



WINEP

**Evaluating customer support for
investigations and improvements to Wyke
Beck and River Wiske**

April 2023

HUMAN8

Background



As part of their statutory environmental obligations, Yorkshire Water submitted proposals to the Environment Agency on the 23rd of January detailing plans to improve water quality and river habitats. This will involve carrying out various investigations and improvement schemes across the region. However, shortly prior to the submission, YW informed the Environmental Agency about 2 additional investigations they would like to carry out: Wyke Beck (rerouting water from upstream to counter storm overflow) and the River Wiske (treating high phosphorous and pollution).

Objectives

- How do customers feel about the proposed investigations and improvements?
- How much would customers be willing to pay for this through their bills?
- How do customers feel about the proposed timings for the investigations and improvements?
- Does this affect how they feel about Yorkshire Water?

Methodology



We ran a survey on the Your Water community

DATE: 8th March – 13th March



277 members of the community took part in the survey

Proposals shared...

Wyke Beck

The first proposal is to investigate possible improvements to **Wyke Beck**.

This is a stream that runs from Roundhay Park to the River Aire in East Leeds.

Storm overflow and treated wastewater discharge into Wyke Beck from Knostrop wastewater treatment works. (Storm overflows are designed to discharge diluted but raw sewage into receiving waters during particularly heavy rain). The stream has also been modified in the past and does not provide a good river habitat i.e., a good natural place for wildlife to live. In a bid to improve the river and its habitat, Yorkshire Water are considering rerouting the water from upstream (Yorkshire Water do not currently own the channel and would therefore need to seek permission to alter it). Yorkshire Water wish to carry out investigations to determine the feasibility of this plan and possible alternatives (if necessary) and finally, how to implement them.

The investigation process would be carried out between 2025-2030. If it proved feasible, actual work would take place between 2030-2035.

River Wiske

The second proposition is to investigate possible improvements to the **River Wiske**.

The River Wiske is a tributary of the River Swale, beginning at the foot of the North Yorkshire moors. It suffers from pollution and flooding problems and has received a water quality classification of 'Poor' for phosphorus.

If phosphorus is not removed, it can starve the water of oxygen and harm the local wildlife.

The main form of treatment is chemical dosing (adding metal salts to wastewater to form solids which are then filtered out). Chemical dosing is not highly expensive but is a continuous cost and has a high carbon impact.

On the other hand, nature-based solutions are cheaper and have greater environmental benefits.

Yorkshire Water want to carry out investigations to determine how to improve the quality of the water and what additional improvements we can provide to the local environment. If the scheme is viable, it would provide phosphorus reduction within the catchment via potential wetlands and other methods to be identified in the investigation.

The investigation process would be carried out between 2025-2030. Actual work (if approved) would take place between 2030-2035.



Key insights & recommendations



Key insights

Customers are supportive of the investigations and improvements to both water courses. While support is slightly higher for the River Wiske improvements, this is largely because some customers would like to see YW stop using storm overflows altogether, not just mitigating their negative effects (as proposed for Wyke Beck).

While the majority support the improvements, they are not supportive of the timeline; 7 in 10 want to see work completed sooner. Many feel that timelines for both investigations and improvements are too leisurely and can't understand the delay in making progress.

Despite concerns around the timescales, 7 in 10 would feel more positively toward Yorkshire Water as a result of a commitment to these investigations/ improvements.

Just over 1 in 3 claim a willingness to pay over £1 per household per year, but a similar proportion would not be willing to pay anything. Some believe Yorkshire Water are the source of the issues and should take responsibility for the improvements and related costs.



Implications

At an overall level, the research suggests that customers are supportive of the investigations/improvements to Wyke Beck and the River Wiske, and that there is some willingness to pay towards this. While customers disagree with the timelines stated, it should be noted that they were not presented within the wider context of YW's overall plans. Customers may be more understanding about how quickly changes can be implemented if seeing how this fits within a wider roadmap of investigations and allowed business improvements.

Overview of key results

	Wyke Beck	River Wiske
Investigations net supportive	70%	81% ^
Investigations net unsupportive	8% ^	3%
Improvements net supportive	71%	82% ^
Improvements net unsupportive	9% ^	4%
% willing to pay anything extra for improvements	64%	64%
% unwilling to pay anything extra for improvements	36%	36%

Support is **significantly higher** for investigating, and improving River Wiske vs. Wyke Beck.

Some customers have strong negative reactions to storm overflows; lower support here tends to be centred around customers demanding Yorkshire Water stop the use of storm overflows altogether. Anything less is considered insufficient by some.

Some also feel they're lacking enough information to make an informed decision and this was particularly the case for Wyke Beck where not all could understand how the rerouting of water would foster a positive impact.

^ Significant difference between Wyke Beck and River Wiske

5 Q2-3 and Q6-7. How supportive/unsupportive are you of the proposed [investigations]/[improvements] to [Wyke Beck]/[River Wiske] n=277 Q11. How much extra would you be willing to contribute on your water bill per year for making improvements to Wyke Beck? N=277

Wyke Beck: First impressions and support

Based on initial impressions customers are pleased to hear of plans to improve Wyke Beck



Initial thoughts on investigations and improvements: Wyke Beck

Improvements are considered necessary and positive where they foster a better environment for wildlife and for recreational users of the stream.



Given the press around storm overflows, any actions that counter the negative effects of pollution are considered urgent and essential.



"This seems like a great thing to do as it is always good to help improve the river and its habitat as this will be beneficial to the area, the environment and animals that live in the area and for people, both locally and anyone who visits the area"

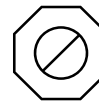


"If it were possible to do the investigations earlier than planned, with a view to starting work earlier it would be a good idea, in view of the recent publicity of raw sewage polluting rivers and the Sea"

However, the timeline is viewed poorly with many considering it too leisurely.



Many also flag that they are working with very limited information and need more detail to make an informed decision.



"Sounds like a plan to further dilute Yorkshire Water's destructive sewage discharges into the river environment i.e. it only alleviates the actions of Yorkshire Water there is no plan to abate or make less frequent"

Some will settle for no less than the complete cessation of storm overflows, anything else is considered insufficient.



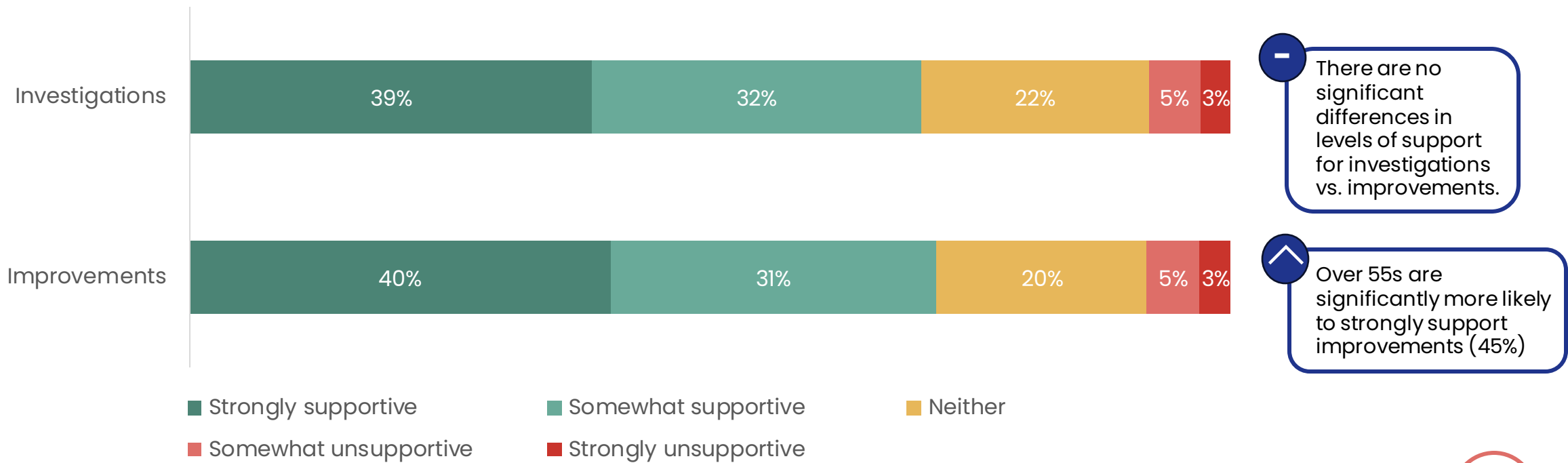
"I don't understand the proposal - rerouting the water from upstream does not describe to me how there would be any benefit to the habitat or water quality"

A minority are concerned about the impact this will have on their bills.

Over 7 in 10 express support for both investigations and improvements



Support for investigations and improvements: Wyke Beck



Watch out!
Yorkshire Water can be cautiously confident in customer support for investigations and improvements – but should remain mindful that this is based on limited information and with the caveat that the timeline is considered problematic.



Many are pleased to see the negative impact of storm overflows addressed, but some want them to stop being used altogether



Why supportive: Wyke Beck

Why unsupportive: Wyke Beck

Investigations

<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Quality of waterways is a priority.✓ Investigations feel necessary to determine the correct course of action.✓ There are hopes that this will involve key stakeholders/experts to ensure the most effective solutions are implemented.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">× Many who are only <i>somewhat</i> supportive clarify that they are supportive of actions but not the timelines.× Those who are unsupportive worry about the costs and timelines.× A minority feel there are other higher priorities e.g. improvements to other areas.
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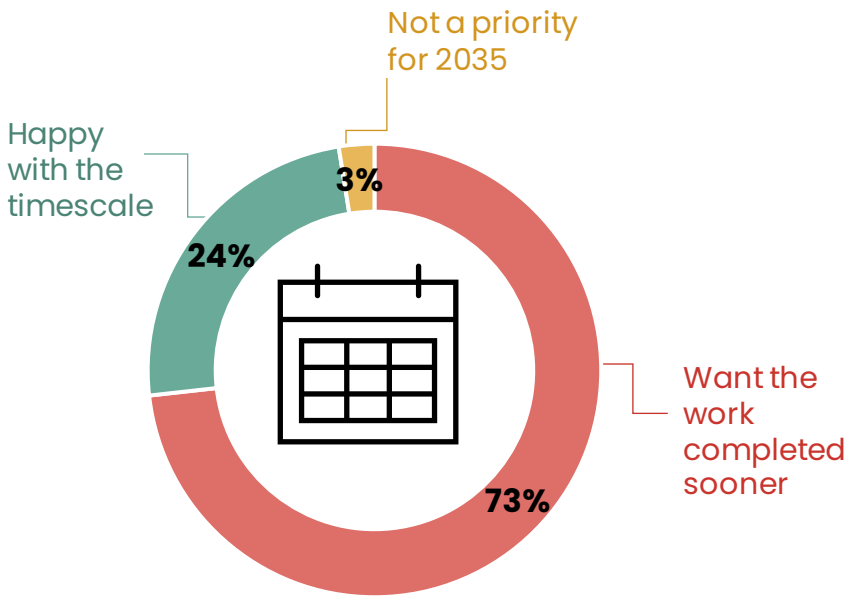
Improvements

<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ These improvements are considered essential.✓ But this is based on limited information/without a sense of cost. If improvements are deemed the most effective and appropriate solution customers would be comfortable with their implementation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">× Often those who are only somewhat supportive and those who are unsupportive implore Yorkshire Water to innovate when it comes to storm overflows – ideally finding alternatives so that they are no longer needed.
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...The importance placed on these improvements instils a sense of urgency – but the proposed timelines don't reflect this

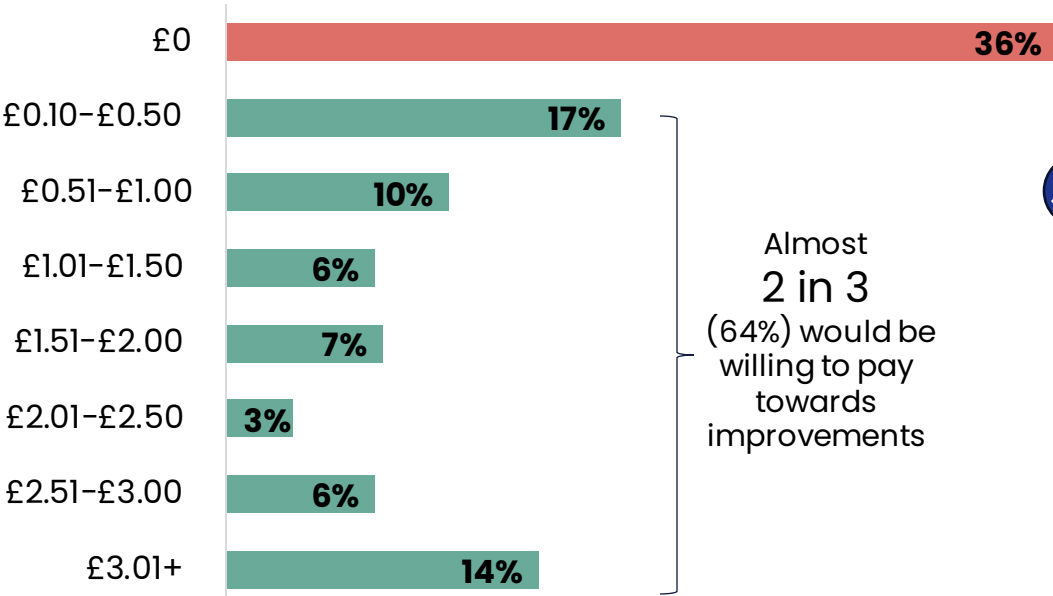


Timescale preferences: Wyke Beck



Over 55s are significantly more likely to want work completed sooner (78%).

Willingness to pay [WTP] (per household per year): Wyke Beck



Almost 2 in 3 (64%) would be willing to pay towards improvements

Those with a water meter are more likely to be willing to pay £3.01+ (17%).

	Based on all...	Based on those willing to pay...
Average amount WTP	£1.02	£1.60
Median amount WTP	30p	£1.25

River Wiske: First impressions and support

Customers strongly favour of nature-based solutions over chemical dosing but ask why prevention is not being considered as an option

Initial thoughts on investigations and improvements: River Wiske

Customers recognise the need for improvements and are overwhelmingly in favour of nature based-solutions (vs. chemical solutions).



"I would be happy for them to investigate and hopefully use nature-based solutions. They shouldn't be using the chemical dosing as we should be looking at environmentally friendly ways of doing things when they are available"

However, many also question the source of the phosphorous and whether this can be prevented as opposed to treated.



"Where does the phosphorus come from in the first place? Isn't the best thing to tackle the problem at source? Yes, finding a way to treat the problem is better than ignoring it, but the best solution is to stop the phosphorus in the first place isn't it?"

The timeline is again a cause for concern. Customers want to see this issue addressed urgently too and, as with Wyke Beck, struggle to understand why the investigations cannot begin immediately.



"Not sure why investigations can't start for 2 years then will take 5 years. Seems a ridiculously long timescale and the investigation work, which may conclude inconclusively, seems likely to be very expensive. Can't it be done quicker and more cheaply?"

Recommendation

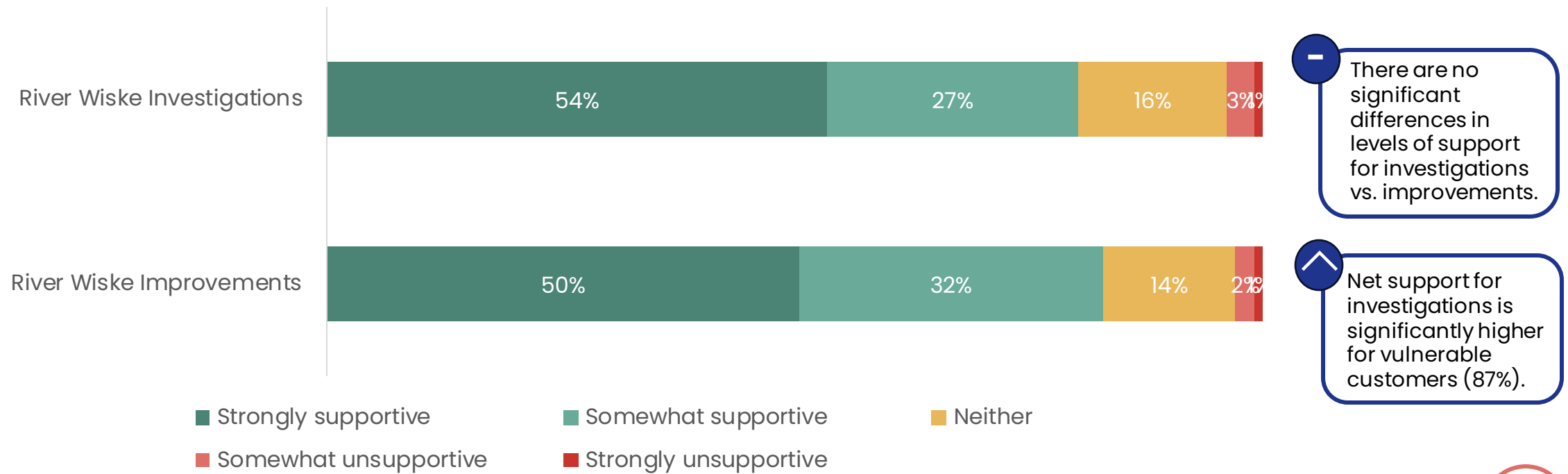
As many immediately question why Yorkshire Water are looking to treat the issue instead of preventing the issue, customers may benefit from education as to why this isn't possible, they'll likely be reassured to know this was at least considered.



4 in 5 are supportive of investigations and improvements to River Wiske



Support for investigations and improvements: River Wiske



Watch out!

As with Wyke Beck, Yorkshire Water can be cautiously confident in customer support for investigations and improvements – but should remain mindful that this is based on limited information and with the caveat that the timeline is considered problematic.



Given there are a number of forms of improvements under consideration customers see merit in investigating the best option



Why supportive: River Wiske

Why unsupportive: River Wiske

Investigations

- ✓ It is even more important to identify the best course of action when a number of solutions are under consideration.
- ✓ Essential for wildlife and biodiversity.
- ✓ Important to ensure all factors are taken into consideration e.g. environmental, financial etc.

- × Many who are only somewhat supportive and those who are unsupportive however, are displeased with the timelines.

Improvements

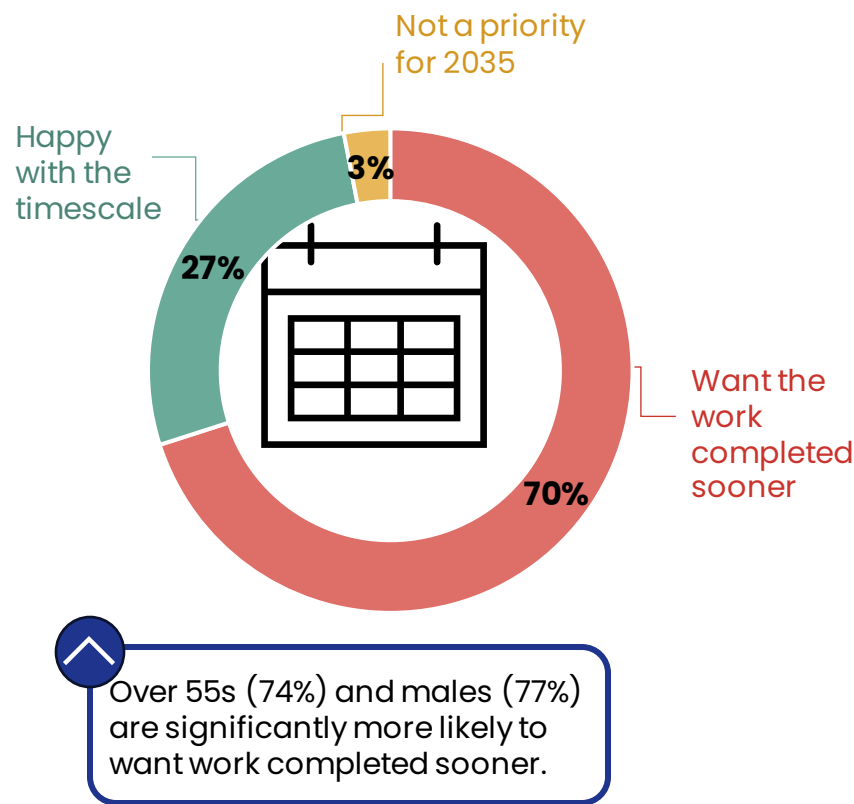
- ✓ Improvements outlined have clear benefits for biodiversity and wildlife.
- ✓ At face value the improvements sound necessary.

- × Those opposed cite costs and timings as the key factors limiting their support.

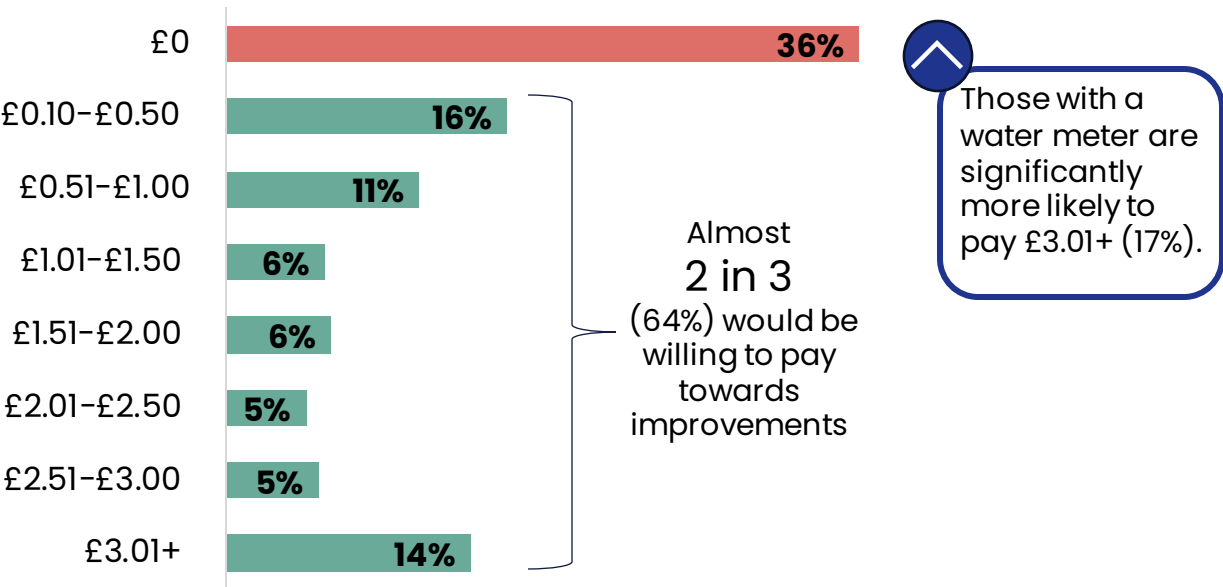
7 in 10 want to see work on River Wiske commence sooner than the proposed timings



Timescale preferences: River Wiske



Willingness to pay (per household per year): River Wiske

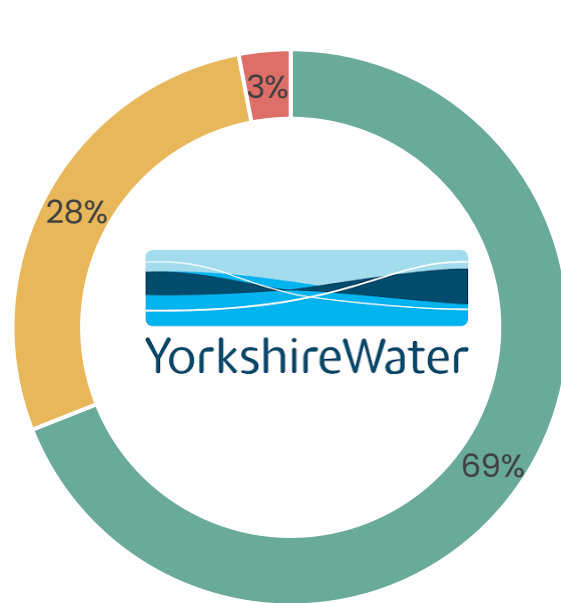


	Based on all...	Based on those willing to pay...
Average amount WTP	£1.02	£1.61
Median amount WTP	30p	£1.25

Impact on brand perceptions

Investigating and subsequently improving the watercourses should have a positive impact on perceptions of Yorkshire Water

Impact on perception of Yorkshire Water



- It would make me feel more positively toward them
- It wouldn't have any impact
- It would make me feel more negatively toward them



Those with a water meter are significantly more likely to feel more positively (73%).

Under 55s (37%) and those without a water meter (39%) are significantly more likely to feel neutral.

Customers are pleased to hear of Yorkshire Water's potential commitment to improve both watercourses.

They would ideally like to be provided with further details (and would likely be reassured to learn that a further consultation would be required before improvements were implemented).

There's a desire to see a breakdown of current plans for improvements and ideally key milestones to help them understand the suggested timeline.

Some believe Yorkshire Water has caused the issues with both Water courses and therefore have a responsibility to improve them.

And not all are willing to pay for improvements – again because it is felt to be Yorkshire Water's responsibility (or for a minority because they do not live in the area and would not benefit).

Appendix

Sample Profile (n=277)

GENDER



Male: **44%**



Female: **55%**

Prefer not to say: **1%**

AGE



18-24 years: **0%**



25 - 34 years: **5%**



35 - 44 years: **10%**



45 - 54 years: **17%**



55 - 64 years: **33%**



Over 65: **34%**

HOUSEHOLD SIZE



1 person household: **26%**



2 person household: **50%**



3 person household: **13%**



4 person household: **8%**



5 or more person household: **4%**

SEG



ABC1: **69%**



C2DE: **31%**

AREA OF YORKSHIRE



South Yorkshire: **17%**



West Yorkshire: **51%**



East Riding of Yorkshire: **12%**



North Yorkshire: **20%**

WATER METER



Have water meter: **70%**



Don't have a water meter: **29%**

Don't know: **1%**

VULNERABILITY



Vulnerable customer: **36%**



Non-vulnerable customer: **51%**

Not known: **13%**



About your community

With over 2,000 members, Your Water is an online research resource giving you easy access to consumers

The community offers a wide range of conventional and innovative research techniques and approaches.

Our aim is to approach every project with fresh thinking and apply methodologies that we truly believe will get you tangible, actionable results.

Any questions?

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