

Ipsos MORI

Voluntary Canoe Access Agreement Pilot Evaluation 2007

Research report prepared for
Environment Agency



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Executive Summary

Background

The Environment Agency, in partnership with Defra, commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct a piece of research to establish the effects of the Voluntary Canoe Access Agreement on stakeholders.

The research was carried out both quantitatively and qualitatively and consisted of:

108 face-to-face riverside interviews on the banks of the Waveney and Mersey rivers

23 qualitative telephone depth interviews with a variety of stakeholders such as canoeing groups, anglers, local authority representatives and landowners.

Key findings

There was fairly low awareness among riverside users, with almost one-quarter aware of the access agreement.

Those who have noticed changes in the river or river users over the past year generally feel that the changes have been positive, particularly on the Mersey.

Overall, stakeholders feel that the agreement has been a success. There has been no animosity reported between different groups (such as canoeists and anglers), and the fact that people are making use of the rivers is viewed very positively.

There are indications that the agreement will be of benefit to businesses. Several have reported an increase in customers, while other businesses adjacent to the river have begun introducing facilities for canoeists.

While the agreement has been well received, it has not resulted in a vast increase in canoeists on these rivers. A large number of river users, and the general public at large, are still unaware of the agreement.

There were concerns that, due to the scheduling of meetings at the agreement's inception stage, several key stakeholders were unable to feed into the discussion fully.

1 Background and Objectives

1.1 Business objectives

In 2001, the report 'Water based sport and recreation – the facts' was published by the University of Brighton on behalf of DETR, now Defra, and funded by the Environment Agency, Countryside Council for Wales, British Waterways and Sport England. The research showed that more access to water for canoeing would encourage more people to do it and provide a larger number of opportunities.

The Countryside Agency, at the request of Defra, commissioned the University of Brighton to undertake a feasibility study looking at whether new access could be achieved through agreements. Sections of the rivers Mersey, Wear, Waveney and Teme were identified as providing a good variety of river types, and access issues, and were used for this study. The study showed that it was feasible to put agreements in place on these four sections of river.

Defra then asked the Environment Agency to try to put the agreements in place and produce a 'toolkit', based on the experience, to help others put more agreements in place. In October 2006 the University of Brighton completed the project, for the Agency, putting agreements in place on the four river sections.

This study, a year on, is looking at how the agreements on two of the rivers, the Waveney and Mersey have affected owners, users and local business, and what wider lessons can be learnt.

1.2 Research objectives

This research is a post-project appraisal to gauge the impact that the Voluntary Canoe Access Agreements have had on two rivers, the Mersey and the Waveney, in the 12 months since their implementation and to understand any further lessons that can be learnt.

There are six groups of people who are the subject of this research, since they were either involved in the agreements, or may have been affected by them. These groups are:

- Land owners – those involved in the agreement to allow access.
- Canoeists, canoe clubs, community canoe groups, commercial instructors
- Anglers, angling clubs/representative
- Local businesses - campsites, tourism, cafes

- Local Authorities (2 on each river)
- Local population who use the rivers for recreation – e.g. dog walkers, anglers

2 Methodology

This research involved two phases, the first being a quantitative face-to-face survey conducted among river-users along the river. The second phase was qualitative, and entailed twenty-three telephone depth interviews with individuals who were involved in the implementation of, or somehow affected by, the agreement pilot on their river.

Quantitative Riverside Survey

In total, Ipsos MORI conducted 108 riverside interviews on the Waveney (55) and Mersey (53) between 6th and 20th October 2007. Interviews were conducted with a variety of respondents, including canoeists, anglers, walkers, and birdwatchers.

The purpose of the 5-minute interviews was to explore people's awareness of, and attitudes towards, the voluntary canoe access agreement that is in place on that section of their river. A key aim was to understand the impact that the agreements have had on these rivers and on the people who use them or live near them.

Qualitative Depth Interviews

The second phase of the research was a series of telephone depth interviews with people who might be, or have been, affected by their local canoe access agreement. This interview was more detailed than the riverside survey, and sought to delve deeper into the issues and impacts of the agreement, including financial impact, interaction between user groups, impact on access, and any changes in terms of the quality of the river experience.

Interviewees: Relation to river and the agreement

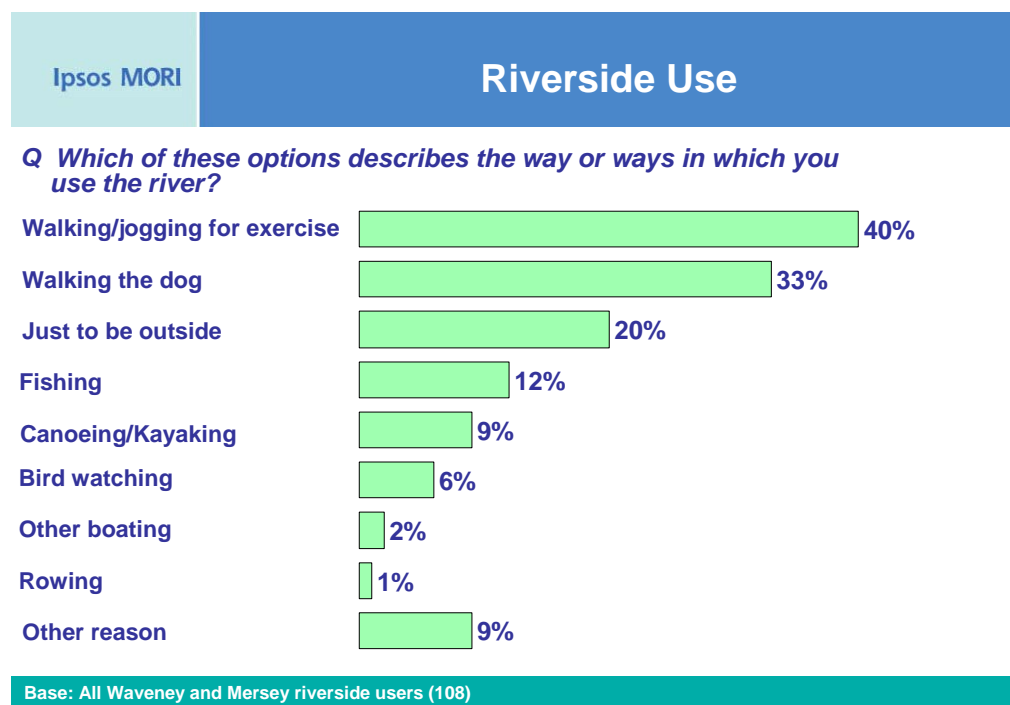
Levels of engagement with the rivers, and the canoe access agreement in particular, vary across interview participants (see tables in the appendix). All interviewees have lived close to the river, used it for recreation and/or work for longer than twelve months and so have all experienced 'life on the river' pre and post-agreement. The degree of involvement with the implementation and maintenance of the agreement varies, from the chairman of the Norfolk and Suffolk consultation with high involvement, to landowners contacted by the University of Brighton at the initial set-up stage but with no further participation.

3 Riverside Survey

3.1 Overview of Findings

Almost one quarter (24%) of riverside users along the pilot stretches of the Mersey and the Waveney are aware of the voluntary access agreement in place. Canoeists and younger river users (aged up to 24) are more likely to be aware of the agreement (both 50%).

Walking or jogging for exercise is the main reason people use the rivers (40%), followed by walking the dog (33%), fishing (12%), canoeing (9%) and bird watching (6%). A further one in five say they use the river 'just to be outside'. There is little difference between the two rivers, except that the Waveney has far more anglers than the Mersey (20% versus 4%).



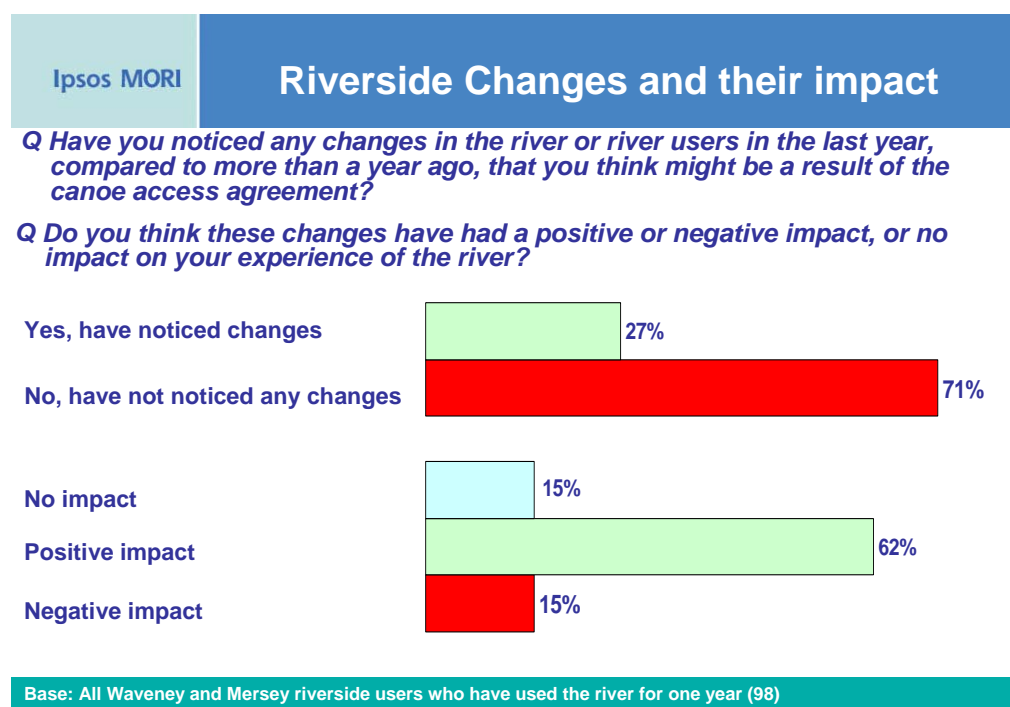
Half of the respondents (50%) have used the river for 10 years or more, while 91% of those surveyed have been river users for at least one year. Three in ten are members of at least one group, with 9% members of a fishing club (16% on the Waveney), 7% members of the RSPB and 6% belonging to the British Canoe Union.

Just over a quarter (27%) of all respondents have noticed a change in the river or river users over the past year, with canoeists and younger users being the most likely to have seen a change (75% and 63% respectively). The figure is higher on the Waveney, with 31% having noticed changes, compared to 22% on the Mersey.

The main changes people have noticed are more canoeists (46%), though this is higher among Waveney users (53%) than Mersey users (36%). The other changes mentioned are busier car parks (15%), and a general impression that the river is more crowded (8%).

Overall, three in five (62%) river users who have noticed changes feel that they have had a positive impact on their enjoyment of the river, while only 15% feel the impact has been negative.

Mersey river users are far more likely to be positive, with 91% feeling that the changes have had a positive impact and none reporting a negative impact. In comparison, 40% of Waveney respondents feel that the impact of the agreement has been positive, and 27% feel that it has been negative.



Few river users have noticed any changes in terms of accessibility of the river, though one in five feel they have benefited personally from easier access. Canoeists and rowers are the

most likely to find river access easier, with five out of the eight canoeists surveyed, and two of the three rowers, feeling access has improved.

Across the sample, the main suggestions for improving canoe access agreements is to improve the quality of signs to access points (19%), and educate different users about how to get along and respect other river users (18%). It is also felt by some that more car parks are required (10%), and that the decision to introduce the agreement should be voted on by the wider community rather than just landowners (9%).

A lack of information about the agreements, and thus a need for more information/publicity is an important factor to users of the Mersey, where 64% would like more information. This compares to 5% of Waveney users who want, or feel there is a need for, more information.

4 River Waveney – Findings from telephone interviews

4.1 Impact of agreement on users

The vast majority of users of the River Waveney that we spoke to in-depth, be these canoeists or anglers, express positive feedback on the canoe access agreement. No negative impacts are reported by this group of respondents, although a few are neutral as they have witnessed no significant change in either their use or enjoyment of the river.

4.1.1 Anglers

Although anglers were anticipated to hold a negative stance towards the access agreement, no animosity has been experienced or witnessed by respondents. Two canoeists employed at local clubs reveal, *“I’ve not even had any problems with fisherman”* and that *“The fishermen I speak to, they don’t seem to have any problem with the increased use of the river by canoeists.”*

Indeed, neither the President nor Secretary of two different angling clubs report adverse impacts on fishing along the Waveney over the last twelve months. Rather, one canoe instructor mentions that there is a degree of collaboration between anglers and canoeists;

“[Anglers] love it when I bring them their tackle. You take it off the trees, you paddle up and you say, there you go is it any good to you?”

[Canoe Instructor]

A member of the Upper Waveney Countryside Project also commented on how the canoe infrastructure can benefit anglers since *“The anglers seem to use the canoe platforms probably more than the canoeists do.”*

4.1.2 Canoeists

A few participants, across the different user groups, have noticed increased numbers of canoeists on the Waveney over the last year;

“It’s definitely increased the usage. That’s the one big bonus that I know it’s definitely done. We’ve noticed as we’re always there and on the river at some stage, I mean I’m ... on the

river once, twice maybe three times a week and I've noticed that there seems to be a big increase of people paddling the river."

[Canoe Instructor]

However, other users of the river comment that usage has changed very little since the agreement was put in place;

"I haven't changed my personal amount I've used the river at all. I still use it as much as I have in the past."

[Waveney Valley Canoe club]

"We as a scout group haven't had any trouble, hassle or impact at all, everything seems the same to us."

[Bungay Sea Scouts]

One respondent hypothesises that if an increase in canoeists has occurred, that this may not be a consequence of the agreement but rather *"A large part of that is to do with the fact that the Broads Authority now have franchises at Geldeston and...on Bungay Common and Outney Meadow"* [Waveney Valley Canoe club].

As the local authorities have not collected usage data on the Waveney over the last year these comments are based purely on perceptions of river users.

A general consensus emerges from both canoeists and other participant groups that the main benefit afforded by the access agreement are the improved portages and access points;

"...the portages have made it considerably easier and they're very clearly marked and I think that's been a considerable improvement on the river"

[Waveney Valley Canoe club]

"It's certainly eased access at certain points and given...them more confidence to use the river, knowing that there is an Access Agreement in operation. Previously it was just informal access, people canoed it, have done for a number of years, but with no agreement, so I guess it's made slightly easier and more confident making for canoe users to use the river"

[Upper Waveney Countryside Project]

A related environmental benefit is also recognised as the canoe launch platforms reducing damage to the river bank where previously canoeists lowered their canoes into the water.

Although the British Canoe Union (BCU) is against the voluntary agreements, canoeists and canoe club owners in the Waveney area are keen to cooperate;

“...the BCU Access Officers [said] they didn’t particularly want us to be involved in these voluntary agreements. They thought they were a negative thing but as I felt at the time, and I still do feel, that the way forward is with voluntary access agreements.”

[Waveney Valley Canoe Club]

4.2 Impact of agreement on landowners

Landowners along the Waveney are largely unfazed by the access agreements, reporting very little impact on themselves or their land by any users of the river;

“They’re not doing any harm if they’re going through or someone just wants to mooch up and down the river on a summers evening, they’re not doing any harm.”

“I haven’t noticed much difference actually. I haven’t noticed hoards of people down there.”

“I’ve not heard anything on the grapevine about them being a nuisance. As I say, providing they stay on the river and pass through it, that’s fine.”

[Landowners]

While the majority of landowners report minimal impact from the agreement, one landowner, a pub landlord, mentioned his concern that the agreement may limit his rights and flexibility as to how he uses his land in the future. Although he allows canoeists to paddle along his stretch of river he has not agreed to the location of an access point on his property because he is afraid it would compromise his authority over future uses of the land.

“...in 20 years time I don’t want a path put across here without me having any say so in it and stuff like that.”

“I personally feel that eventually if I wanted to close it down and say, look I want to do this here, or maybe I want to build a

house there, or something like that, because there's a right of access I'm not going to be able to do it."

[Pub landlord]

Participants report hearsay of negative attitudes from other landowners who refused to sign the canoe access agreement, but none have experienced this first-hand.

4.3 Impact of agreement on business

Both of the business contacts on the Waveney report positively on the financial impact of the access agreement, and anticipate this to develop further with the agreement staying in place.

An increase in visitors has apparently already been witnessed at the Outney Camping and Caravan Park;

"He [owner of Outney Camping and Caravan Park] certainly said his hiring out of canoes...had improved and had gone up quite considerably this year."

[Waveney Valley Canoe Club]

A local pub landlord agrees that customer numbers are up;

"My trade has increased I would say, it is better for business to have it there, yes."

"We're getting, mainly we're getting canoeists that are camping on the, they, I think they get in at Diss...and they canoe down and they use us as a stop over. And then the next day they go on to Bungay, so it's quite a convenient place for them stop."

[Pub landlord]

4.4 Concerns and limitations to the agreement

While the vast majority of feedback is positive, the primary concern raised by several respondents on the Waveney relates to the safety implications of the access agreement. There is also a feeling that, although the agreement as it stands has run smoothly and been successful, it could have achieved more if the Environment Agency had pursued negotiations with landowners and anglers in the more contentious areas between Ellingham and Geldeston.

4.4.1 Safety

The greatest concern shared by all those involved with the Waveney is the implication that increased and easier access to the water has on the safety of users and especially private canoeists.

"I suppose safety is a, could be a negative thing because...ignorant people suddenly using the river we could have to deal with health and safety issues."

[Broads Authority]

Many interviewees mentioned a fatality which occurred during the last year at the weir on a nearby stretch of the Waveney. There is a general consensus among these participants that, while canoe and boat clubs will ensure canoeists wear safety equipment and vigilantly check their crafts, the access agreement provides the opportunity for members of the public who are unaware of local dangers (weirs for instance) to use the river and put themselves in danger. In terms of addressing these safety concerns, participants suggest clear signage of the danger areas, and the provision of safety ropes and rings at each access platform.

4.4.2 Geographical limitation to access agreement

A further area of contention raised by a range of respondents is the geographical limit of the access agreement:

"...the only downside of the whole agreement has really been the difficulty around Ellingham weir, one particular spot there where it hasn't, other people feel that we've lost access there if anything"

[Waveney Valley Canoe Club]

The area beyond Ellingham Lock, up to Geldeston through the Broads navigation area, was never intended to be included in the agreement. However, this is seen by a member of the Broads Authority to be a failing with the agreement exercise as *"It was important, this link, it was important to the Broads' area to make it a fully workable access Agreement."*

Difficulties persuading both anglers and landowners at Ellingham to support the access agreement prevented the trial area being extended as *"There was a ministerial political drive to actually get the project done and dusted which stopped it happening"* [Broads Authority].

"It was a missed opportunity. I think that we should have really pursued [it] further really. That's a purely personal thing"

because ultimately, as I said, the remit of the project was just to go to Ellingham and they just stuck to that boundary in the end...they achieved what the project set out to do really.”

[Broads Authority]

One respondent was also very vocal about the potential of including the new cut, connecting tidal water below Geldeston Locks to Ellingham, into the agreement as he feels this would provide an ideal bypass to the area of the river where anglers and landowners were reluctant to grant access and where there have been problems with canoe leases and river users;

“On the tidal situation, where we made an agreement on access and use, it has been totally abused by Rowan Craft at Geldeston Locks, who lease out canoes and won’t issue any instructions on going upstream...they don’t supply no notices, they don’t do anything. They don’t tell people there is not an access agreement upstream and that’s very, very poor.”

“...just opening up a small dyke that is, at the moment only six foot wide and disused, connecting that to the river would create an ideal bypass.”

[Angler, heavily involved in access agreements]

4.5 Overall reactions one year on

Across all groups of respondents, the feedback on the canoe access agreement in place on the Waveney is generally positive;

“It’s realising the potential of our countryside ...I think it’s thrown the river open to any, a lot more people, a wider audience.”

[Broads Authority]

“...part of our remit is to encourage recreation along the river where it doesn’t impact on wildlife and other businesses along the river, and this doesn’t.”

[Upper Waveney Countryside Project]

This lack of adverse effects may be the result of the informal, and largely harmonious, use of the river already existing between different groups on the Waveney prior to the agreement.

“We’ve always had good relationships with local landowners and then what’s happened has really only formalised a generally good situation on the river that’s existed for a number of years which I understand that was partly why the Waveney was chosen in the first place because traditionally we have had a very good working relationship with the landowners.”

[Waveney Valley Canoe Club]

Indeed, two participants mentioned concerns that the peaceful collaboration already in place on the Waveney would actually be threatened by the access agreement;

“We were quite concerned when we first got involved in the project that we’d always had very good working relationships with landowners and we’d had fairly good access rights and that what might happen was that people would not wish to sign up to a formal agreement.”

[Waveney Valley Canoe Club]

“I was a little concerned at the start that people have been canoeing the river for years without any hindrance, and I thought that it might stir up a few things with landowners if it was more formalised.”

[Upper Waveney Countryside Project]

The lack of significant impact made on the Waveney by the canoe access agreement is mentioned by canoeists,

“Me, as a personal user it’s made absolutely no difference because we were using it prior to that Agreement...from my understanding is there were always access agreements but they were just talked ones, verbal.”

“Where they’ve built the access points is where we always used to use it anyway.”

[Canoe Instructor]

Due to these informal agreements already being in place, one canoeist reports hearsay regarding the lack of necessity for the agreement;

“The only thing I have heard is people have said, ‘Well this has been here for years, why bother?’”

[Canoe instructor]

However, some respondents do feel the agreement has the very positive effect of formalising agreements and publicising their existence to a wider audience.

“...whereas before it was a case of lobbing your canoe anywhere you could get it in. I’ve never been quite sure that you should really be there... All that’s gone now. You know that you can be there. You know that you have permission to be there, so it’s a security in your usage.”

[Broads Authority]

4.6 Key Learning Points

4.6.1 Practical advice for set-up consultation

Participants who had higher levels of involvement in the set-up of the canoe access agreement on the Waveney gave practical advice for the Environment Agency in terms of setting up more of these voluntary agreements in other parts of the country.

There is a strong feeling that the involvement of Brighton University is crucial to the success of such projects because of their objectivity and dedication to the process.

“What has been most important is the involvement of the university... Because these people are viewed by all the parties as independent and not financially or commercially motivated.”

[Angler, heavily involved in access agreement]

“I think the key element to the success of an agreement is clearly if anything ultimately the Brighton people worked quite hard to get.”

[Waveney Valley Canoe Club]

One respondent who has been heavily involved throughout the implementation and maintenance of the access agreement on the Waveney said he feels a certain degree of resentment towards the Environment Agency because he feels that some members of the Environment Agency took an unfair level of credit for arrangement of the agreement;

“Unfortunately the Environment Agency showed a lack of interest until the end when there was some sort of accord and acclaim and up jumped people who purported to be involved and actually done very little along the way, but of course they rolled up at the meeting, looking as though they’d jumped out the rag bag with their Environment Agency shirt on... Probably there was only four people from the Environment Agency that done anything, they got very little acclaim.”

However, this criticism of the Environment Agency is not shared by others we spoke to, with one canoe instructor reporting; *“I think...they have done and are still doing a brilliant job. They couldn’t be trying any harder.”* However, this respondent did have far less involvement in the process than the respondent quoted above.

A criticism relating to the set-up of the agreements, and mentioned by a few respondents, is the impractical and inconvenient arrangement of meetings and consultations.

“The Environment Agency consistently wants to hold meetings during the day when people aren’t, I’m retired, but people who are on committees can’t go because they’re working and can’t take off time for work.”

[Angler, heavily involved in access agreement]

“I was quite involved in the initial stages of the agreement and at the time I was working from home and I was able to attend daytime meetings and then after about a year or so I actually returned to full time teaching and I could no longer attend the meetings during the day and it seemed at the time that meetings were organised during the day and I think if it was me I would have carried on working with the project had they been able to organise out of hours meetings during the evening.”

[Waveney Canoe Club]

The financial and time burdens of being involved in the set-up of the agreement was also raised as an issue which would need to be addressed in future cases.

“...if you have a meeting, for example, in Norwich and it’s to do with the Waveney, every person then has got to travel 15

miles to their office at least, some 40 miles to the river. They've then got to find parking, they've got the petrol. Fishing clubs haven't got that money to pay with."

"I've got all the meetings I went to, which must now total 30, 40, over that period of time, fishing clubs haven't got the money. You put your interest in and you're expected to fund that out your own pocket."

[Angler, heavily involved in access agreement]

"That might be something to consider that a lot of the people who want to be involved in this kind of thing are going to be volunteers and some allowance could have been made to give those volunteers an opportunity to attend such meetings."

[Waveney Canoe Club]

4.6.2 Use of local knowledge and contacts

One participant involved with Norfolk County Council highlights the opportunities available for a degree of collaboration between the Countryside Rights of Way team and the canoe access team.

"I'm not sure whether you came through the County Council's Public Rights of Way Team. That clearly would be helpful talking to them because quite often I guess the access areas where you're looking for, they're not accessing the river but there'll be Public Rights of Way or riverside paths where the public already have access there and we may well have some kind of knowledge of the landowner, a previous history of what's gone on if there have been ever negotiations, which might be useful."

Other participants highlight the importance of using local people to help negotiate and implement the agreement;

"...you do need people with that local knowledge to tap into them, so that you get it right and it's not seen as somebody from afar perhaps negotiating and imposing, as it were, into

an area. So yeah, use local people and local knowledge where you can."

[Upper Waveney Countryside Project]

4.6.3 Improve communication and publicity

The minimal change on the Waveney following the implementation of the access agreement is speculated by some respondents to result from low levels of publicity about it.

"I think probably unless you're a canoeist or someone who actually lives on the river and has been party to the agreement I'm not sure that it's widely known that there has been this significant change to the river."

[Waveney Canoe Club]

"They put some leaflets out and they've put boards out there, but they haven't really gone for it nationally."

[Broads Authority]

"I think it's gone rather quiet that there is canoe access on the Waveney and perhaps it does need a little bit of promotion."

[Upper Waveney Countryside Project]

One respondent feels low levels of publicity around the agreement may be beneficial in the long run;

"They've under promoted it in a certain way I think, but then again do you want to have loads of people charging down the river?... Because you over promote it, next minute you've got hundreds of people wanting to do it and in fact if you allow something to build slowly, it allows it be a manageable build."

[Broads Authority]

However, one business participant disagrees with these comments, attributing the increased visitor numbers to the Outney Camping and Caravan Park to the *"high profile launch"* and the *"effective publicity"* of the access agreement through advertising on channels such as the local television.

"I know my local pub, it's got ... the leaflets in it now and that sort of thing, and I have seen people turning up with that nice leaflet/brochure that they produced."

[Canoe Instructor]

5 River Mersey – Findings from telephone interviews

5.1 Impact of agreement on users

Overall, opinion among those involved in the implementation of the agreement on the Mersey is favourable. There is a feeling that the agreement has opened the river up to many people who might otherwise not have used it. No conflicts between canoeists and other river users have been reported, and some landowners have started to make use of the agreement in an effort to boost business.

However there is also a feeling that more information needs to be made available to increase the number enjoying the river.

5.1.1 Canoeists

Although there has been a slight increase in the number of canoeists using the Mersey since the agreement came in, this figure is not substantial.

“I would say it’s increased, not dramatically, but it’s increased.”

[Stockport Council]

“I have seen a lot of activity at weekend with cars and canoes coming up and parking and disappearing off.”

[Burnage rugby club]

However, others feel there has not been a noticeable change,

“There’s one or two people who’ve said people used the river before, they’ve used it since, and not really noticed a change.”

[Mersey Valley Countryside]

However there is a shared view that the agreement has been of great benefit to the canoeist – particularly the improved access points.

“It has benefited in that it’s identified new access points that we weren’t aware of before... There was one piece of land we were using that was council owned and now it’s an official

canoe trail, then they're prepared to put effort into protecting it as land to get access to the river."

[Local paddler]

Despite a suggestion that British Canoe Union members do not feel that the agreement goes far enough, there is an acceptance that it has improved the situation on the Mersey and opened up the opportunity to canoe to more people, which can only be a positive thing. People now know their rights, making the situation more comfortable for all parties, and the agreement now means that there is canoeing access on the doorstep of people from Greater Manchester.

"...we've now got a right to be there whereas in the past people just paddle it...it has improved it, Its got to be a good thing."

[Local paddler]

"I think it's made it available to more people and people of, perhaps lower skill and experience, and widened the availability of canoeing, which is what it's all about."

[BCU Regional Officer]

"Obviously there's a lot of people who are canoeists in Greater Manchester, so they've got a resource on their doorstep now rather than having to travel further a field. I think they benefit from that."

[Mersey Basin Campaign]

5.1.2 Other river users

The agreement does not seem to have had an adverse effect on other river users, indeed most feel that having more canoeists has actually enhanced the river experience for all.

"Perhaps people who are using the banks for recreation, walking along, walking their dog or whatever, they notice more people on the river, perhaps sparks a bit of interest in their mind?"

[Mersey Basin Campaign]

“Last Sunday we actually we had a canoe race which started in our riverside park, so we had about 32 people racing along the river, they were canoeing downstream from Stockport out into Trafford basically. So, all the canoeists were really enthusiastic about it. At the moment, what we’re trying to do is build some interest from other sections of the community, because I’m aware that really, it’s kind of, because it’s quite a specialist sport, and on Sunday we also, we did have other people who just came out to watch and you know, so that was quite a nice morning, they were just watching everybody canoeing and setting off along the river. So it’s nice that people are just walking past, see people using the river too.”

[Regeneration Officer]

Despite concern regarding friction between canoeists and anglers, none of the respondents have experienced or witnessed problems between those users. It has been suggested that this is because there are few anglers on this stretch of the Mersey.

“They love to see people canoeing down the river and, I think 90% of people would support us with it. Some of the people who go fishing don’t like us there because they say we affect the fishing. But again, I’ve not heard of any adverse reports that people have been challenged by fishermen at all or anything like that on the river. So, as far as I’m aware there’s been no adverse impact to anyone using the river or even the bank side. Like I say, it’s got to be a good thing that everyone is getting on and getting on with using the river.”

[Local paddler]

“...because I think the stretch of river where the canoe trail is, isn’t a hugely used resource by anglers. I know that part of the world quite well and you don’t often see that many fishermen down there, so I think in that respect it wasn’t a great big problem.”

[Mersey Basin Campaign]

The only complaint relates to horse riding, and the fear that the canoeists suddenly appearing from the river might frighten horses, but again this is a hearsay/speculative concern and had not been experienced or witnessed.

“The only other thing that I’ve heard is from horse riders that the canoeist running up the steps with the canoe might scare horses as they come past. But I think the chances of somebody coming out of the river whilst the horse is going past at that particular moment are very, very slim. So that’s the only thing that I’ve heard.”

[Community Parks Officer]

5.2 Impact of the agreement on landowners

Landowners along the Mersey feel largely unaffected by the access agreement.

However, one landowner, a parish councillor, does have an unusual concern because their access point requires passage through a locked gate, thus requiring volunteers to open the gate to allow access. The parish council requests that canoeists phone 48 hours in advance so that they can ensure there is someone available to let them in but this request is being overlooked by a number of canoeists who instead have begun launching their canoes from a neighbouring orchard where there is not an official launch site.

“We allow canoeists to come through, albeit, we do say that they phone us 48 hours before hand to arrange this...So it requires the gates to be opened as and when they want to park their vehicles, or a small gate opened so they can get out. So we do insist on that, but nine times out of ten, people don’t ring.”

“But it has been known that some have actually come down without informing us, go out and turned at the end of the field is an orchard with a gate on it anyway, they can get out of. And they’ve just got out of there and walked through the orchard and out.”

[Carrington Parish Council]

5.3 Impact of the agreement on business

As yet, businesses along the Mersey site have not experienced a significant financial impact as a result of the agreement, although, as one canoeist pointed out, the more relevant businesses may have seen an increase in business.

“There is a canoe supply shop nearby so it won’t do them any harm there will it?”

[Local paddler]

A number of people also identify Burnage Rugby club as one business that is starting to introduce facilities and activities for canoeists, and organising events to cater for them.

“I know that one local business, Burnage Rugby Club is looking into the possibility of expanding the business to doing canoe hire. So that could have a positive effect on a local business, ie they get canoeists in and they offer like a changing room and shower facilities and things like that. So I think it could be good for them.”

[Community Parks Officer]

“...one of the access points is adjacent to their land at the riverside, and so their site is a natural place to park and which they are quite happy with. And also they wish themselves to get involved in canoeing.”

“...for the canoe race a couple of weeks ago we had 40 odd people or more on their site, quite a few using showers, having refreshments...there will have been a few people there for that specific event, using their facilities and bar - certainly for that one event there is an increase in business.”

[BCU Regional Officer]

The general manager of the rugby club confirmed that they are taking advantage of the situation and looking at ways of encouraging canoeists to use their facilities.

“We’ve had a couple of events which have promoted a little bit of spin-off trade for us in terms of people gathering here and

*setting off and to the openings and various other things.
We've had a few events here which we've benefited from."*

[Burnage Rugby Club]

5.4 Concerns and limitations to the agreement

On the whole, Mersey contacts we spoke to feel that the access agreement is a positive thing, particularly as it encourages people to take up canoeing and make full use of the river. However, several did mention concerns regarding safety and the future of the agreement.

The greatest concern was that non-qualified canoeists may enter the Mersey without taking due care of their safety.

"Get the health and safety message across."

[Mersey Valley Countryside]

Another concern is that the agreement could be removed at any time.

"Is it's a voluntary Agreement and that voluntary Agreement could be removed at any time by any one of the owners and, say you get a big section that you've got agreement on, and someone owns a small section of land and they withdraw their agreement, then we're stuck. How do you get around that one? Or do you just, ride through, bandit run through somebody's private property? That's what they're known as in canoeing circles when people go on the river that they're not supposed to, they call it a bandit run."

[Local paddler]

5.5 Overall reactions one year on

Generally, the agreement has been well received on the Mersey. No disputes have been reported between river users, and businesses are beginning to take advantage of the agreement.

Overall the agreement has helped convey the message that there is a nice, recreational stretch of water that people can enjoy, and this needs to be developed further.

"I think it's the general impact of the getting the message across that the water quality within the Mersey is improving"

and the Mersey itself is an asset rather than a liability for the region.”

[Mersey Basin campaign]

Indeed the only criticism relates to the fact that not enough people are aware of the agreement, and therefore not making use of this excellent natural resource.

5.6 Key Learning Points

5.6.1 Increase funding and follow-through

One of the main concerns raised regarding the access agreement on the Mersey is a lack of funding, and, as a result, a lack of follow-through. Although launch sites have been built, many other potential developments that were initially mentioned have not come to fruition.

“At the moment it is just a grass path. But it could’ve done with steps or a tarmac bench. And we thought we could afford something ourselves. But unfortunately, like all poorly paid councils, we cannot.”

“We need the sign to say that there are no life belt facilities there. And also there was supposed to be a sign going up, as to where the canoes could go to along the river. Now both of them have not happened. So as far as I’m concerned, the Agency came up with the idea, good idea, very good idea, but didn’t financially, or any other way, carry anything out.”

[Carrington Parish Council]

“Well I think one of the sad points is the Environment Agency have been instrumental in getting the Agreement put in place for us. The funding for that type of project has now been removed...Stockport Council have been very, very supportive throughout, as have the Environment Agency, it’s just unfortunate that any funding of that nature now has been removed with cuts in the Environment Agency.”

[Local Paddler]

5.6.2 Improve communication and publicity

Although canoeists have been positive towards the agreement, there is a feeling that they could have been consulted more on certain issues – particularly on the installation of the access steps.

“The steps and things that were put for access round the weirs and for access to the weir, to the water were actually put in without coming to the canoeing side for any advice and they actually looked at it and put them in, in the winter, but when the river’s two foot lower in the summer in one case the water is six foot away from the bottom of the steps. And in other cases where the steps are still in the water the thing is three foot above water level and it’s impossible to get in and out from the canoe. So, if you’re building features for canoeists, take advice from the canoeists and make sure you take account of the river level variation.”

[BCU Regional Officer]

“I think one of the things that the British Canoe Union were a bit concerned because of the speed at which we did it. I think they would have preferred to have been involved in the actual design of the canoe steps more. There is an issue with canoe steps in that, because the river level changes quite a lot and has done quite a lot recently, and when you actually install the canoe steps, you do it to the level the river is at that point and then we’ve had some issues with silt building up in front of the canoe steps. And also, when the steps are wooden, in certain places the steps are wooden platforms and there’s an issue there over the height of the river when people are canoeing, because if you need to get in and out of the canoe, if the river’s low, you’ve got quite a big step up to the wooden platform if it’s a wooden canoe step. So, what I would probably say is, and I don’t know if that’s resolvable to be honest.”

[Regeneration Officer]

This was echoed by another respondent who feels that during the setup phase all stakeholders should have been kept more informed of progress.

"I think the key thing is to get everybody involved, so all stakeholders, all members of the partnership. Make sure everyone's involved, knows what's going on. Explain to people what it actually means, what their roles and responsibilities might be with an access agreement in place. I think it's just about communication really, making sure everybody knows what's going on."

[Mersey Basin Campaign]

Further to this, several respondents mention that the Environment Agency needs to remember that the people they are consulting with are volunteers, not councillors, and that information needs to be in a more understandable format.

"...if they're going to use small councils, they've got to remember that these people are volunteers... A little bit more information, a good information pack, when it's not got gobbledygook, would help."

[Carrington Parish Council]

Overall, a greater amount of information about the agreement is required to increase the numbers who are canoeing. While existing canoeists are aware of the agreement and its ramifications, non-canoeists are not, and therefore there has not yet been a noticeable increase in participation.

"I tend to get the impression these are people who are enthusiasts and who have got it through the various clubs or whatever or the canoeing websites, shops, whatever that they use. So I think awareness is pretty high within that fraternity, but not as far as the general public."

[Burnage Rugby Club]

"I think the problem that we've got now is that it's just the existing canoeists that will use the facilities. So I think if you could build in some sort of revenue element to the project so that you could get maybe another youth group or you could get certain groups to, either you could pay for them to use the river, to canoe along the river, I think that would be a good idea really."

“...because we invest quite a lot of money, we need to keep really building and publicising the trail, so we can encourage more people, a more different type of people to use it too.”

[Regeneration Officer]

6 Conclusions and recommendations

- The voluntary canoe access agreements which have now been in place on the River Waveney and the River Mersey for twelve months have received broad levels of support from various users of the rivers, as well as landowners and businesses located along their banks. Anticipated conflicts between user groups have not materialised, and in some areas collaboration has actually increased. The access agreements are recognised as a positive step towards promoting these rivers as assets to their local areas and as places accessible for the general public to enjoy and make use of.
- However, despite their positive reception, the access agreements have not encouraged substantial increases in the number of canoeists using either the Mersey or the Waveney. Indeed large sections of the general public, including regular users of the rivers, remain unaware of these voluntary agreements. The low level of awareness identified through this research links into feedback from river users that communication and publicity of the canoe access agreements needs to increase (especially on the Mersey) in order to maximise the positive benefit of the agreement. Local Authorities, sports governing bodies and those who benefit locally need to take the lead in promoting these agreements so that as many people as possible can benefit from this resource.
- The feedback gathered here regarding the trial agreements on the Mersey and the Waveney must be taken within the wider context of these two rivers. In the case of the Mersey, the low use of the river by fishermen may have reduced the potential for a conflict in priorities, whilst the harmonious mixed-use of the Waveney prior to the trial means many see the agreement as merely formalising arrangements which were already in place.
- Aside from isolated individuals, the agreements are reported to have been successfully and proficiently implemented by involved parties. It is felt that people local to the river must be consulted and heavily involved when these agreements are delivered, as they will be affected by them. A national scheme, that doesn't involve those affected, is unlikely to be as engaging as a campaign run at a local level.
- If the Environment Agency co-ordinate such a scheme in the future it must be transparent in its actions and ensure that any issues are followed up. There is some concern that the

Environment Agency has not carried out all the actions it claimed it would, leading to some discontent. A clear statement of the Environment Agency's responsibilities in the process should help eliminate this problem.

- A number of people complained about the times key meetings were held at the inception stage. These stakeholders could have fed valuable information into the process, and future meetings should, wherever possible, be scheduled at times that allow people who work full time to attend.

Appendix A: Depth Interview Participants

Table 1: Research participants related to the Waveney

	Relation to river	Involvement in agreement
Anglers	Angler, President of angling club	Heavily involved throughout process
	Angler, Secretary of Harleston and Wortwell fishing club	Provided details of landowners
Canoeing groups	Canoeist, Local commercial instructor	No involvement
	Canoeist, Chairman of Waveney Valley Canoe Club	Involved at onset
	Canoeist, Leader of Bungay Sea Scouts	Attended set-up meetings
Landowners	Landowner, fisher, canoeist	Approached to give access
	Landowner	Approached to give access
Businesses	Outney Camping and Caravan park	Approached to give access as park has river frontage
	Pub landlord	Approached to give access
Local Authorities	Norfolk County Council	Involved in creation of multi-purpose access site
	Upper Waveney Valley Countryside Project	Worked closely with Environment Agency
	Broads Authority Information Centre	Close involvement

Table 2: Research participants related to the Mersey

	Relation to river	Involvement in agreement
Canoeing groups	Canoeist, BCU Regional Officer	Provided information
	Canoeist	Attended meetings with Environment Agency
Landowners	Landowner, Burnage Rugby Club	Approached to give access
	Landowner, Sale Golf Club	Approached to give access
	Landowner, Urmston 5 th Scouts	Approached to give access
	Carrington Parish Council	Limited involvement; ‘not invited to meetings’; have an access point
Local Authorities or Tourism	Stockport Council, Regeneration Officer	Involved in all aspects of the agreement including installation of access points
	Stockport Council, Community Parks Officer	Worked closely with Environment Agency; heavily involved
	Trans Pennine Trail	Consulted with Brighton University and attended some meetings with EA
	Mersey Basin Campaign	Worked with Environment agency; added an access point to one of their sites
	Mersey Valley Countryside Warden Service	Approached to give access

Appendix B: Riverside Questionnaire

INTRODUCTION/CONFIDENTIALITY

Good morning/afternoon/evening. My name is . . . from Ipsos MORI, the independent research company. On behalf of the Environment Agency, we are conducting a short survey of people who use this river to ask them their opinions on some local issues.

I would like to assure you that all the information we collect will be kept in the strictest confidence, and used for research purposes only. It will not be possible to identify any particular individual or household in the results. I wonder if you could spare me about 5-10 minutes of your time.

GENERAL

Q1. SHOWCARD A Could you look at this card and tell me which of them describes the ways that you use this river and the river banks? MULTICODE

A	Walking/jogging for exercise	1	
B	Walking the dog	2	
C	Fishing	3	
D	Canoeing/Kayaking	4	
E	Rowing	5	
F	Other boating	6	
G	Bird watching	7	
H	Just to be outside	8	
	Other reasons (WRITE IN AND CODE '9')	9	(26)

Q2. **And for how many years have you used this river or its riverbanks?** SINGLE CODE

Less than 6 months	1	
6 months – 1 year	2	
Between 1 and 2 years	3	
Between 2 and 5 years	4	GO TO Q3
Between 5 and 10 years	5	
More than 10 years	6	
Don't know	7	THANK AND CLOSE (27)

Q3. **Are you a member of any local or national user groups, such as a nature group or a boating association? If so, which one(s)?** MULTICODE

National Trust	1	
RSPB	2	
British Canoe Union (BCU)	3	
Amateur Rowing Association (ARA)	4	
Ramblers	5	
Fishing group/club	6	
Royal Yachting Association (RYA)	7	
Other (WRITE IN AND CODE '8')	8	
None	9	
Don't know	X	(28)

Canoe Access Agreements - Awareness

Q4. **Did you know about the Canoe Access Agreement that is in place on this stretch of river?** SINGLE CODE ONLY

Yes	1	ASK Q5
-----	---	--------

No	2
Don't know	3

GO TO TEXT BELOW Q5

(29)

ASK ALL WHO ARE AWARE OF THE ACCESS AGREEMENT (CODE 1 AT Q4). OTHERS SKIP.

Q5. **How or where did you find out about this agreement? DO NOT PROMPT. MULTICODE. PROBE FULLY. How else?**

Friends/family	1
Through club/ user group	2
Signage / Notice board on river	3
Media and Press (TV, radio, newspaper)	4
Tourist information / Centre	5
Seen a leaflet	6
On the internet/web	7
Just heard it somewhere	8
Don't know	9

(30)

ASK ALL

READ OUT: This canoe access agreement is a voluntary agreement among private landowners to provide canoeists with access to the river at certain specific points along the riverbanks. This has been a pilot scheme that has been in place for about 12 months now. The purpose of this survey is to find out what impact this agreement has had, if any, for the people like you who use this river and its banks.

ASK ALL WHO HAVE USED THE RIVER FOR AT LEAST 1 YEAR (CODES 3 -6 AT Q2). OTHERS SKIP TO Q10.

Q6. **You said you have been using the river/riverbanks for more than a year. Have you noticed any changes in the river or river users in the last year, compared to more than a year ago, that you think might be the result of this canoe access agreement? SINGLE CODE ONLY.**

Yes, have noticed changes	1	ASK Q7
No, have not noticed changes	2	GO TO Q9
Don't know	3	

(31)

ASK ALL WHO HAVE NOTICED CHANGES (CODE 1 AT Q6)

Q7. **Could you tell me what kind of changes you have noticed?** DO NOT PROMPT.
MULTICODE. PROBE FULLY.

More canoeists	1
Car parks more busy/full	2
Incidents between canoeists and anglers	3
Incidents between boaters and canoeists	4
River just seems more crowded	5
More people using the river-side businesses	6
Other (WRITE IN AND CODE '7')	7
Don't know	8

(32)

ASK ALL WHO HAVE NOTICED CHANGES (CODE 1 AT Q6)

Q8. **Do you think these changes have had a positive or negative impact, or no impact, on your experience of the river?**

SINGLE CODE ONLY

No impact	1
Positive impact	2
Negative impact	3
Don't know	4

(33)

ASK ALL WHO HAVE USED THE RIVER FOR AT LEAST 1 YEAR (CODES 3 -6 AT Q2).

Q9. **Have you noticed any changes that have specifically affected the accessibility of the river, for example, whether it is now easier for you or other users to access the river?**
MULTICODE. PROBE FULLY.

No, not noticed changes in accessibility	1	
Yes, easier for me to access river	2	
Yes, easier for other users to access river	3	GO TO Q14
Other (WRITE IN AND CODE '4')	4	
Don't know	5	(34)

ASK ALL WHO HAVE USED THE RIVER FOR LESS THAN 1 YEAR (CODES 1 OR 2 AT Q2).
OTHERS SKIP TO Q14

Q10. **You said you have been using the river/riverbanks for less than a year. Have you noticed anything about the river or river users that you think might be the result of this canoe access agreement?**

SINGLE CODE ONLY

Yes, have noticed impact	1	ASK Q11
No, have not noticed impact	2	GO TO Q13
Don't know	3	(35)

ASK ALL WHO HAVE NOTICED IMPACT (CODE 1 AT Q10)

Q11. **Could you tell me what kind of things you have noticed?** DO NOT PROMPT.
MULTICODE. PROBE FULLY.

Lots of/more canoeists	1	
Car parks more busy/full	2	
Incidents between canoeists and anglers	3	
Incidents between boaters and canoeists	4	
River just seems crowded	5	
More people using the river-side businesses	6	
Other (WRITE IN AND CODE '7')	7	
Don't know	8	(36)

ASK ALL WHO HAVE NOTICED CHANGES (CODE 1 AT Q10)

Q12. **Do you think these things you have noticed have had a positive or negative impact, or no impact, on your experience of the river?**

SINGLE CODE ONLY

Positive impact	1
Negative impact	2
No impact	3
Don't know	4

(37)

ASK ALL WHO HAVE USED THE RIVER FOR LESS THAN 1 YEAR (CODES 1 OR 2 AT Q2).

Q13. **Have you noticed any impact in terms of the accessibility of the river, for example, whether it is now easier for you or other users to access the river? MULTICODE. PROBE FULLY.**

No, not noticed changes in accessibility	1
Yes, easier for me to access river	2
Yes, easier for other users to access river	3
Other (WRITE IN AND CODE '4')	4
Don't know	5

(38)

ASK ALL

Q14. **Is there anything specific you would suggest in terms of improving canoe access agreements, or how this one has been implemented along this stretch of river?**

DO NOT PROMPT. MULTICODE. PROBE FULLY.

More information about them	1
More car parks available	2
Better/more signs about the access points	3

Get rid of them	4
Educate different users about how to get along and respect other river users	5
Put it to a community vote / Should not just be up to the landowners	6
Other (WRITE IN AND CODE '7')	7
Don't know	8

(39)

READ OUT: Thank you very much for speaking to me today. I have just one final question to make sure we speak to a range of people

Q15. Would you mind telling me your age?

WRITE IN & CODE EXACT AGE

Exact Age
(40) (41)

16-24	1
25-34	2
35-44	3
45-54	4
55-59	5
60-64	6
65-74	7
75+	8
Refused	9

(42)

DO NOT ASK. CODE GENDER

Male	1
------	---

Female		2	(43)
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READ OUT: That's the end of the survey. Thank you again for taking the time to speak to me today. If you have any questions about the Canoe Access Agreements on this river, I can give you an information leaflet. If you have any questions and would like to contact the Environment Agency about these agreements or about this survey, I can give you the telephone number for their Customer Contact Centre (0870 850 6506).

Appendix C: Telephone Discussion Guide

INTRODUCTION/CONFIDENTIALITY

Good morning/afternoon/evening. My name is . . . from Ipsos MORI, the independent research company. I am calling you because we are carrying out some research for the Environment Agency, and the goal of the project is to speak to people who have been involved with, or affected by, the voluntary canoe access agreements that have now been in place on the Waveney and the Mersey, for 12 months.

If you wouldn't mind, I would like to interview you over the phone to ask about your opinions and experience with the process and impact of these agreements on your river. The Environment Agency would like to know how this has impacted on you, the changes you've felt and seen, what's worked well, what hasn't worked well, and any suggestions you have for improving it in the future. Depending on how much you have to say, it should take 20-30 minutes in total.

For research purposes, so that I have an accurate record of your comments, I would like to record the interview and have it professionally transcribed. Are you happy with that? And the Environment Agency has asked if they could have copies of the transcripts of all of the 25 interviews we will be conducting. Would you be happy for the Environment Agency to have a written transcription of your interview? [If not happy with that: If you would prefer, we could anonymise the interview so it would not identify you in any way. Would that be acceptable?]

Relation to the river and the agreement

- Could you tell me a bit about how you use or are affected by the river?
 - Active user of river or live/work near river; financial dependence on river? Job/duty to look after the river?
 - And for how long have you used the river? Do you have experience of this river from before the voluntary canoe access agreement was implemented here?
- How were you involved in the implementation of this pilot project of a voluntary canoe access agreement?
 - Central or peripheral role? Involved in entire process or just specific aspect(s) of it?

Impact of the agreement

- How has the agreement impacted you and/ or your business?

- How has it affected your use and/or enjoyment of the river? (use it more or less? Quality of your river experience?)
- Has this been positive or negative?
- From what you have seen or experienced first-hand, what have been the main impacts of the agreement on this river and its users?
 - Have you personally noticed whether the number of users increased or decreased?
 - Have you personally noticed whether the quality of the river experience has changed? If so, has it changed for the better or worse?
- [If you are a user] Would you say use the river more or less since the agreement?
 - Why do you say that?
 - Do you feel that using the river is easier or harder as a result of the agreement? Why do you say that? Is that a good or a bad thing?
- [If not already mentioned] Have you seen or heard [specify which] about the agreement having a financial impact on the businesses near the river?
 - Was this positive or negative?
- [If not already mentioned] How about canoeists, have you seen or heard [specify which] about how the agreement has impacted them?
 - Have you noticed whether their use of the river has increased or decreased?
 - Is this positive or negative?
- [If not already mentioned] How about other users of the river (non-canoeists) like anglers, boaters or walkers, have you seen or heard [specify which] about how the agreement has impacted them?
 - Have you noticed whether their use of the river has increased or decreased?
 - And do you think this is positive or negative?
- Overall, based on all you have seen, experienced or heard, would you say the impacts of this agreement have been positive or negative for the river and its users?
 - What have been the positive impacts? Why do you say that?
 - What have been the negative impacts? Why do you say that?
- Can you think of any other effects as a result of the agreement?
 - Has there been an impact away from the river? If so what? Is this positive or negative?

- Has the agreement affected other parts of the river not covered by the agreement? If so, how? Is this positive/negative?

Key learning points

- Thinking about the entire process of the implementation of the access agreement, and the impact it has had on the river and its users, what have been the key learning points?
 - If voluntary agreements were going to be implemented in other areas, what would be your main piece of advice for those involved with the process?
 - Any pitfalls to avoid? Any element that is key to the success of an agreement?

- Is there anything else that you would like to mention that might help others do things better the next time?