

**Report to** Sustainable development panel

**Item**

13 September 2017

**Report of** Head of planning services

**Subject** Public consultation on draft River Wensum Strategy

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### **Purpose**

This report outlines the main contents of the draft River Wensum Strategy and seeks members' endorsement of the draft strategy as part of the consultation process.

### **Recommendation**

To endorse the vision, objectives and proposed content of the draft River Wensum Strategy.

### **Corporate and service priorities**

The report helps to meet the corporate priority to provide a safe, clean and low carbon city, and a prosperous and vibrant city.

### **Financial implications**

None

**Ward/s:** All Wards

**Cabinet member:** Councillor Stonard – environment and inclusive growth

Councillor Kendrick - resources

### **Contact officers**

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### **Background documents**

None

# Report

## Introduction

1. A report was taken to Sustainable Development Panel on 19 July 2017 to inform members about the public consultation on the draft River Wensum Strategy which runs from 26 July to 15 September 2017..
2. It was agreed at the July panel meeting that the date of the September meeting would be moved forward to 13 September to enable the panel to respond to the draft Strategy within the consultation period.
3. The purpose of this report is to outline the main contents of the draft strategy and to seek members' endorsement of the strategy through the consultation process. Background to the development of the strategy, including the creation of the River Wensum Strategy Partnership (RWSP), was set out in the July report so is not repeated here.

## Overview of the draft strategy

4. The River Wensum is a valuable asset to the city with a rich heritage and great potential to drive wider economic, social and environmental improvements. The city council has significant assets in the river corridor in terms of land and buildings, and also significant liabilities including maintenance of open spaces, riverside walk, and river structures, for example. The development of the strategy is an opportunity 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. One of the key aims of the strategy is identification of funding opportunities and potential to attract private sector investment to the river corridor.
5. The strategy also addresses the issue of maintenance. Projects within the draft strategy will not add to the council's management and maintenance costs, and it is anticipated that, through more streamlined management of the river corridor, management issues such as illegal mooring should be resolved more quickly and help reduce related costs.
6. The full draft strategy including appendices is available on the council's website: [https://www.norwich.gov.uk/info/20225/planning\\_policies\\_supporting\\_documents/1511/the\\_river\\_wensum\\_strategy](https://www.norwich.gov.uk/info/20225/planning_policies_supporting_documents/1511/the_river_wensum_strategy)
7. The strategy looks ahead for a ten year period, and includes an action plan focused on the first three years to kick-start regeneration of the river corridor. The strategy contents have been informed by the previous issues and opportunities consultation, and through ongoing dialogue between partners and stakeholders.
8. The strategy's overarching vision for the river corridor 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’.***

9. The objectives for delivering the vision are:
- (a) improving the management of the river corridor and its surroundings for the benefit of the city, residents of the wider Norwich area, and visitors;
  - (b) increasing access to, and use of, the area by all, including enhanced connectivity with the Norfolk Trails network;
  - (c) enhancing the natural environment and green infrastructure;
  - (d) 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;
  - (e) enhancing heritage, making the most of the unique historic environment within the river corridor;
  - (f) addressing social deprivation and inequalities;
  - (g) maximising the efficiency of public expenditure in the river corridor, where possible reducing the pressure on stretched public sector budgets; and
  - (h) identifying and exploiting external funding opportunities including private sector investment.

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### **Strategy themes, policies and proposals**

10. The objectives have informed the main strategy chapter themes 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 chapters in their own right.
11. Some of the strategy’s policies and proposals are referred to under the themes below. The policies set out the strategy’s general approach for a number of issues, and the proposals are for specific improvement projects, some of which are considered capable of being delivered in the short to medium term (and therefore form part of the action plan) and others which require further investigation or are more aspirational.
12. **Management and partnership working:** A well-managed river corridor, with effective joint working between partners, is considered a pre-requisite for the regeneration of the river corridor. The strategy proposes:
- (a) Closer working between strategy partners (in particular the city council and Broads Authority) to improve and streamline management of the river corridor. As part of this the city council and BA have developed a joint protocol to ensure a co-ordinated approach to key management and enforcement issues including illegal mooring and sunken boats.
  - (b) 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 for example. 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 existing council maintenance liabilities.

- (c) Working with external partners, 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.
- (d) The management chapter includes a policy to reduce social inequalities and promote health and wellbeing (Policy 1) by ensuring that the design of individual projects and the implementation of the strategy will address health and social inequalities of local communities adjacent to the river where appropriate and feasible. This reflects the priorities in the council's corporate plan.

**13. Access for walking and cycling:** The strategy proposes:

- (a) 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 Playhouse, between Duke's Palace Bridge and St George's Bridge; and between Fye Bridge and Whitefriars).
- (b) 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 (policy 4). A CIL funded action plan project has recently commenced which will address these key accessibility issues.
- (c) 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 Whitlingham Country Park in the longer term. The RWSP is also exploring whether Riverside Walk could be part of Norfolk Trails network which could have benefits for promotion and for greater coordination in terms of management and maintenance.

**14. Waterways access and leisure:** The strategy proposes:

- (a) Provision of new river infrastructure and enhancement of existing infrastructure to encourage greater recreational use of the Wensum (policies 6 and 7). The chapter includes a number of action plan projects

which are shown on map 12 including an upgrade to Friar's Quay slipway, new canoe launches at new Mills, enhanced moorings at the Yacht station, and other new moorings in a number of locations. A proposal for new short stay visitor moorings at Quayside has the potential to address illegal mooring and associated anti-social behaviour through management of the new facility.

- (b) Angling is also promoted in appropriate locations (policy 8).
- (c) The strategy addresses potential conflict of interest between key river users by ensuring appropriate provision for specific users groups (map 12 allocates bank space for angling and for mooring purposes).
- (d) There is a public right of navigation within the BA area which includes the River Wensum up to New Mills. As part of the development of the strategy the BA has produced a navigation advice note to summarise its approach to assessing proposals for development in or adjacent to the navigation area.
- (e) The strategy encourages greater commercial activity in the river corridor (policy 9) including floating restaurants, hotels and other suitable leisure uses.
- (f) The strategy supports promotion of events and trails (policy 10). The RWSP has made an initial funding bid for a river festival.

**15. Environment:** The strategy proposes:

- (a) Improvements to water quality (policy 11) and includes an action plan project to improve water quality by reducing the levels of fats oils and grease entering the river in the Magdalen Street / Fye Bridge Street area which has a significant number of fast food establishments.
- (b) Protection and enhancement of biodiversity, and habitat creation (policy 12), which includes an action plan project for a biodiversity enhancement management plan, and a pilot project for floating vegetation platforms to soften the hard-piled river edges and improve habitat and biodiversity.
- (c) The strategy also promotes opportunities to renaturalise the profile of the river and to create additional flood storage, where feasible, to reduce flood risk (policy 13).
- (d) Renewable energy generation is encouraged (policy 14) including water source heat pumps.
- (e) The enhancement of green infrastructure and areas of open space is 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.

16. **Longer term opportunities:** 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, 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.
17. **Implementation:** The 'action plan' referred to above of projects considered capable of implementation within the short to medium term (approximately 3 years) is attached at appendix 1. Some of these projects are cross-cutting and address several strategy themes.
18. Having a strategy in place will assist in the identification of funding opportunities and has potential to attract private sector investment. Funding is being explored for action plan projects and has already been secured for project A3 (Riverside Walk access and signage improvements) and A4 (improvements to connectivity at Marriott's Way / Barn Road gateway). Sponsorship and crowdfunding are also promoted where appropriate. A project identified during development of the strategy, to introduce an eel pass at new Mills to enhance the river's eel population by assisting their migration, was installed in Spring 2017 with EA funding.
19. The strategy sets out proposed delivery arrangements including a Strategic Board to oversee implementation of the strategy, and a Delivery Board.

## Conclusions

20. The River Wensum Strategy has many potential benefits for the city council, its partners, residents, 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:** 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.

- **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 vision, objectives and content of the draft River Wensum Strategy.

22. All comments received during the consultation process will be considered by the RWSP following the end of the consultation period on 15 September. It is anticipated that a report including a summary of the public consultation and the final version of the strategy will be taken to Sustainable Development Panel in late 2017 (dependent on the level of response and issues raised) and to Cabinet for adoption in early 2018.

## Appendix 1: Action plan of short-medium term projects

Theme	Ref	Project	Anticipated delivery	Lead authority
<b>Walking and Cycling Access</b>	A1	Missing link in Riverside Walk between Duke St and St George's Bridge	2019/20	Norwich City Council (NCC)
	A2	Missing link in Riverside Walk between Fye Bridge and Whitefriars (north bank)	2020/21	NCC
	A3	Riverside walk accessibility improvements including signage and interpretation	2017/18 – 2018/19	NCC
	A4	Marriott's Way - Barn Road gateway	2017/18 – 2019/20	Norfolk County Council
<b>Waterways Access and Leisure</b>	W1	Friar's Quay slipway enhancement	2020/21	Broads Authority (BA)/NCC
	W2	Yacht station expansion	2020/21	BA/NCC
	W3	New Mills Canoe portage	2018/19	BA/NCC
	W4	Quayside short stay moorings	2019/20	BA/NCC
	W5	Boom towers repiling and mooring	2019/20	BA/NCC
	W6	New short-stay moorings between Carrow Bridge and Lady Julian Bridge	2018/19	BA/NCC
	W7	New short stay visitor and demasting mooring at the NR1 Development	2017/18	BA/NCC
	W8	Hydrographic survey for dredging	2017/18	BA
	W9	River festival	2018/19 (at earliest)	NCC
<b>Environment</b>	E1	FOG (Fats Oils and Grease) project	2018/19	Anglian Water
	E2	Biodiversity enhancement plan including management of non-native species	2020/21	Wild Anglia
	E3	Floating vegetation platforms in key locations (and as part of new development)	Pilot – 2017/18	Environment Agency
	E4	Boom Towers - enhancement scheme to Devil's Tower	2019/20	NCC