

River Wensum Strategy Consultation
Report by Senior Waterways and Recreation Officer

Summary: This report provides members with details of the draft River Wensum Strategy that is currently being consulted on and highlights the main aims and objectives of the strategy and its proposed action plan.

Recommendation: That Members endorse the vision and objectives of the draft strategy and provide officers with comments on the proposed content of the strategy and its action plan for referring to the strategy working group.

1 Introduction

1.1 The River Wensum Strategy Partnership (RWSP) has recently consulted on a draft strategy for the future management of the River Wensum in Norwich with the overarching aim of repurposing and revitalising the river to make it a tourism asset for the City. The RWSP is led by Norwich City Council working in partnership with the Broads Authority, Norfolk County Council, the Environment Agency and the Norwich Society. The draft strategy was informed by an issues and opportunities consultation, and through ongoing dialogue between partners, stakeholders and local residents. The strategy area of the River Wensum extends from Hellesdon Mill in the west to Whitlingham Country Park in the East. Although the formal public consultation on the draft strategy ended on the 15th of September it was agreed that the Broads Authority could submit comments after that date. The draft strategy can be viewed at www.norwich.gov.uk/riverwensum

2 Vision and objectives

2.1 The strategy vision is to: “breathe new life into the river by enhancing it for the benefit of all and increasing access to, and greater use of, this important asset. The river will once again play an important part in the growth and vitality of the city, strengthening the visitor economy and helping to give the city a competitive advantage in attracting inward investment”.

2.2 The objectives set out in the strategy for delivering this vision are:

- improving the management of the river corridor and its surroundings for the benefit of the City, residents of the wider Norwich area, and visitors;
- increasing access to, and use of, the area by all, including enhanced connectivity with the Norfolk Trails network;
- enhancing the natural environment and green infrastructure;

- enhancing the City's environmental, cultural and historic offer in a manner which maximises the attractiveness of the area as a location to do business;
- enhancing heritage, making the most of the unique historic environment within the river corridor;
- addressing social deprivation and inequalities;
- maximising the efficiency of public expenditure in the river corridor, where possible reducing the pressure on stretched public sector budgets; and
- identifying and exploiting external funding opportunities including private sector investment.

3 The draft strategy proposals

3.1 The strategy seeks to deliver the objectives through a number of themed sections which are set out below. Some of the objectives, for example enhancing heritage, and addressing social deprivation and inequalities, are cross-cutting and inform policies and proposals in several chapters, so are not identified as themed chapters in their own right.

3.2 Management

A well-managed river corridor, with effective joint working between partners, is a pre-requisite for the regeneration of the river corridor and to maximise benefits to the City and wider area. Management proposals in the strategy include:

- closer working between strategy partners (in particular the City Council and Broads Authority) to improve and streamline management of the river corridor. The City Council and Broads Authority have already developed a joint protocol to ensure a co-ordinated approach to key management and enforcement issues including illegal mooring and sunken boats;
- clarification of key partner responsibilities for the river is provided in the strategy (see Appendix 1 within the strategy annex). This shows that primary responsibility for maintenance within the river corridor falls upon the City Council, including grounds maintenance, maintenance of river structures, open spaces and of the riverside walk. In response, the strategy seeks opportunities to maximise volunteer and community input into maintenance and environmental improvements, and to explore potential for sponsorship for some ongoing maintenance where appropriate. The strategy also states that development of individual proposals must fully address maintenance costs and identify how this will be funded so as not to add to future maintenance liabilities;
- establishment of delivery arrangements including a delivery board and a strategic board to oversee implementation and monitoring, involving joint working with key delivery partners;
- Working with external partners and stakeholders, including the business community, to deliver the strategy and access external funding. There is

great potential for partnership working with those external organisations whose objectives complement those of the strategy, which could include development of projects and initiatives to maximise benefits for the river - both physical improvements to access for example, as well as a more joined up approach to issues within the river corridor such as health and wellbeing, and economic development. Paragraph 3.13 in the strategy sets out a list of potential partners which includes Norwich BID which now includes the river within its expanded area, Norfolk Trails and Active Norfolk.

3.3 Access for walking and cycling

A key strategy theme is increasing walking and cycling access to the river corridor. The proposed access measures in the strategy seek to encourage increased use of the river corridor by commuters and leisure users, and help to create the conditions for local businesses to thrive through increased footfall and activity including events and festivals, whilst supporting health initiatives which encourage activity. Proposals include:

- completion of the Riverside Walk between New Mills and Trowse Swing Bridge within the strategy lifetime (see policy 2). This includes action plan projects to complete two key 'missing links' (in the vicinity of the Norwich Playhouse, between Duke's Palace Bridge and Blackfriars Bridge; and between Fye Bridge and Whitefriars);
- accessibility improvements are also proposed, including infrastructure improvements to the Riverside Walk to ensure access for people of all ages and abilities (policy 3), and improved signage between the river and key visitor destinations (policy 4). A Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funded action plan project has recently commenced which will address these key accessibility issues;
- the strategy also proposes greater connectivity between the Riverside Walk and Norfolk Trails (policy 5) including better links between the Riverside Walk and Marriott's Way at Barn Road to encourage commuters and leisure users (action plan project A4), and enhanced links with the Broads cycling and walking network at Whitlingham Country Park in the longer term. The RWSP is also exploring whether the Riverside Walk could be part of the Norfolk Trails network which could have benefits for promotion and for greater coordination in terms of management and maintenance.

3.4 Waterways access and leisure

Perhaps the main way the strategy can deliver its overarching aim of reinvigorating the river is by providing new, and enhancing existing, waterways infrastructure as this will encourage greater recreational use of the river in the heart of the city. This chapter includes a number of action plan projects which are shown on map 12 including:

- an improved slipway at Friar's Quay and enhanced moorings at the Yacht station;
- new short-stay visitor moorings and demasting moorings in a number of locations including at Quayside, between Carrow Bridge and Lady Julian Bridge and Carrow Bridge and Trowse Swing Bridge;
- improved canoeing infrastructure including new canoe access points at New Mills;
- enhancement of angling access and fish habitat;
- increasing the use of the existing river jetties at Elm Hill and the station;
- promotion of river events and trails including a proposed river festival.

3.5 Environment

The strategy aims to improve the natural environment, the public realm and open spaces near to the river. The river is a wildlife corridor and its sensitive enhancement has the potential to improve ecology and biodiversity in the heart of the city. Proposals include:

- improvements to water quality in specific stretches of the river including a proposal to reduce the levels of oils and fats entering the river from food related businesses in the Magdalen Street/Fye Bridge Street area;
- protection and enhancement of biodiversity of the river and riverbanks including proposals for floating vegetation platforms; a biodiversity enhancement and non-invasive species management plan and an eel pass at New Mills to assist with migration of this protected species (which has now been installed);
- The enhancement of green infrastructure and areas of open space is also proposed (policy 15). The strategy includes an action plan project to enhance the setting of one of the historic Boom Towers adjacent to Carrow Bridge. The Devil's Tower is a scheduled ancient monument located at one of the historic gateways to the city, with potential for an enhanced open space to serve the rapidly expanding local population and visitors.

4 **Longer term opportunities**

- 4.1 The strategy also identifies some potential projects as opportunities for the future which may be developed in the strategy lifetime as opportunities arise. These include the historic New Mills pumping house, the medieval Boom Towers and city walls/wooded ridge in east Norwich, Bishop's Bridge to Cow tower open space, Mary Chapman Court riverside site in the northern city centre, and Wensum Park. Additionally further opportunities for improved access upstream of New Mills have been identified but all these potential

opportunities require detailed investigation in order to establish feasibility and costings.

5 Funding

- 5.1 The strategy aims to deliver improvements to the river corridor over a ten year period. The action plan will identify projects that are likely to be deliverable in the short to medium term. Other projects will require external funding and this is currently being looked at in detail by the RWSP. Potential sources of project funding include Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), Anglian Water and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 The objectives, policies and projects outlined in the draft strategy document propose an integrated approach to managing the Wensum in order to maximise its potential for tourism, navigation, green infrastructure, biodiversity and business development. This approach is to be welcomed as the strategy presents a real opportunity to deliver a wide range of social, environmental and recreational benefits for the City through partnership working particularly through enhancements to land and water access.
- 6.2 Members' comments on the draft strategy are welcomed.

Background paper:	None
Report author:	Adrian Clarke
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Broads Plan Objectives:	Multiple particularly C 4.1 and E 6.1.
Appendices:	None