

Report to Sustainable development panel
21 March 2018
Report of Director of regeneration and development
Subject River Wensum Strategy

Item

6

Purpose

This report feeds back on the recent public and stakeholder consultation on the draft strategy, and sets out the revised strategy for endorsement by the council.

Recommendation

To endorse the revised River Wensum Strategy, and to recommend to cabinet that it adopts the strategy.

Corporate and service priorities

The report helps to meet the corporate priorities: a safe, clean and low carbon city, a healthy city, a fair city, and value for money services.

Financial implications

None arising from this report.

Ward/s: Multiple Wards, including Wensum, Mile Cross, Mancroft and Thorpe Hamlet

Cabinet member: Councillor Stonard - Sustainable and inclusive growth

Contact officers

| | |
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Background documents

None

Report

Background

1. The River Wensum is a valuable asset to the city, with a rich heritage, and has great potential to drive wider economic, social and environmental improvements.
2. 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 to the river corridor, enhancing its natural and built environment and biodiversity value, and by stimulating business and economic activity. The RWSP is led and project managed by the city council. Councillor Stonard is the member lead and chairs the RWSP Project Board. Partners comprise the Broads Authority, Norfolk County Council, Environment Agency, and the Wensum River Parkway Partnership.
3. Over the past couple of years the RWSP has consulted the public and stakeholders on issues and opportunities for the river corridor (in 2015) and on a draft strategy document (in 2017).
4. The draft strategy has now been revised following the most recent consultation. Please note that a consultation response was made by this Panel at the meeting on 13 September 2017 – see paragraph 11 below.
5. The resulting River Wensum Strategy is a long term strategy to facilitate positive change 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 the city's regeneration.
6. The purpose of this report is to provide feedback on the recent consultation, and to present the proposed final version of the strategy for endorsement by sustainable development panel, and subsequently for adoption by cabinet.

Consultation

7. A public and stakeholder consultation was held between July and September 2017, and involved a public exhibition on 26 July which was attended by over 70 individuals and organisations.
8. The consultation attracted a high volume of comments from a range of consultees. There were over 240 online responses to the consultation plus approximately 20 written responses. In addition a good range of organisations responded to the consultation, including RWSP partners, Historic England, Norwich City Council Green Group, Norwich BID, VisitNorwich, Norwich Playhouse, developers, Friends groups (including Train Wood, Marlpit), stakeholder and user groups (angling, canoeing) environmental groups (RSPB, Norwich Fringe, CPRE) and residents groups (St Edmund's Wharf, Old Millers Wharf, Quayside).

9. This is a very positive level of response for a public consultation and demonstrates a strong public interest in the strategy from local residents, key public bodies, the business community and stakeholder groups.
10. Analysis of online comments overall is very supportive of the draft strategy – see the table below. Most online respondents commented on a range of issues. Consultees were able to provide additional comments to their online response, which many did resulting in about 550 such responses. Some of these comments are critical but these tend to be from a small number of consultees.

| | Strongly agree / agree (%) | Neutral (%) | Disagree / Strongly disagree (%) | No. of online responses (240 total) | No. of additional responses |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|---|--|------------------------------------|
| Vision/objectives | 79 | 8 | 13 | 223 | 82 |
| Management | 75 | 11 | 14 | 204 | 51 |
| Walking cycling access | 80 | 5 | 15 | 195 | 81 |
| Waterways access | 80 | 6 | 14 | 188 | 78 |
| Environment | 87 | 5 | 8 | 187 | 62 |
| L-T opportunities | 74 | 19 | 7 | 184 | 52 |
| Implementation | 72 | 14 | 14 | 182 | 51 |
| Other comments | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 87 |

11. The main issues raised by consultees include:

- (a) Need for greater emphasis on projects upstream of New Mills, particularly to address social inequalities. This was raised by several respondents including Friends of Train Wood and Marriott's Way, Friends of Marlpit Paddocks, and Norwich Green Party.
- (b) Need for greater emphasis on environmental issues and objectives, particularly biodiversity. Respondents included Sustainable Development Panel which proposed an amendment to the objective related to the natural environment to include biodiversity, Norwich Green Party, and several individuals.
- (c) Need for greater reference to heritage issues (raised by Historic England, and Norfolk County Council Community and Environmental Services) to acknowledge the importance of the historic environment in the river corridor.
- (d) Support for partnership working on delivery from many respondents including Norwich BID, and stakeholder and community groups.
- (e) A number of respondents, both individuals and stakeholder groups, highlighted the potential opportunities for community input including development of a volunteer workforce.
- (f) Several respondents wanted to see structured evaluation /prioritisation of projects on an agreed set of criteria (Norwich Green Party, Friends of Marlpit Paddocks, Friends of Train Wood).
- (g) A number of projects were proposed, many upstream of New Mills including improved canoe access and walking access (individuals and stakeholder groups).

- (h) The strategy proposal to complete the 'missing link' of riverside walk between Fye Bridge and Whitefriars raised a number of objections from local residents (St Edmund's Wharf, Old Millers Wharf), chiefly on grounds of amenity and safety.

Revised strategy

12. The strategy, as proposed to be revised, has taken on board many of the consultation responses. An analysis of the consultation responses is set out in the table (see link to website below) and a list of all proposed changes is set out at appendix 1 to this report. Comments have been summarised and amalgamated where possible into groups of issues to assist with clarity. Individual respondents are not named however the names of organisations and stakeholder / community groups are included. (Link to table of consultation responses : https://www.norwich.gov.uk/downloads/file/4420/river_wensum_strategy_table_of_responses)
13. Overall, the strategy is not proposed to be fundamentally changed from the draft version published in 2017. The revised strategy still has the same key themes as the draft strategy: management and partnership working, access for walking and cycling, waterways access, and environment, with the overall aim of regenerating the river corridor. In terms of delivery, the revised strategy continues to stress the importance of working in partnership with key stakeholders to implement policies and proposals, and the importance of seeking external project funding.
14. However there are several changes of emphasis in the revised document. In particular, the strategy is proposed to be revised to clarify that its focus is not just on the city centre to east Norwich area but that it includes a number of potential projects in the area upstream of New Mills. It is acknowledged that this was not made sufficiently clear in the draft strategy. Accordingly the revised strategy includes:
- (a) An update to Appendix 3 of the strategy(Potential strategy projects) by adding several new projects identified during the consultation. It should be noted that many of the projects suggested by respondents were already listed in this appendix. The majority of the projects in Appendix 3 are located upstream of New Mills, within Wensum and Mile Cross wards and, if implemented, should help address social inequalities in this area.
 - (b) An updated Action Plan to include a new action to assess all the projects in Appendix 3 in Year One of project delivery (2018/19). These will be added into an updated Action Plan subject to their performance in the assessment.
 - (c) Inclusion of assessment criteria for potential projects, based on the extent to which they meet strategy objectives and provide value for money, and their deliverability. This also specifies that a basic prerequisite for additional projects will be to demonstrate that they can attract external funding, and that they fully address maintenance costs so as not to add to existing council maintenance burdens.
 - (d) A new summary map to illustrate both action plan projects and potential future projects (see appendix 2 to this report).

15. Other proposed changes highlight the importance of the natural and built environment, for example:
- (a) Several changes to make greater reference to environmental issues in the Vision and Objectives and in the Environment section, including reference to biodiversity in the objective relating to the environment.
 - (b) New text and a plan in the Environment section to provide context on the historic environment in the river corridor.
16. Greater reference is also added in the revised strategy to encouraging active participation of local communities and stakeholders in project delivery where appropriate.
17. A significant change is proposed to one of the action plan projects seeking to complete the missing link of Riverside Walk between Fye Bridge and Whitefriars Bridge. As stated above there was much local opposition to this proposal on grounds of amenity impact and safety. It should be noted that the city council has a long-standing ambition to complete the riverside walk on both banks of the river and has succeeded in delivering over 11km of walkway in the city to date. This particular stretch has some sections of riverside walk in place already, including in front of St Edmund's Wharf and Old Miller's Wharf. The principle of completing this link will remain a proposal in the local plan and an aspiration in the River Wensum Strategy, and is supported in principle by the Greater Norwich Growth Board. However, given the concerns raised through the consultation it is proposed to remove this project from the action plan to allow for detailed investigation of feasibility and deliverability, to inform options for completion of this missing link. There is already a riverside walk in place on the opposite bank of the river, at Quayside, and the strategy makes clear that the priority is the completion of the missing link in the vicinity of the Playhouse, where there is currently no access on either bank.
18. A number of more minor changes are also proposed, including clarifications, minor edits, consequential changes, and updates. The table of minor changes is available on the council's website for information. (Link to minor changes: https://www.norwich.gov.uk/downloads/file/4422/river_wensum_strategy_table_of_minor_changes)
19. The revised strategy document and annex are attached at these links:

Revised strategy:

https://www.norwich.gov.uk/downloads/file/4418/revised_river_wensum_strategy_large_file_12_mb

Annex:

https://www.norwich.gov.uk/downloads/file/4419/revised_river_wensum_strategy_annex

Conclusions and next steps

20. This is an opportunity for sustainable development panel to comment on the revised River Wensum Strategy. The revised strategy provides a clear vision and set of objectives for the area, 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 city council, its partners, residents, businesses and visitors to the city. It will help to:
- (a) 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.
 - (b) 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.
 - (c) 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.
 - (d) 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.
 - (e) Address management and maintenance of the river corridor: The strategy will not add to the council's management and maintenance liabilities. Through more streamlined management of the river corridor, issues such as illegal mooring should be resolved more quickly and help reduce related costs. There is also potential for involving volunteers and local communities in delivery, which has the potential for reducing management and maintenance costs.
 - (f) Generate income: The strategy has potential to assist with income generation for the city council, for example by creating the conditions to increase activity in the river corridor and support the use of council owned river infrastructure, such as some of its pontoons, thus leading to increased revenue.
21. It is therefore recommended that sustainable development panel endorses the revised strategy and recommends to cabinet that it adopts the strategy at its next meeting in June. The strategy will also be reported to the committees of the partner bodies in June and July, for adoption.

Appendix 1: Table of proposed changes to River Wensum Strategy

| Proposed change reference | Document reference | Proposed change |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| PC1 | Para 2.3 & Executive summary | Amend the vision at paragraph 2.3 (and in the Executive Summary) to read "The strategy aims to breathe new life into the river corridor 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 role 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." |
| PC2 | Environment | Add new paragraph 6.45 to read: "The River Wensum strategy area does not exist in isolation, and developments outside its boundary may have implications and opportunities for the regeneration of the river corridor, such as the proposed Western Link from the Northern Distributor Road to the A47. If this major development goes ahead it is important that any potential environmental impacts arising from it on the Wensum downstream are fully addressed and mitigated." |
| PC3 | New para 6.3 | Add new paragraph 6.3 in the Environment chapter: ' The easterly, low-lying and coastal nature of the Broads landscape makes it particularly vulnerable to the predicted impacts of climate change and sea level rise, including coastal and river flooding. The length of river covered by this strategy includes both tidal and fluvial influenced sections, as New Mills pumping station is considered the tidal limit. The strategy should underpin climate change adaptation to ensure that flood, environmental and economic resilience is improved as a result of actions taken. The flood risk planning responsibilities of the Environment Agency consider the risks posed by climate change. More information on climate change in this area can be found through the Broads Climate Partnership at http://www.broads-authority.gov.uk/looking-after/climate-change .' |
| PC4 | Paras 6.36-6.38 | Insert new section on the Historic Environment at paragraphs 6.36 - 6.38 in the Environment section. |
| PC5 | Executive Summary | Add the words "and historic" into first sentence of Section on Environment in the Executive Summary to read: "The strategy aims to improve the natural and historic environment..." Add additional bullet under Environment heading on p.6 to read: "Conserve and where possible enhance the historic environment and individual designated and non-designated heritage assets along the riverbank to |

| Proposed change reference | Document reference | Proposed change |
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| | | ensure the historic riverside environment." |
| PC6 | Para 3.14 | Add new second sentence into paragraph 3.14: "Opportunities will be taken where appropriate to encourage the active participation of these groups in the enhancement and management of the river corridor. " |
| PC7 | Para 4.1 | Amend second sentence of paragraph 4.1: "The strategy presents an opportunity to improve the infrastructure for walking and cycling within the Wensum River corridor for all users,..." |
| PC8 | Para 2.4 & ES | Amend the third objective in paragraph 2.4 (and in Executive Summary) to read "Enhancing the natural environment, biodiversity and green infrastructure". |
| PC9 | Para 2.4 & ES | Amend fifth objective in paragraph 2.4 (and in Executive Summary) to read "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". |
| PC10 | Para 3.13 | Amend para 3.13 by adding the following: "Historic England and potentially the Heritage Lottery Fund in relation to projects that have an historic environment element;" |
| PC11 | Para 3.13 | Amend the section on Partnership working by adding a new final sentence to paragraph 3.13: "Local community groups and stakeholder groups can also play an important role in the design and delivery of projects and in some cases it may be appropriate for projects to be community led, dependant on the nature of specific projects." |
| PC12 | Action plan table, para 8.3-8.5, and para 1.10 | Amend action plan to require an audit of all potential projects identified through the consultation, to be undertaken in the short term (within 1 year), and add new text at paragraph 8.3-8.5 setting out the proposed assessment criteria. Amend Executive Summary to reflect this, adding a new second sentence under Action Plan and Funding to read: "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.". Also amend para 1.10 by adding a new second sentence "The focus of current action plan projects is mainly within the city centre as this is where current opportunities and potential funding have been identified, however there are other projects that could be developed for the area upstream of New Mills, some of which have been identified through the consultation process." and a new penultimate sentence: " Potential future projects will assessed and, subject to how they perform against the assessment criteria, may be included in a future version of the |

| Proposed change reference | Document reference | Proposed change |
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| | | Action Plan." . |
| PC13 | Appendix 2 | Amend reference to Norwich City Council planning policy DM28 in Appendix 2 to refer to the policy more fully, by adding: "Development proposals with a frontage to the river Wensum which includes the route of the Riverside Walk will be required to make provision for the relevant section of the walk as part of the overall design of the development. Where development adjoins a navigable section of river opportunities should be taken to provide residential and/or commercial moorings, to facilitate access by water where appropriate and reasonably practicable to achieve." |
| PC14 | Para 4.6 and 4.10, map 4 | Remove map 4 as this is no longer an action plan project. Revise paragraph 4.6 by replacing the third sentence with: " The completion of missing stretches of Riverside Walk from New Mills to Trowse Swing Bridge is therefore a key objective of the strategy reflected in policy 2, and with the priority being completion of the 'missing link' in the vicinity of the Playhouse which is considered to be deliverable within the strategy period. Completion of the Fye Bridge to Whitefriars Bridge missing link is highlighted as a longer term aspiration. The missing section of Riverside Walk upstream of New Mills.....". Include new text in paragraph 4.10 following the first sentence, and amend part of third sentence, to read: "This link is considered to be capable of implementation in the longer term dependent on detailed investigation of feasibility and deliverability. Once delivered this project would unlock the remaining section between ..." |
| PC15 | Para 4.16 & Appendix 3 | Include new final sentence of paragraph 4.16: "This project is included in the list of possible future action plan projects in Appendix 3." Add new bullet point in Appendix 3 under Walking and Cycling Access: "Creation of a new section of riverside Walk between Sweet Briar Road and the public open space adjacent to The Gatehouse Public House on Hellesdon Road, to provide access to the river." |
| PC16 | Map 10 | Amend map 10 to show correct location of upstream canoe portage point. |
| PC17 | Para 5.14 | Amend paragraph 5.14 is changed to read "... enhancing provision upstream of New Mills, including at Wensum Park, Andersons Meadow and near Hellesdon Mill." Add new potential future action plan projects to Appendix 3 under 'Waterways Management, access and leisure': 'Provision of canoe access close to Marlpit Paddocks'. |
| PC18 | App.3 | Add new potential future action plan projects to Appendix 3 under 'Waterways Management, access and leisure': 'Provision of canoe access at Wensum Park and Anderson's Meadow'. |

| Proposed change reference | Document reference | Proposed change |
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| PC19 | App.3 | Add new potential future action plan projects to Appendix 3 under 'Waterways Management, access and leisure': ' Investigate proposal to reintroduce a small, pedestrian ferry across the Wensum at the site of Pull's Ferry.' |
| PC20 | Para 5.36 | Amend paragraph 5.36, first sentence to read: 'Although Norwich has a thriving tourist industry and is a popular short stay destination, there is great potential to maximise the tourism and leisure opportunities offered by the River Wensum.' |
| PC21 | Para 6.12 | Amend final sentence of paragraph 6.12 to say:" The project will be delivered by the Environment Agency, anticipated in 2018/19." Amend action plan accordingly. |
| PC22 | Paras 6.18 – 6.19 | Insert section in to document at end of paragraph 6.19: "These projects will be assessed against a set of criteria for inclusion in the action plan (see paragraphs 8.3-8.5). The action plan is intended to be a living document to be updated over time with input from relevant stakeholders. " Amend final sentence of paragraph 6.18 to read: "It is anticipated that the Biodiversity Enhancement and Non-Native Species Management Plan will be developed in partnership with appropriate organisations and conservation bodies." |
| PC23 | Action plan | Amend action plan in section 8 (Implementation) by bringing forward the timescale for project E2 from 2020/21 to 2018/19, and change lead to EA/NWT. |
| PC24 | Paras 6.14 & 6.35 | Amend paragraph 6.14 by adding a sentence to the end: "The river runs adjacent to several designated sites of importance for biodiversity and nature conservation including Marlpit, Hellesdon Meadows and Train Wood County Wildlife Sites, and Andersons Meadow Local Nature Reserve." Amend paragraph 6.35 first sentence to read: " The river also possess several areas that afford quiet and more naturalised spaces, such as along the Marriott's Way approaching Hellesdon Mill, including the Marlpit Paddocks, Anderson's Meadow, Train Wood and around the Cow Tower." |
| PC25 | Para 6.39 | Amend fifth sentence of paragraph 6.39 to read:" The Devil's Tower on the south bank of the river is a scheduled monument." |
| PC26 | Appendix 1 and Figure 1 | Update Appendix 1 (Roles and Responsibilities) with a new section 'Litter collection' to read: "Norwich City Council collects litter both in the river and on the riverbank. This is undertaken by a monthly boat collection; the boat goes upstream and downstream of New Mills on alternate months so each section of the river gets cleaned six times per annum. The Broads Authority has no specific responsibility for |

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| | | litter collection but in practice they carry out a litter sweep at the beginning of each year and then pick litter up as and when necessary when the rangers are out and about." Also amend figure 1 (Key areas of responsibility for the river corridor) to include litter collection. |
| PC27 | App. 3 | Add potential new project to Appendix 3 under 'Waterways management, access and leisure': 'Investigate provision of leisure access to Cow Tower.' |
| PC28 | Para 7.4 | Add the following text after third sentence in para 7.4: 'There is also potential to enhance the ecology of the river through any redevelopment, which should be explored, potentially including fish passage to enable migratory fish to pass upstream.' |
| PC29 | Para 7.6 | Add additional text to end of penultimate sentence in paragraph 7.6: '...and with a range of positive benefits for biodiversity and health and wellbeing.' |
| PC30 | Para 7.6 | Add new sentence following third sentence of paragraph 7.6, and amend following sentence, to read: 'Constraints also include issues with anti-social behaviour in the vicinity of the Boom Towers and City Walls which need to be addressed. However the proposal could deliver...' |
| PC31 | Para 6.34 | Amend first sentence of paragraph 6.34 to read: 'There are other areas in the city centre, for example along Riverside, and at Elm Hill Gardens, whether there may be opportunities to seek to enhance open space provision adjacent to the river which will help to meet the recreational needs of the existing and growing population in the city centre and east Norwich.' |
| PC32 | Para 8.7 | Add new second sentence to paragraph 8.5: "For example Crowdfund Norwich has been set up by the city council to support community groups, social enterprises and charities to carry out a range of projects, most of which are likely to be small scale." and insert weblink to Crowdfund Norwich. |

Appendix 2

Summary of projects & key opportunities

