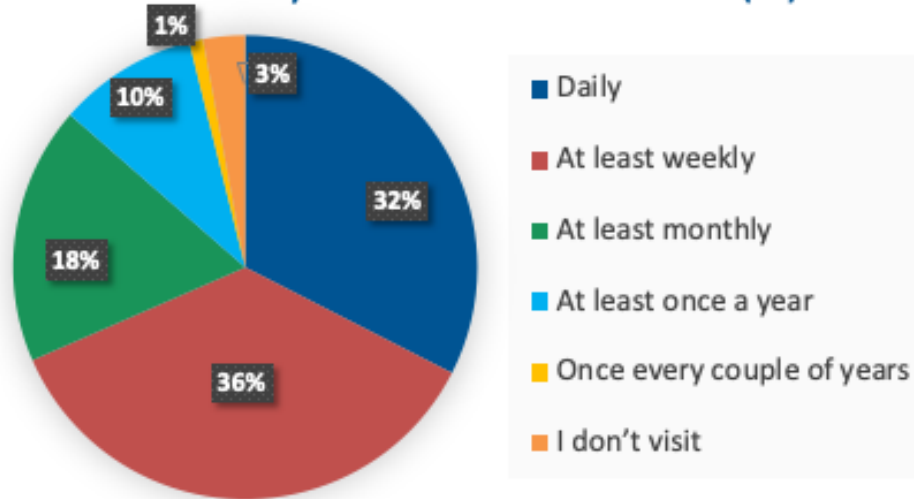


# We asked respondents how they interact with the River Ems

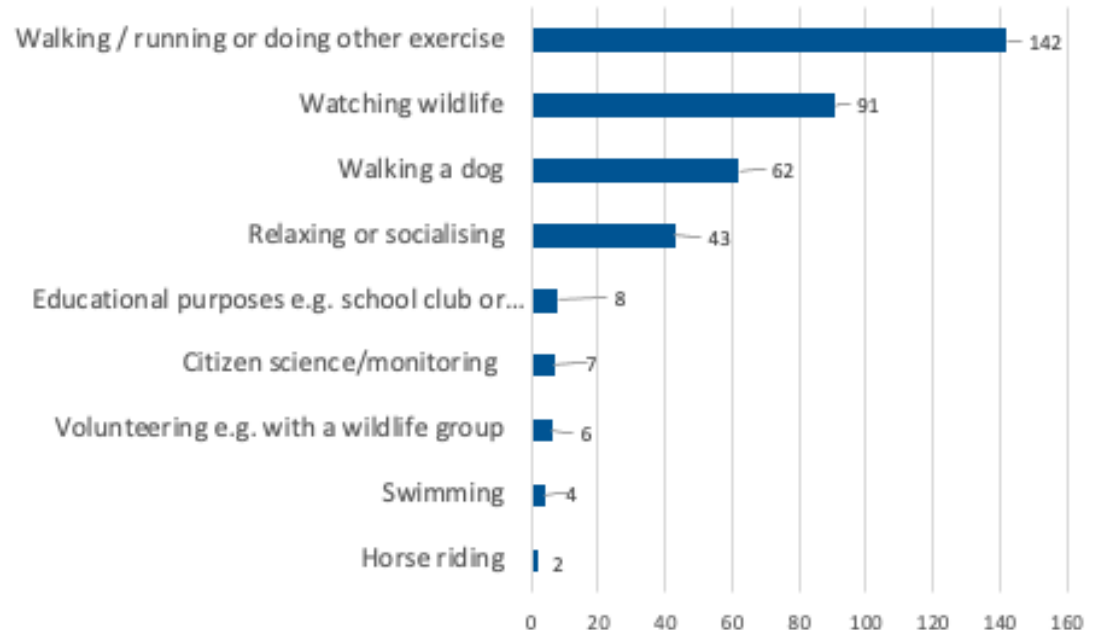
- Nearly 70% of respondents visit once or more a week

- 58% of people visit to the River Ems to do two or more activities such as walking a dog or exercising.
- 44% of respondents visit to watch wildlife.

How often to you visit the River Ems? (%)



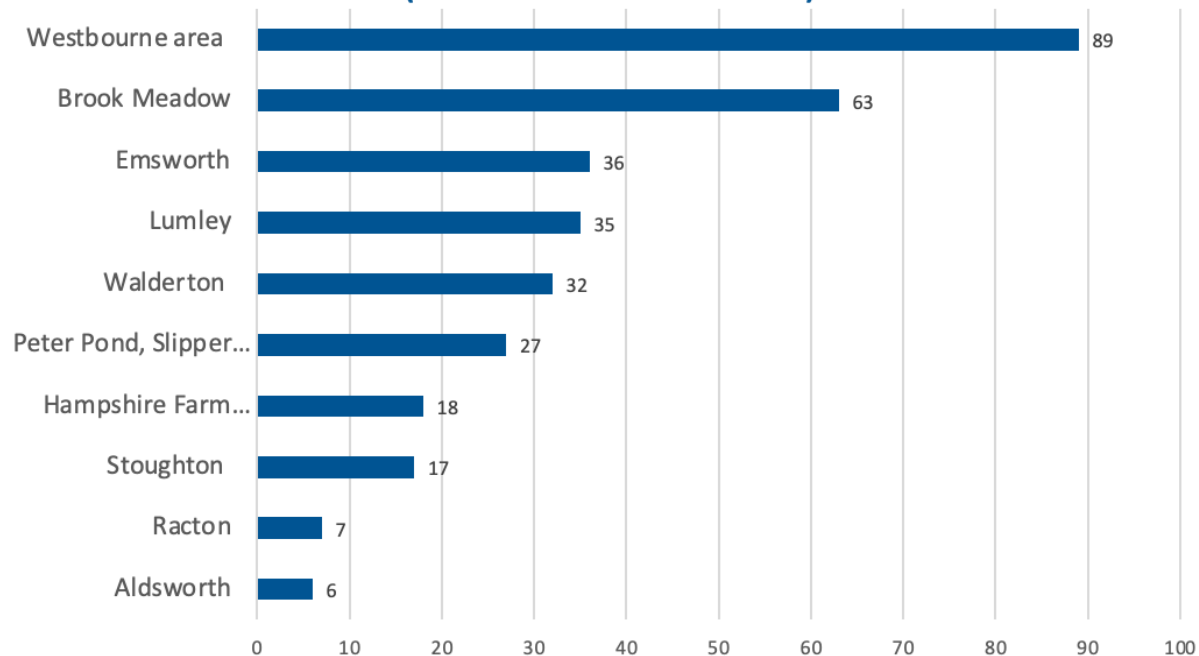
What activities do Respondents undertake?  
(number of discrete mentions)



# We asked respondents to tell us what parts of the river they visited

- The southern section of the River Ems (Westbourne and below) are the most visited. This section includes the more built up areas as well as the Brook Meadow Nature Reserves and ponds.

Which parts of the Ems do respondents visit?  
(number of mentions)



The whole route of the Ems brook meadows, Westbourne primary are especially good for the dogs to cool down and children to play and explore. We also like to walk down the side of Westbourne church all the way to Emsworth as we spot a variety of wildlife and also means we can avoid roads and relax in nature. We also like to swim in the sea.

Brook meadows, Lumley mill and Pete's pond several times a week and a walk up to Westbourne once or twice a month looking for wildlife beautiful damioselle etc

All accessible reaches regularly, most often Aldsworth reach, Brook Meadows Farm channels, Mill stream to Lumley. Less frequently Broadwash to Stoughton and south of Brook Meadow.

The Walderton and Stoughton part mainly. I helped to clear a short section of it (whilst the bed was dry) when we had a Walderton Green tidy-up this year.

We asked respondents what areas of the Ems they appreciate the most

Most respondents listed multiple places along the river. The places opposite received the most mentions.

**Around Westbourne (32%)**

River Street. Its on our walk to school and checking its levels, wildlife is part of our day.

The area near humpback bridge, North St, Westbourne, because you can get close to the water.

I love stopping to look at the river when I walk over the bridge on North Street, Westbourne and also the part of the river you can sit down by in River Street near Commonside.

Ems from North Street bridge going South has amazing wildlife, often walk by the river down to Emsworth

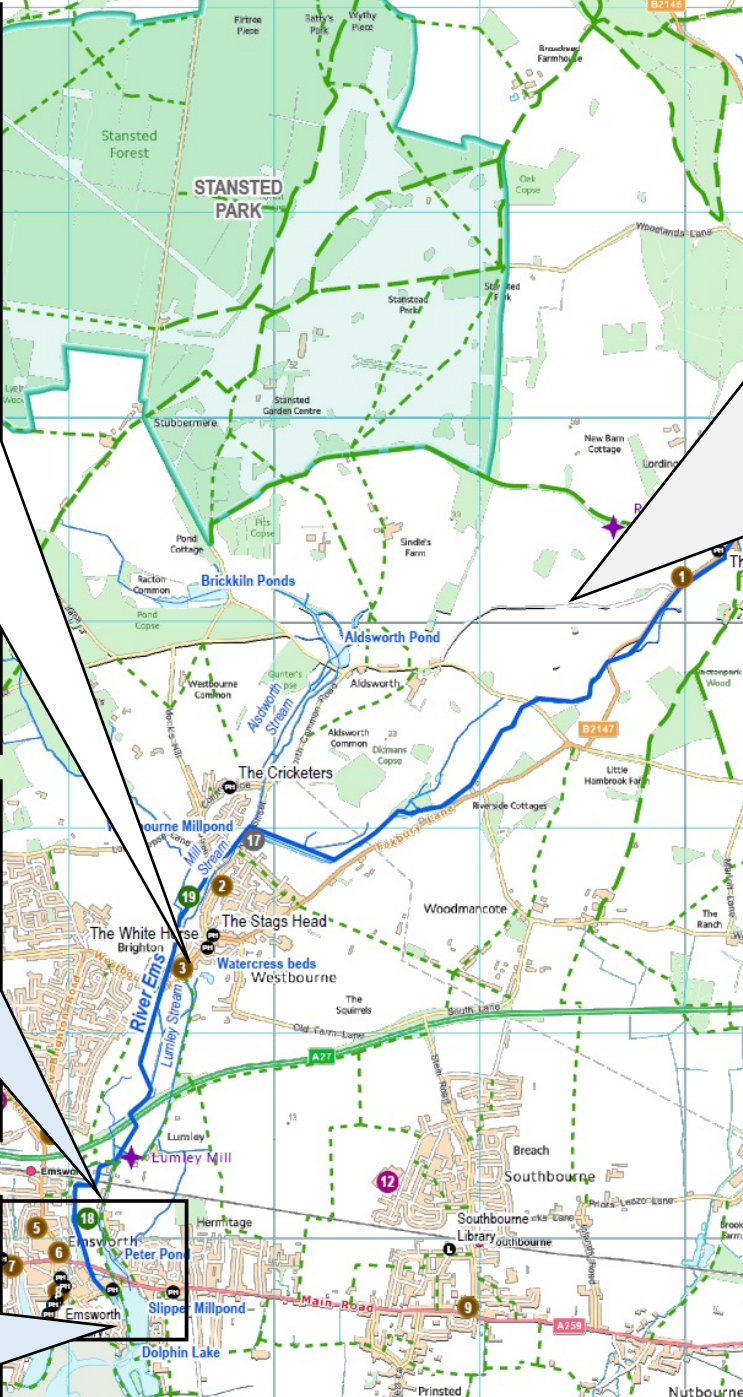
**Brook Meadows (19%)**

I am concerned for the entire river, but particularly appreciate it at Brook Meadow.

There is wonderful contrast between the unkempt section through Brook Meadow and the 'urban' stretches in Westbourne. Both are lovely.

**Emsworth & Ponds (14%)**

The part that flows into Chichester Harbour through the Slipper Pond is especially loved by me



**Walderton & the Upper Reaches (13%)**

I loved the water meadows in Walderton in two separate fields that have been ploughed up, and the river diverted to the edge of the fields

I love walking alongside the section that runs through Walderton and do this every day.

The source of the River from Wildham Wood through to Westbourne

While I enjoy walking beside the Ems in Walderton, it often isn't flowing, but when it is, it makes all the difference.

**All of it! (28%)**

All really as they are connected and wildlife needs good flow

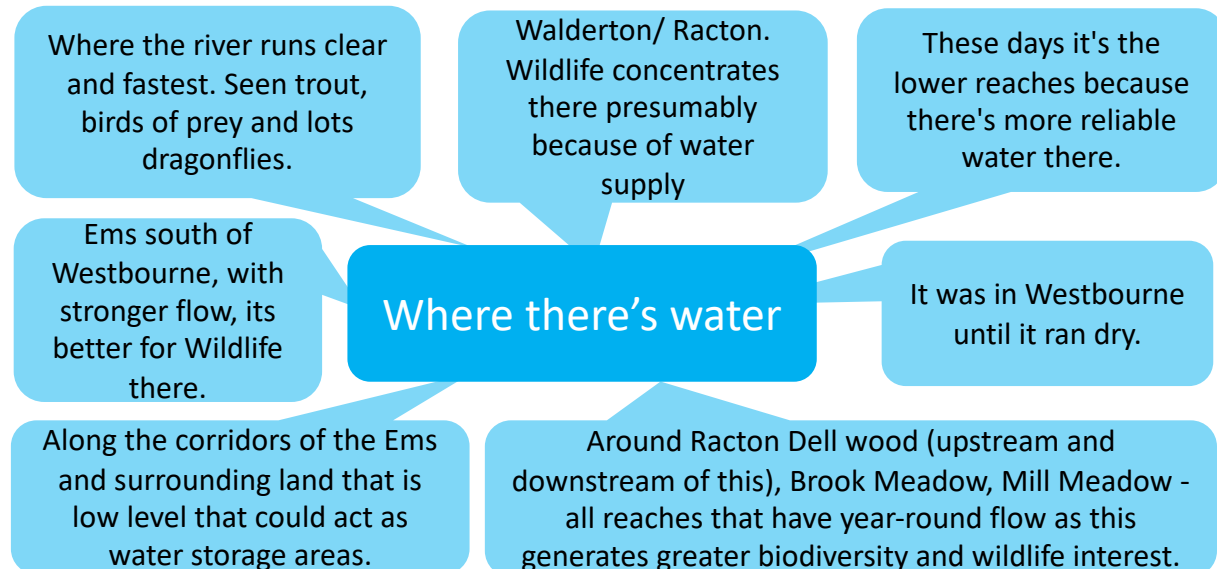
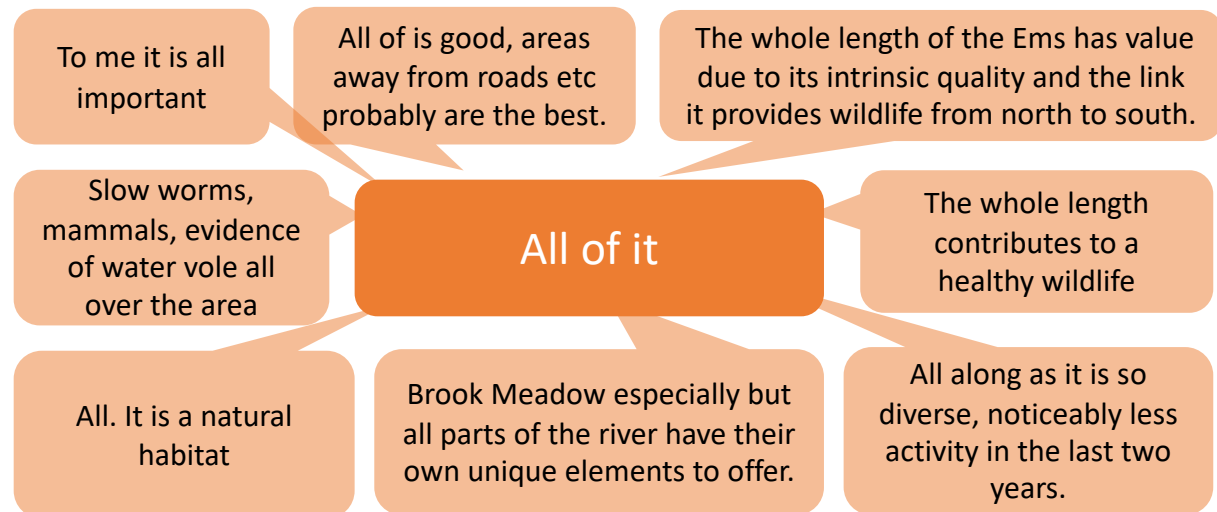
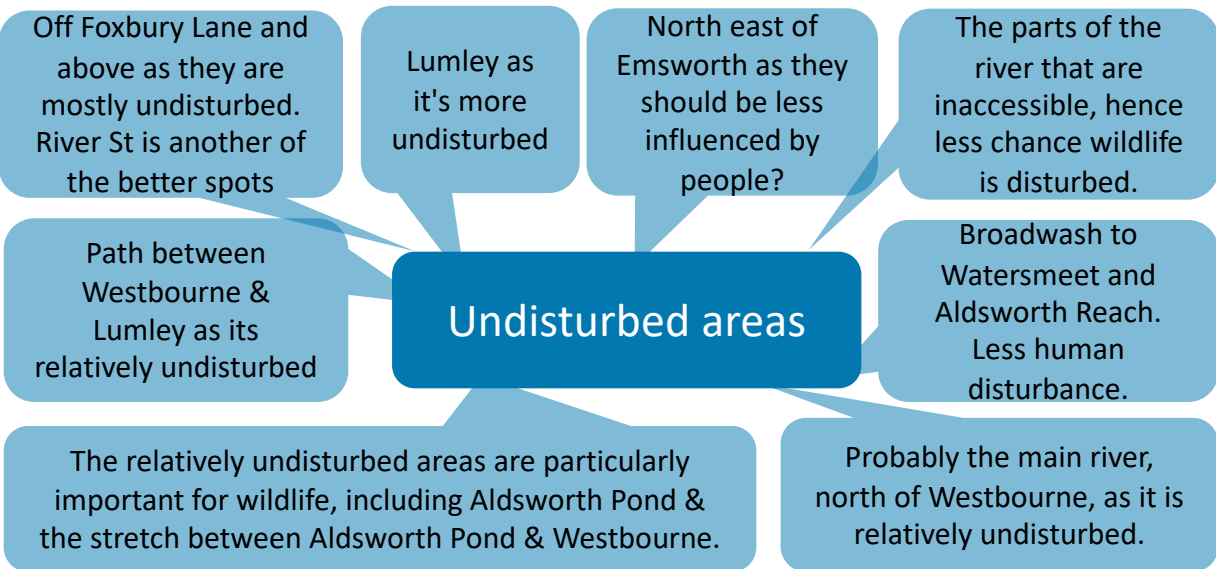
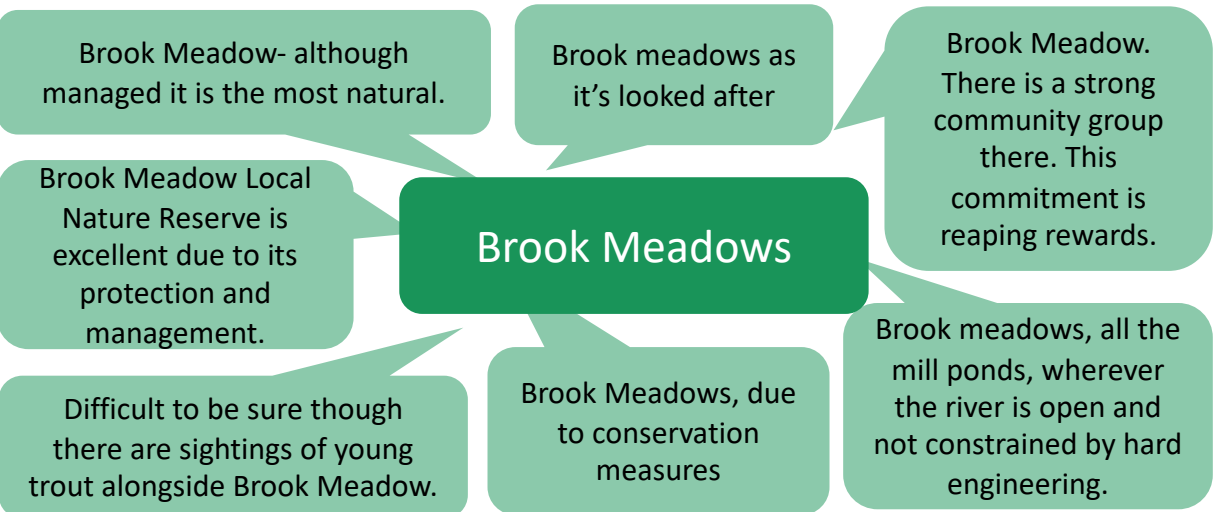
The whole river, for the wildlife it hosts. Especially kingfishers.

The areas that I visit, as I know them. However, all parts of the river are important ecologically and should be protected.

All of it, you can't just have one bit that works well it relies on a catchment based approach to ensure a healthy and thriving river habitat

# We asked respondents to tell us what areas are important for nature.

## Four themes emerged (Sample comments)



We asked respondents to tell us what areas are important for nature

Some told us about the various species they seen along the river

### Westbourne & River Street

- Kingfishers
- Water voles
- Fish
- Brown Trout
- Pied Wagtails
- Ducks & ducklings
- Mallards geese
- Herons
- Cormorants
- Otters (during flooding)

### Sindles Farm

- Full of indicator species

### Stoughton

- Birds

### Emsworth to Westbourne

- Bats
- Damselflies
- Water voles
- Eels
- Rare algae
- Kingfishers
- Grey Wagtails
- Coots

### Millstream and Lumley Area

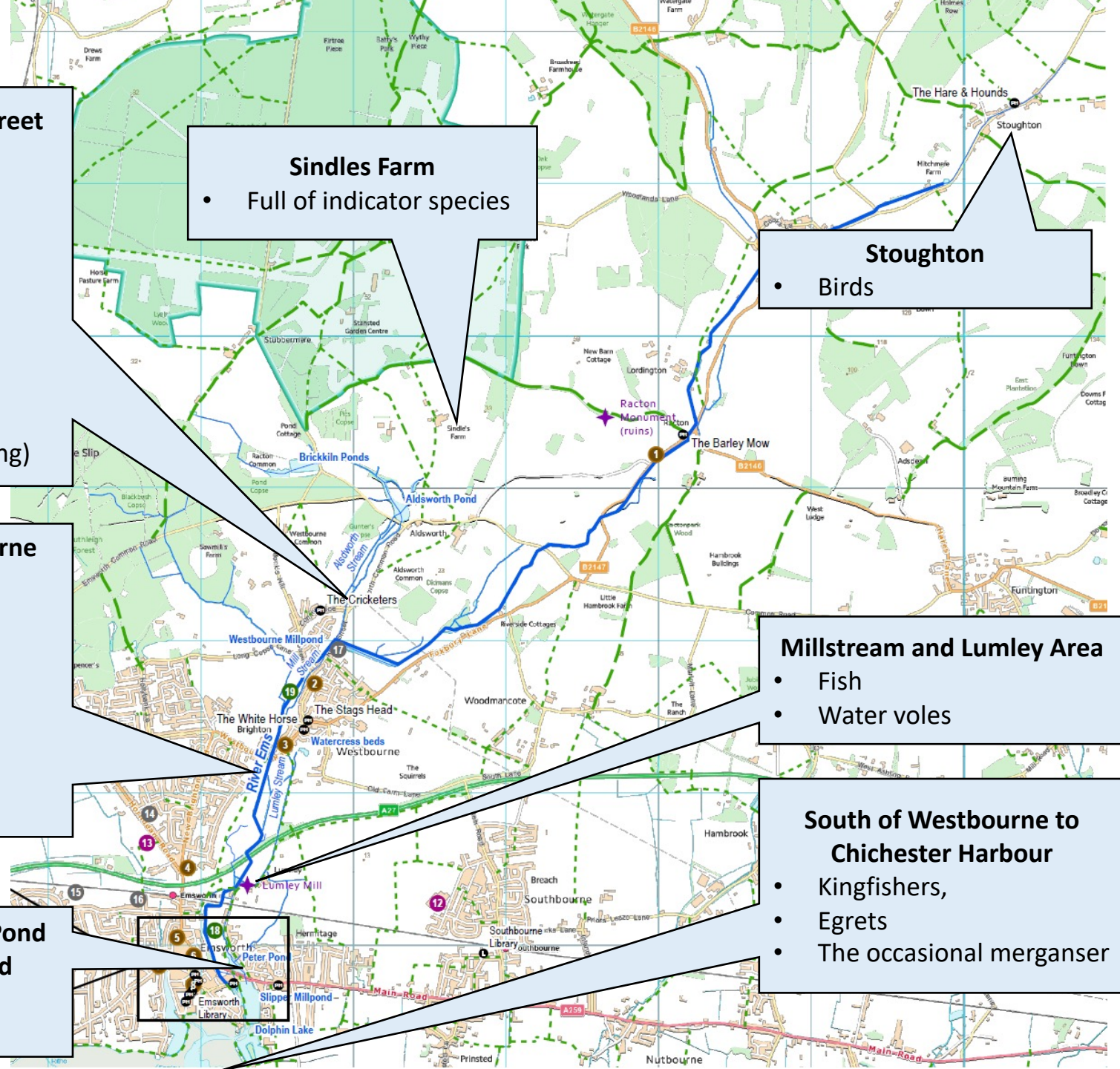
- Fish
- Water voles

### Brook Meadow, Peter Pond and Slipper Mill Pond

- Kingfishers
- Water voles

### South of Westbourne to Chichester Harbour

- Kingfishers,
- Egrets
- The occasional merganser



# We asked respondents whether they thought the health of the River Ems had declined and if so, what they had observed

**81% (166)**  
Of respondents thought the health of the River Ems had declined

## A decline in water quantity

The overwhelming majority **86% (143)** of those who thought the health of the river had declined observed a reduction in the flow or level of water

## A decline in wildlife

**30% (50)** of respondents observed a decrease in the presence and/ or abundance of wildlife. This was in most cases linked to the loss of water

(sample comments)

- Definitely lower flows 'on average'
- The river bed is dry !!!!!
- There has been very little water in it this year, due to abstraction. Less water means less habitat for wildlife.
- It now dries up at the northern end of Westbourne in the summer with low flow elsewhere.
- Lack of water has been most noticeable issue
- Variable water flows, incl. complete dry out of sections below Lumley Mill
- Simple, No River
- Longer periods of the year when flow ceases or reduces significantly. 20 years ago the flow was predictably good between Oct and May.
- River is either lower or dry for longer periods of time
- A reduction in the flow of water particularly marked in the last 3-5 years.
- Seriously depleted water levels and flowrate in prolonged periods of dry weather
- Dried out reach at Brook Meadow (summer 2022). Very low shallow flow, very little velocity around Lumley Stream and main channel up & beyond Westbourne
- River drying up further and further downstream year on year
- Water voles have disappeared
- Fewer fish and invertebrates in 2020 & 2021 compared to 2017
- Less wildlife. Dead fish.
- Far less birdlife. I heard a bittern a few years ago, nothing since. Swans have vanished, fish disappearing
- Fish are no longer visible at Lumley mill; very few birds seen long River street
- When we moved to Westbourne 30 years ago the river contained trout, eels and was regularly inhabited by ducks, moorhens and coots and their young. I have not seen any in the last 10 years
- Lack of little fish i.e. Sticklebacks
- No water where the local geese can swim or feed, likewise wild moorhen and coots and No fish. Vastly reduced numbers of insects and birdlife
- No fish, no kingfishers, moorhens is a massive reduction in biodiversity.
- No trout
- Very short time of water staying. Not long enough for wildlife to reproduce
- I no longer see Water Voles. I was a regular observer in 2008

# Other observations relating to the decline in River Ems health

Increase in pollution and litter (16%)	Increase in weeds/ clogging/siltation (8%)	Increase of other human pressures (5%)	River management or lack thereof (4%)
<p>Nitrates from silage run off on adjoining fields to detriment of river ecosystems</p> <p>Slurry pollution from surrounding farmland, over flowing domestic Cesspits</p> <p>A lot of rubbish is thrown into rivers &amp; streams. One example was a shopping trolley</p> <p>Agricultural impacts. This isn't routinely monitored but does contains biocides</p> <p>Dirty water appears to have animal muck horse/ pig/ cow wash off</p> <p>Pollution from old leaking cesspits</p> <p>Sewage fungus</p> <p>the issue of sewage</p> <p>More litter in stream.</p> <p>Surface scum and litter</p> <p>Occasional pollution when bubbly foam appears under waterfall after heavy rain.</p>	<p>Increased silting, far more obstructive vegetation, water discolouration</p> <p>Siltation a particular problem in the Aldsworth Stream</p> <p>In many places the river bed is clogged with logs and/or vegetation.</p> <p>Build up of silt, weeds, etc</p> <p>Lots of silt</p> <p>Overgrown with weeds and look unkempt</p> <p>The reduction in water flow has caused parts of the bed to become very weedy</p> <p>Huge influx of hair algae (?) since 2021</p> <p>Around Westbourne reeds are choking up the river &amp; preventing free flow.</p> <p>Overgrown such that the flint/chalk bed cannot be seen</p> <p>Dry, water levels so low even in winter, and over grown, storm drains / grates blocked.</p>	<p>Development pressure, including the loss of some parts of the river corridor to housing.</p> <p>Dogs not under proper control also have had a negative impact on disturbance on the river and may have contributed to the absence in Brook Meadow of the Water Vole</p> <p>Workmen have been throwing lumps of concrete in the ponds</p> <p>Rise in river bed caused by concrete/tarmac large stones</p> <p>Wire fences at parts of the river gathering rubbish and restricting wildlife and a hazard to children</p> <p>Some damage has been done by un-authorized public access to Peter Pond</p> <p>Local residents new to the area treat it as a drainage ditch</p> <p>Lots more dogs around affecting birds and other wildlife.</p>	<p>The artificial flood banks installed just north of Westbourne... prevent natural flooding &amp; destroyed some meadow habitat.</p> <p>Lack of wet lands and green corridors affect wildlife travelling and increasing</p> <p>There are barriers preventing upstream fish movement.</p> <p>More could be done in brook meadows flood plain to wiggle the flow out to the harbour</p> <p>Deterioration of the river banks in some areas.</p> <p>General condition of the banks</p> <p>Too much water is being taken out by the water company and the EA do not seem to be protecting the river.</p> <p>Lumley Mill weir adjusted to change flow often too late, after dried up. Weir.. prevent eel, vole, snake, fish movement</p> <p>Lack of management of river course and banks on Brook Meadow</p>

# We asked respondents if their homes bordered the Ems and whether they suffered from flooding

Does your home border the River Ems?	Have you in the past, or do you now suffer from flooding?	If you answered yes, has this increased in recent years	Do you use any water saving devices?
18% said yes	16% said yes (12% on their land, 4% at their home)	53% said no 28% said yes 22% weren't sure	88% said yes

We asked respondents, if you don't use them already, what might make you consider water saving devices?

Possibly. I water the garden with grey water in times of shortage

I would definitely consider water butts

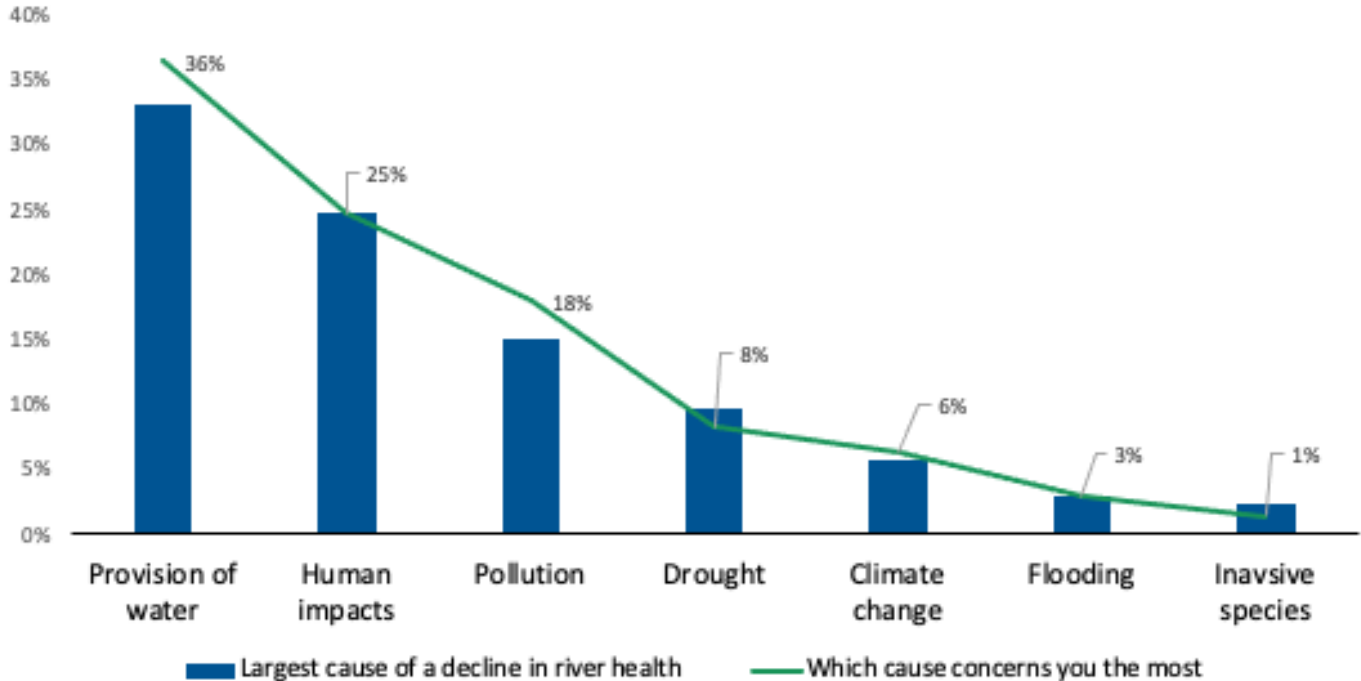
summer drought



# We asked Respondents to rank the various causes of a decline in the health of the River Ems

- The provision of water was ranked as having the greatest (negative impact) by most respondents, and was also the cause of most concern, closely followed by human impacts.

Causes of a decline in the health of the River Ems ranked by which cause respondents think is having the greatest (negative) impact and which is of most concern (%)



## Other causes mentioned by respondents

General mismanagement. Too much water abstracted, rubbish left in the river, wildlife disappearing

Covering adjacent fields with animal waste silage every autumn eventually runs off and overloads the chalk stream with vastly high nitrate levels.

I think we all know the main issue is extraction by Portsmouth water Company. Anything else is a distraction

Raised height of river bed due to dumping of foreign debris, large stones, concrete and tarmac from road repair over time

It's ALL about quantity of water. The quality will be generally OK to good if there is enough and isolated pollution incidents can be dealt with if there is enough water moving through the watercourses.

The River has been modified for many decades.... As a result, there is not a free-flowing river anymore and fish and other aquatic animals cannot easily move around reducing their resilience.

Highway run off...research shows it contains c300 substances...metals to petrochemicals. All bad.

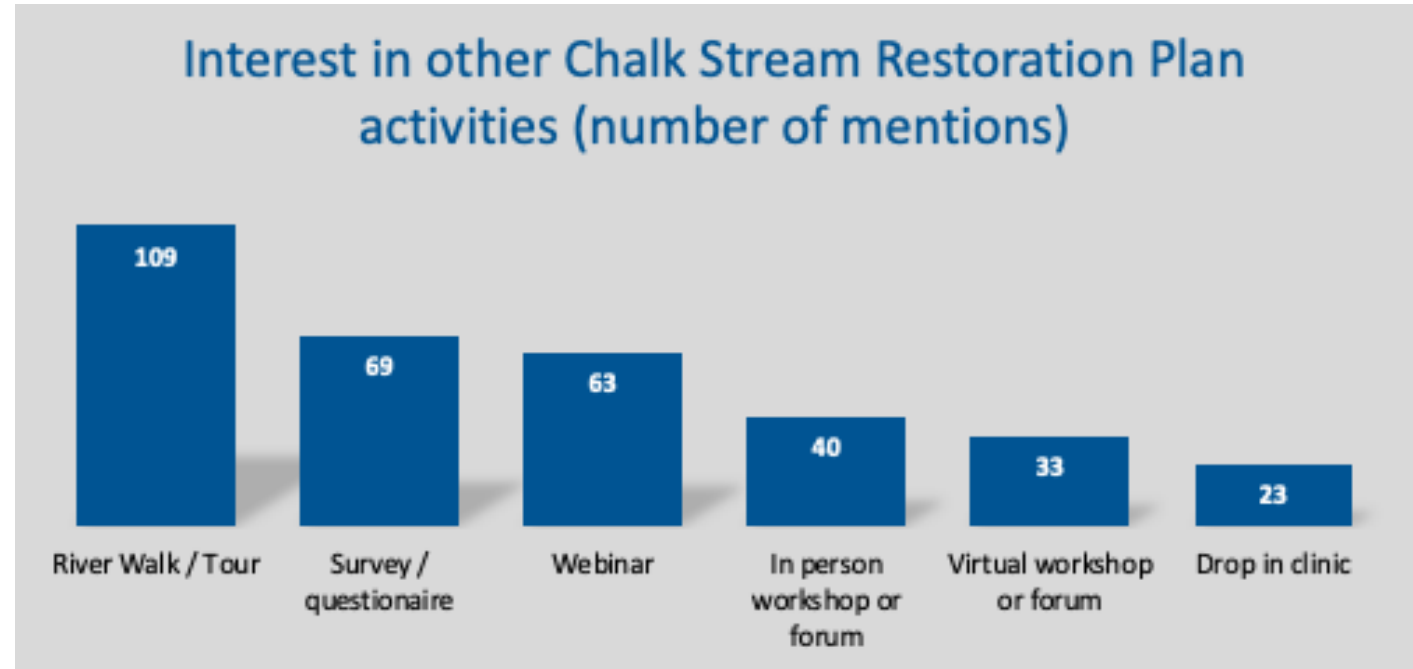
Sediment, no swimmable deep water pools, bank erosion

Deeply concerned on the impact of Long Copse Lane development on the river

Indication that riparian areas are not sympathetically cared for. Some home owners, small land owners lack knowledge to treat areas appropriately.

# We asked respondents if and how they'd like to stay engaged

- 73% (152) of respondents want to stay informed about the 10 year Chalk Stream Restoration Plan for the River Ems and provided an email address for this purpose.
- 68% of respondents expressed an interest in participating in other activities. The most popular of these was a river walk or tour selected by 53% of respondents. A third (33%) would be happy to complete another survey or questionnaire.



The information gleaned above will inform ARRT's design of other activities to enable local people to participate in the 10 year Chalk Stream Restoration Plan.

Respondents also put forward a few suggestions

Ask local groups to arrange activities around the Ems. Inform all local schools and get the children involved.

A video of the current River state would be useful, a lot of information can be conveyed, eg Riverwoods by The Big Picture charity.

Quite happy to start a local group, survey and monitoring the Ems plenty of volunteers around here, Brook Meadows are angry and would be easily recruitable to the cause

# Finally, respondents were invited to leave any last comments

## Below is a selection of these

Need to ensure there's flow year-round for reaches at and downstream of Westbourne to allow fish to survive and thrive. Love to watch the fish in the river at Brook Meadow bridges.

As far as I am aware the upper reaches of the Ems has always dried out in the summer. If the intention is to maintain a higher water table with the aim of keeping water in the Ems throughout the year will this not increase the risk of flooding in the winter?

I [have] lived in Long Copse Lane for 55 years. I have seen the decline in the Ems on my walks and it breaks my heart. Hampshire County council are hell bent on building thousands of houses with no care for where water is going to come from, or the used water from them going. The demand already outstrips supply, over development is helping to destroy The Ems.

Please prioritise public access into the water as recreation, as little as dipping a toe in is fundamental to our wellbeing & public mental health

I would recommend that the timing of the plan (10 years) is considered along other plans and initiatives out there including (but not limited to) water company AMP investment cycles; and the Water Resources South East Regional Plan, which identifies key water infrastructure requirements in the short term (e.g. by 2030) but also in the longer term (e.g. by 2040 and beyond).

So glad this is happening. Thankyou

I would like to think we can rely on all parties concerned with the River Ems to pull together regardless of personal interest and unite to protect this unique habitat.

Its not just the Ems, but also the mill stream that runs through the village and is silting up through lack of flow- its now no more than a muddy ditch

I think it would be useful to start river fly monitoring along the river.

The River is at a watershed in terms of reversing the harm that is being done by unsustainable abstraction. There is documented evidence the wildlife directly suffers from the prevailing conditions and the way the River is currently mis managed.

Good luck with this important work!

There are a number of Ems related trusts and charities that diligently look after and try to develop and protect their little bits of the Ems. I think these need to be bought into an broader longer term overseeing organisation whilst still be able to tap into and motivate their enthusiastic volunteer resources.

Nobody will do anything until it is too late

This initiative should receive full support to accompany the success shown by the management of Brook Meadow LNR. This could be the blueprint for initiatives to protect and enhance other important nearby chalk streams (e.g. in Southbourne and Hambrook)

The 'Save the Ems campaign dramatises the autumn dryness, without acknowledging the stream support that keeps water flowing at the detriment to chalk stream species. It's as if they wish to encourage invasive species to destroy the chalk stream ecology.

The core issue is over abstraction. If that can be eliminated or substantially reduced, everything else can be managed, most of it by nature herself.

I so hope this works - we cannot afford to lose this beautiful river