

Wensum River Parkway Update including Deal Ground Bridge Planning Application

Report by Senior Waterways and Recreation Officer

Summary: This report provides members with an update on the work of the Wensum River Parkway Partnership and detail of an outline planning permission recently granted by the Broads Authority for a pedestrian bridge linking the proposed Deal Ground development site with the Utilities site over the River Wensum.

Recommendation: That members note the contents of the report.

1 Background

- 1.1 The Wensum River Parkway Partnership, which currently comprises Norwich Heart, The Broads Authority and Norwich City Council, was founded in order to improve the management and development of access to the River Wensum through the City of Norwich. Aside from the general ambition to raise the profile of the river as an asset to the City, one of the key aims of the Partnership was the establishment of a continuous riverside walk through the City linking Whitlingham Country Park with the Marriot's Way. A significant part of this route has been established although there is still a missing link between St George's Bridge and Duke Street Bridge in the centre of Norwich and no link to Whitlingham downstream of Carrow Bridge.
- 1.2 Recently the Partnership has proposed developing an Integrated River Corridor Strategy for the Wensum building on the work carried out by the Broads Authority in the development of its Integrated Access Strategy. The Partnership has identified a need to work in partnership with other local authorities and businesses in order to realise its ambitions for the river.

2 Norwich City Council River and Riverbank Strategy

- 2.1 Norwich City Council (NCC) is also currently developing a strategy for the management of the river which focuses on its land holdings and interests but also seeks to support initiatives that enhance public use of the river and its banks in accordance with the aims of the Wensum River Parkway Partnership. The Partnership is therefore currently working with NCC on the development of its strategy in order to maximise opportunities for delivering improvements to access in the river corridor through this initiative.
- 2.2 One of the priorities for the Partnership is identifying landownership, use and management throughout the river corridor in order to identify opportunities for access projects. Some mapping work has already been carried out in

partnership with the City Council but further work is required to develop a complete map of the river corridor.

3 Current planning proposals

- 3.1 Currently the Partnership is also seeking to encourage and support proposals put forward by developers for new links on the river parkway which have arisen from existing planning agreements. For example developers have recently come forward with proposals for a shared use cycle/pedestrian path on the residential development immediately downstream of Carrow Bridge which will provide a section of the missing route to Whitlingham Country Park.

4 Deal Ground Bridge

- 4.1 One of the key factors required for the development of a continuous route to Whitlingham Country Park is the need to cross the river in the area of the Utilities Site and Deal Ground. These brownfield sites sit on the north and south banks of the river respectively.
- 4.2 To the south of the Deal Ground is the former May Gurney site which covers five hectares. This site fronts The Street at Trowse and is bordered to the north and west by the River Yare, which on the west side is at the head of navigation at Trowse bridge. Access to the Deal Ground is through the May Gurney site, this access has a junction on The Street, Trowse and links to the roundabout at County Hall. There is planning permission for a mixed-use redevelopment scheme on this part of the site and this includes a bridge to cross the River Yare and access the Deal Ground. The air draft height of this bridge has been set at a minimum of 6'.
- 4.3 Together, the Deal Ground and Utilities sites have been identified as strategically important and with the potential to provide major mixed use, sustainable development to help to meet the Greater Norwich Development Partnership (GNDP) growth agenda in term of new housing and jobs and to regenerate east Norwich. Both sites suffer from a range of potential constraints, including contamination, access and flood risk and are in fragmented ownership. Both sites are within the area administered by Norwich City as LPA.
- 4.4 In May 2013 Norwich City Council resolved to grant planning permission for a major redevelopment of the Deal Ground site comprising the construction of a maximum of 670 residential units (594 on the Deal Ground site and 76 on the May Gurney site), a Local Centre comprising nine commercial units totalling 1,265 sq m within the May Gurney site, a restaurant dining quarter and a public house comprising five commercial units totalling 1,210 sq m within the Deal Ground site, landscaping measures to provide bio-swailes, wetland habitats adjacent to the Carrow Abbey Marsh CWS plus access road, pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure. The Broads Authority was consulted on this planning application and a report was presented to Planning Committee on 26 April 2013.

- 4.5 Central to the development of the Deal Ground site is a requirement for an access to the site from the north, i.e. from across the Wensum. This is required to limit the volume of vehicle traffic accessing the site via the roundabout at County Hall (which is at capacity) by providing an easy alternative pedestrian and cycle access, to improve the sustainability of the development and to integrate the development fully into the surrounding urban area.
- 4.6 The Broads Authority recently received an outline planning application setting out the principles of a proposal to provide the required bridge. The application site area extends from the junction of Hardy Road with Kerrison Road (adjacent to the eastern end of the Norwich City Football Club/Laurence Scott Electromotors site), south and then east along Hardy Road and under the Trowse Railway bridge to an area of land adjacent to the Network Rail land north of the river which would form the northern landing point of the bridge. On the southern bank the bridge would land within the Deal Ground site. The bridge would be located approximately 70m downstream of the Trowse Rail Bridge.
- 4.7 The outline proposals showed an opening bridge with a soffit height of a minimum of 14' (4.3m) above mean high water springs. The overall span of the bridge would be approximately 50m across and the central section of approximately 17.4m wide would open, albeit only to 12m wide. This would give an opening section across one third of the river's width at this point. Supports within the river channel would be required, but these would be outside of the opening section. No final details of design have been included, but it is suggested that in order to achieve the opening arrangement the bridge be of either a double bascule or sliding type. The bridge deck would be approximately 4.1m wide and would accommodate pedestrians and cyclists. There would be no vehicular access over the bridge.
- 4.8 No undertaking regarding the opening arrangements was submitted in the application, however it is understood from the agent that the bridge would be kept normally in the 'closed' position and would open as required. The agent advises that in respect of opening arrangements the applicants are proposing to adhere to the requirements of Section 25 (4) of the Trowse Bridge Act which requires:
- (a) The new bridge shall be provided with adequate machinery, works and conveniences for opening and closing of the opening span of the bridge.
 - (b) Unless prevented by unavoidable injury or accident to the new bridge, the Board shall open the new bridge when completed for the passage of vessels on request at any time of the day or night except when engines or carriages shall be about to pass over the new bridge and on any such occasions the new bridge shall not be closed so as to delay or detain any vessel for longer than shall be necessary to allow the passage of such engines and carriages;

- 4.9 The maintenance of navigation has been one of the key drivers of the design of the bridge, with the minimum requirement being a navigable height under the bridge of no less than 4.3m MHWS, which is equivalent to that offered by the bridges further upstream. The objective in setting this minimum height is to ensure no further impediment to navigation. Whilst it is accepted that the Trowse Rail Bridge is currently at a lower height, it is the aspiration of the Authority to improve the bridge height here over time and there have been negotiations with Network Rail regarding this. Construction of the bridge at this height would provide an air draft sufficient to maintain navigation at a standard no less than the current standard in this reach, although it is accepted that there would be a much longer bridge hole for vessels to pass through before being restored to unimpeded water (i.e. the 4.1m of the new bridge, plus the approximately 70m to the Network Rail bridge, plus the length of that).
- 4.10 There is concern over the width of the opening section, which at 12m wide is less than the opening section of Trowse Rail Bridge which is 12.9m. The preferred opening width would be 15m, to allow turning and manoeuvring space before Trowse Rail bridge, and amendments to the scheme have been requested. Members will be updated. In the event that further information is not provided, this matter will have to be covered by planning condition.
- 4.11 A more fundamental concern relates to the management arrangements for the opening of the bridge, and historic problems with the opening of the Trowse Rail Bridge have illustrated the issues which arise when opening cannot be reliably achieved. The Authority has worked hard with Network Rail to resolve these historic issues and would not want to introduce a new impediment having now made progress in reaching agreement on resolving the historic problems. This was an issue raised by the Navigation Committee. The agent for the applicant advises that they can offer an identical arrangement to that set out in the Trowse Bridge Act – i.e. an on demand opening – and requests that this be covered by planning condition. The Authority's solicitor advises that this matter can be dealt with by a Grampian condition to the effect that the development must not begin until a bridge opening plan (including arrangements for ensuring that the obligations for the opening of the bridge are complied with) has been submitted to and approved by the Broads Authority and that thereafter the bridge opening plan must be complied with. A similar condition could be imposed covering the maintenance arrangements.
- 4.12 The application as originally submitted showed no provision for dolphins or pontoons upstream and downstream, either to protect the bridge supports or to provide de-masting or other moorings. However, a subsequent drawing has shown indicative de-masting/embarking/disembarking moorings on the downstream true right bank, plus a 60m length each of online visitor and private moorings downstream on the frontage of the Deal Ground site. Further information has been sought from the agent as to the construction, operation and management of these, particularly given that the de-masting/embarking/disembarking moorings are on the site of the consented riverbus pontoon, and members will be updated. In the event that further

information is not provided, these matters will also need to be covered by planning condition.

- 4.13 Members will recall that when this proposal was originally considered by the Local Access Forum the forum indicated, in concord with the Broads Authority's Navigation Committee and the Norfolk and Suffolk Boating Association, that slipway provision here would be welcome and the agent has indicated that this will be provided on the River Yare frontage, adjacent to the site boundary. This is welcomed in principle, although further details will be required regarding construction, maintenance, management and parking. This could be provided as part of a reserved matters application in connection with the main Deal Ground site.
- 4.14 Finally, the issue of the illumination of the bridge is pertinent to navigation, as any illumination should not be positioned so as to create glare on the river as this would be a hazard to vessels as well as disturbing nocturnal and crepuscular species. Officers recommended that the details of illumination be subject to a planning condition.

5 Planning Decision

- 5.1 The planning application outlined at paragraph 4 above was considered by the Broads Authority's Planning committee at its meeting on 16 August. Outline planning permission for a pedestrian and cycle bridge was granted by the Broads Authority subject to all the matters highlighted in paragraph 4 being satisfactory addressed by the provision of further information by the applicant or by planning condition.
- 5.2 Members should note that the planning permission only covers that part of the bridge in the Broads Authority's executive area and due to the nature of the boundary here (which is drawn along the riverbank) this covers only the area over the water and does not therefore include the landing points of the bridge or the land on which these are situated.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The construction of a new pedestrian and cycle bridge over the River Wensum here will be instrumental to unlocking the growth potential of the Deal Ground and is supported in principle. There are a number of issues however which have not been resolved and will need to be the subject of detailed planning conditions to ensure that all impacts on the broads and on navigation are adequately addressed. In this case, the proposed bridge would facilitate access across the Wensum for cyclists and pedestrians and thereby improve links between Norwich and the Broads to the south, including to Whitlingham Country Park, and this is welcomed. Officers also welcome the proposal to provide a slipway and moorings on the river frontage and will continue to work with the developer to maximise the access potential of these facilities.

6.2 The Wensum River Parkway Partnership will also continue to work with the City Council on its proposed River and Bank Strategy with a view to developing the Partnership's proposed Integrated Access Strategy for the River Wensum. Further reports will be presented to the Local Access Forum as this work progresses.

Background papers:	Nil
Author:	Adrian Clarke
Date of report:	28 August 2013
Broads Plan Objectives:	TR1, TR2, TR3
Appendices:	Nil