

Risk Assessment – Dinghy Sailing River Itchen (Self-Led, No Safety Cover)

Activity	Dinghy Sailing (Self-Led)	Location	River Itchen – Above Northam Bridge, Southampton
Conditions	High tide; no safety boat cover		
Participants	Informal group of sailors with mixed experience		
Produced by	James Wardle	Approved by	Stephen Everitt
Review	Review annually or following any incident or near miss		
Date	11 th Jan 2026		

Scope and Context

This risk assessment covers informal, self-led dinghy sailing on the River Itchen above Northam Bridge at high tide, undertaken without dedicated safety boat cover.

This is a self-organised, peer-to-peer activity. Participants sail together as equals and are individually responsible for their own safety, navigation, and decision-making. No participant is acting in a supervisory or instructional role.

The area is relatively sheltered and overlooked, with generally accessible banks that allow for self-rescue following a capsize. However, hazards include bridge structures, tidal flow, interaction with other river users, cold water, and limited external assistance.

Hazard	Who Might Be Harmed	Risk	Existing Controls / Mitigation	Risk Level	Further Actions
Being swept onto bridges	All sailors	Injury or damage from collision with bridge piers or arches	Maintain safe distance from bridges; be aware of wind and tidal direction and their likely effects on boat handling and set; use paddles or oars if required	High	Brief sailors on wind/tide effects before launching
Capsize	Sailors	Cold water shock, entrapment, loss of control	Buoyancy aids worn; sail in buddy pairs; short distance to bank for self-recovery; keep all ropes and equipment tidy and controlled to reduce	Medium	Review personal righting and recovery techniques

			entanglement risk; phones carried in dry bags		
Interaction with rowing boats	Sailors and rowers	Collision or disruption to rowing activity	Maintain good lookout; pass port-to-port where possible; avoid rowing lanes; communicate courteously with other water users	Medium	Agree avoidance areas in advance
Chase or coaching powerboats	Sailors	Wash or speed causing instability or collision	Stay clear of active coaching areas; wear visible clothing; indicate presence clearly	Medium	Increase separation if powerboat activity increases
Lack of safety cover	All participants	Delayed response to incidents	Stay within easy reach of the bank; avoid solo sailing; mobile phones in waterproof cases; pre-agreed emergency and communication plan	High	Confirm shore contact before launching
Cold water exposure	Capsized sailors	Hypothermia	Limit session duration; wear wetsuits or appropriate layers; exit water promptly after capsize; warm shelter available ashore	Medium	Monitor water temperature and sailor condition
Entanglement in moorings or debris	Sailors	Injury or entrapment	Avoid known moorings and debris fields; centreboards raised in shallow or obstructed areas; maintain tidy deck and cockpit	Low	Identify temporary hazards before launching

General Notes

- This is a self-led activity with no safety boat cover.

- Participants must assess their own competence and suitability for the conditions.
- Sailing should be conservative, prioritising control and proximity to the bank.
- A shore contact should be informed of plans and expected return time.
- This risk assessment aligns with RYA safety guidance and good river seamanship practice.