

River Wensum Strategy
Report by Senior Waterways and Recreation Officer

Summary: This report provides members with an update on progress with the River Wensum Strategy (RWS) since the public consultation on the proposed strategy took place in 2017. A final version of the strategy has now been produced which takes account of the responses received during the consultation. Overall the final version of the strategy has not been fundamentally changed from the draft version which was supported by the Navigation Committee at its meeting on the 7th of September 2017. The final version of the Strategy still includes policies and proposals that seek to enhance navigation and boating access to the River Wensum. The Strategy is due to be adopted by the partners by the end of Summer 2018 and will be delivered over a ten year period.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The River Wensum Strategy Partnership (RWSP) was created in December 2014 to develop a strategy for the River Wensum in Norwich in order to maximise its potential for regeneration, in particular by encouraging greater access on land and water to the river corridor, enhancing its natural and built environment and biodiversity value, and by stimulating business and economic activity on the river. The RWSP is led and project managed by Norwich City Council and the strategy partners are the Broads Authority, Norfolk County Council, the Environment Agency, and the Wensum River Parkway Partnership. The strategy area covers the River Wensum from Hellesdon Mill in the west to Whitlingham Country Park in the East.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to present the final version of the River Wensum Strategy to the Navigation Committee for information. The RWS is a long term strategy to facilitate positive change in the river corridor, particularly by improving access and facilities which will allow for increased activity on the river and help to change perceptions of the city as a visitor destination in the southern Broads.

2 The final strategy

- 2.1 The final strategy is the culmination of sustained partnership working by the partners in the River Wensum Strategy Partnership since late 2014. All the partners have contributed to the development of the strategy through regular Working Group and Project Board meetings. The RWSP carried out two public and stakeholder consultations first on issues and opportunities for the river corridor (in 2015) and then on a draft strategy document (in 2017). There

was a very positive level of response from the public consultation demonstrating a strong public interest in the strategy from local residents, key public bodies, local businesses and stakeholder groups. The Navigation Committee considered and supported the draft strategy at its meeting on the 7th of September 2017.

- 2.2 While the revised strategy has taken on board many of the consultation responses overall it has not fundamentally changed from the draft version which was published in 2017. It has the same key themes as the draft strategy: **management and partnership working, access for walking and cycling, waterways access, and environmental enhancements**, with the overall aim of regenerating the river corridor. In terms of delivery, the revised strategy emphasises the importance of working in partnership with key stakeholders to implement policies and proposals, and the importance of seeking external project funding. The final strategy document is included at Appendix 2, the initial action plan can be seen at Appendix 3 and an executive summary is set out at Appendix 1 to this report.
- 2.3 However, there have been some minor changes to the document in particular to stress that its focus is not just on the city centre but also on the river upstream of New Mills. This is reflected by the fact that the document identifies a number of potential projects in the upstream area of the Wensum. Other changes highlight the importance of the natural and built environment, including the historic environment in the river corridor, and inclusion of assessment criteria for potential projects. Greater reference is also added into the strategy to encourage the active participation of local communities and stakeholders in project delivery where appropriate.
- 2.4 The strategy and action plan include all the policies and projects intended to encourage greater boating activity that were previously supported by the Navigation Committee. These include projects to provide various short stay moorings and demasting moorings, the construction of canoe access points, the re-establishment of mooring at the upstream end of the Norwich Yacht Station and enhancing the slipway at Friars Quay. The strategy also seeks to provide benefits for anglers and the Broads Authority is working with the Broads Angling Services Group to ensure that angling enhancements will be included in the action plan.
- 2.5 The revised strategy provides a clear vision and set of objectives for the River Wensum corridor, and proposes a set of policies and projects that will help to bring about sustainable regeneration of the river corridor for the benefit of the RWS partners, residents, businesses and visitors to the city. It will help to:
- Attract external investment: the strategy will act as a basis for funding bids; its emphasis on working closely with key partners and stakeholders is likely to improve access to funding opportunities.
 - Support growth: Delivery of enhanced green infrastructure along the river corridor will support the major housing and employment growth planned for the city centre and east Norwich.

- Support the local economy: a more accessible river corridor with a high quality public realm will help boost the local economy, both by providing a backdrop more attractive to the relocation and creation of business in the creative sector and also by attracting tourists and visitors with benefits to Norwich's shopping, heritage and visitor attractions.
- Reduce inequalities: the strategy has potential health and recreational benefits for existing communities adjacent to the river, some of which suffer from high levels of deprivation and health inequalities.
- Address management and maintenance of the river corridor. More streamlined management of the river corridor will help to deal with issues such as illegal mooring more quickly. There is also potential for involving volunteers and local communities in project delivery, which has the potential for reducing management and maintenance costs.

3 Conclusions

- 3.1 The strategy partners propose to adopt the strategy over the period June to September 2018 and deliver the identified improvements to the river corridor over a ten year period. The action plan identifies a range of projects that are likely to be deliverable in the short to medium term as resources allow. Some 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. The action plan will also be reviewed on an annual basis and any new projects suggested will be assessed against a project prioritisation matrix.
- 3.2 The strategy has the potential to deliver significant improvements for recreational access to the River Wensum corridor and increase the profile of the city of Norwich as a boating and canoeing destination. The strategy will be taken to the Broads Authority meeting on the 27th of July for adoption.

Background paper:	None
Report author:	Adrian Clarke
Date of report:	4 June 2018
Broads Plan Objectives:	TR1/TR3/NA4
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – River Wensum Strategy Executive Summary Appendix 2 – River Wensum Final Strategy Appendix 3 – River Wensum Strategy Initial Action Plan

Appendix 1

Executive summary

About the River Wensum

The River Wensum runs through the heart of Norwich and was once the centre of city life and industry. However as the city has changed the focus of activity has moved away from the river. Now very little activity is currently evident on the river itself or on the open spaces beside it.

But the river is now cleaner and greener than in the past. It now enjoys much improved public access, with 11km of riverside walk created since the 1970s and three new bridges built since 2001. It is a short walk from one of the most vibrant city centres in the country, and adjacent to Norwich University of the Arts. It runs through the most historic part of the city centre with many nearby notable landmarks including Norwich Cathedral, The Halls, Fye Bridge and Bishop's Bridge.

A thriving riverside environment with improved access and a high quality public realm has the potential to greatly benefit the city and wider Norwich area. The River Wensum Strategy is a long-term strategy aimed at facilitating change and regeneration in the river corridor by helping to change perceptions of the city as a visitor destination, improving the quality of life, and acting as an economic driver to attract external investment and contribute to Norwich's regeneration.

About the River Wensum Strategy Partnership

A new partnership has been established to develop a strategy to revitalise the River Wensum. The River Wensum Strategy Partnership (RWSP) is led by Norwich City Council working alongside the Broads Authority, Norfolk County Council, the Environment Agency, and the Wensum River Parkway Partnership.

The RWSP has consulted with other stakeholders and the public to help it shape a 10 year strategy and a 3 year action plan. It is anticipated that a final strategy will be adopted by the RWSP members in mid 2018.

The strategy vision

The strategy covers the River Wensum corridor from the city council boundary at Hellesdon in the west to Whitlingham Country Park in the east. The 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. An enhanced river corridor, with its unique natural and historic environment, 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’.

The objectives are for delivering the 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, biodiversity 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 the historic environment, ensuring its long term conservation where practicable, and making the most of the unique and significant heritage assets 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.

The draft strategy proposals:

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 (set out in section three) include:

- Clarification of Partners’ roles and responsibilities to make it easier for stakeholders and the public to know who to contact.
- Establishment of delivery arrangements including a delivery board to oversee day-to-day management of the river, and a strategic board to oversee implementation and monitoring, involving joint working with key delivery partners.

- Working with local stakeholder groups and those who live and work in the vicinity of the river to help deliver the strategy.
- Ensuring that ongoing maintenance is addressed fully for all projects and proposals to make sure that they do not add to ongoing public maintenance expenditure.

Access and leisure

A key strategy theme is increasing access to the river corridor, including enhancing connectivity with the Norfolk Trails network (section four), and encouraging greater leisure and commercial use of the river itself (section five). Proposed access measures will 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 event and festivals, whilst supporting health initiatives which encourage activity.

Proposals include:

- Completion of the riverside walk between New Mills and Trowse Swing Bridge, including construction of the key 'missing link' of the Riverside Walk between Duke's Palace and St George's Street
- Improvements to the accessibility of the Riverside Walk downstream of New Mills making it accessible for people of all ages and abilities, and enhanced signage between the river and key tourist and visitor locations including the city centre
- An improved cycle crossing of the Barn Road roundabout to encourage greater commuting and leisure usage of the Marriott's Way and the Riverside Walk
- Enhanced links with the Broads network at Whitlingham Country Park in the longer term
- Enhancement of existing, and creation of new, river infrastructure. This includes an improved slipway at Friar's Quay and enhanced moorings at the Yacht station. New short-stay visitor moorings are proposed in a number of locations including Quayside and between Carrow Bridge and Lady Julian Bridge. The strategy also encourages improved canoeing infrastructure including new canoe access points at New Mills
- Enhancement of angling access and fish habitat
- Promotion of river events and trails including a proposed river festival.

Environment

The strategy aims to improve the natural and historic environment, the public realm and open spaces near to the river (section six). 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 to manage non-native species; and an eel pass at New Mills to assist with migration of this protected species (which has now been installed)
- Improvements to open spaces adjacent to the river to maximise their use for leisure and recreation as well as enhancing biodiversity and heritage features where appropriate.
- Conserve and where possible enhance the historic environment and individual designated and non-designated heritage assets along the riverbank.

Ideas for the future

The strategy also identifies some potential projects as opportunities for the future (section seven), 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, Mary Chapman Court riverside site in the northern city centre, and Wensum Park. These potential opportunities require detailed investigation in order to establish feasibility and costings.

Action plan and funding

The strategy aims to facilitate regeneration of the river corridor in the longer term, but includes an action plan with a number of projects considered capable of delivery in the short to medium term (approximately three years) to kick-start the process of positive change. The action plan also includes an assessment of potential project suggestions in order to identify additional projects for future delivery. It is a living document and will be updated as required.

The strategy proposes working with external partners and relevant stakeholders and community groups to attract funding to the river corridor. Potential sources of project funding for action plan projects include Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), Anglian Water, and the Water Mills and Marshes Landscape Partnership. Other sources of funding will be applied for as projects develop.

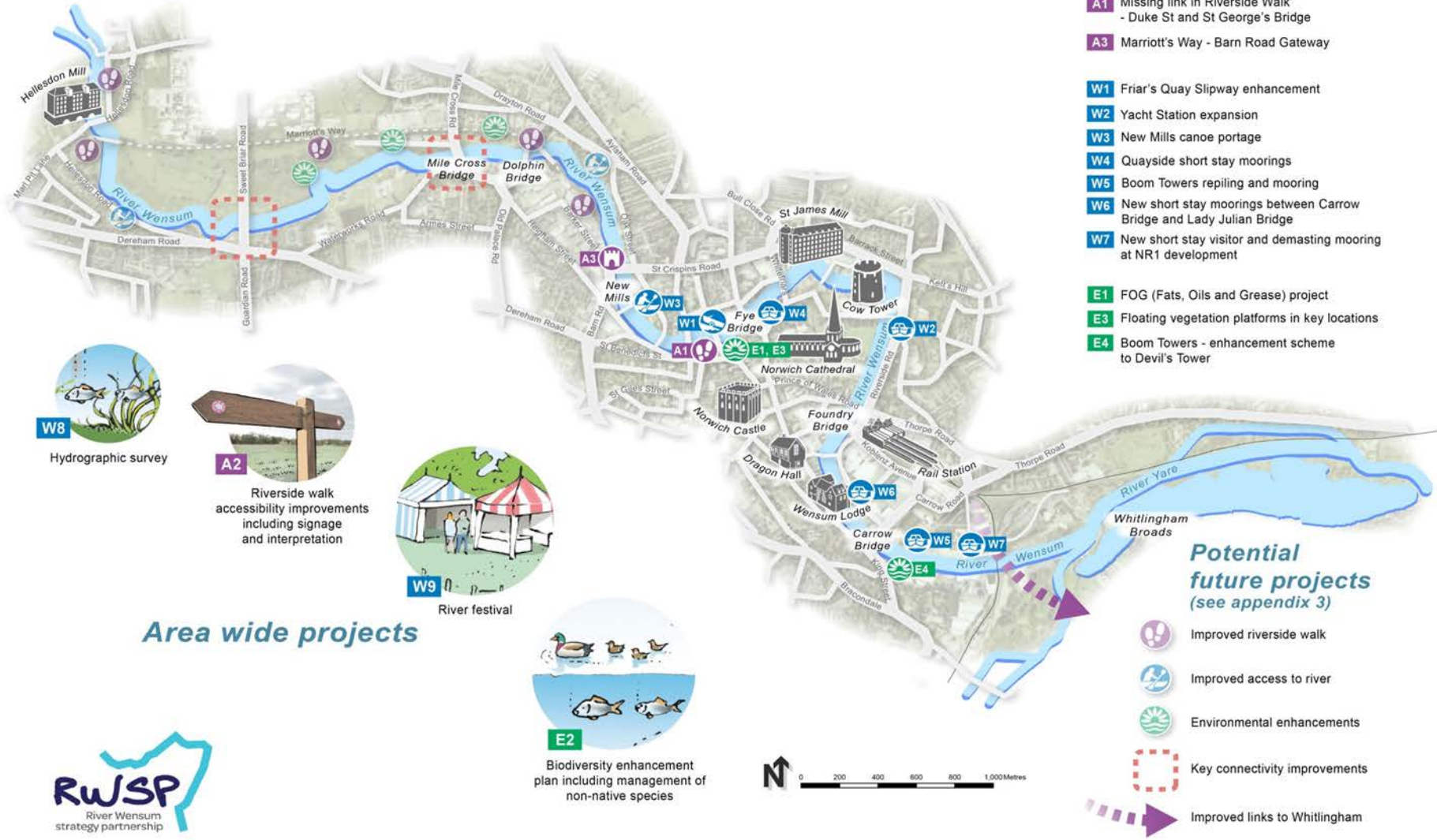
Strategy benefits

The strategy will have a range of economic, social, environmental and heritage benefits including:

- Increased access to the river corridor and an enhanced public realm for the benefit of residents, businesses and visitors

- Boosting the local economy by providing an environment conducive to the establishment and growth of various creative businesses and by attracting tourists and visitors with benefits to Norwich's shopping, heritage and visitor attractions
- Improved green infrastructure to support the delivery of major housing growth planned for the city centre and east Norwich areas
- Providing health and recreational benefits for the existing communities adjacent to the river, some of which suffer from high levels of deprivation and health inequalities
- Improved natural environment and biodiversity in the river corridor, acting as a green lung in the heart of the city
- Identification of funding opportunities and potential for private sector investment, through focused attention on the river.

Summary of projects & key opportunities



Site specific projects

- A1** Missing link in Riverside Walk - Duke St and St George's Bridge
- A3** Marriott's Way - Barn Road Gateway
- W1** Friar's Quay Slipway enhancement
- W2** Yacht Station expansion
- W3** New Mills canoe portage
- W4** Quayside short stay moorings
- W5** Boom Towers repiling and mooring
- W6** New short stay moorings between Carrow Bridge and Lady Julian Bridge
- W7** New short stay visitor and demasting mooring at NR1 development
- E1** FOG (Fats, Oils and Grease) project
- E3** Floating vegetation platforms in key locations
- E4** Boom Towers - enhancement scheme to Devil's Tower



W8
Hydrographic survey

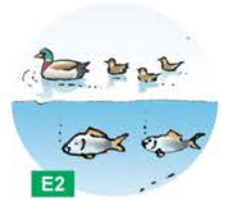


A2
Riverside walk accessibility improvements including signage and interpretation



W9
River festival

Area wide projects



E2
Biodiversity enhancement plan including management of non-native species



Potential future projects (see appendix 3)

- Improved riverside walk
- Improved access to river
- Environmental enhancements
- Key connectivity improvements
- Improved links to Whittingham