

**Report to** Sustainable development panel

**Item**

19 July 2017

**Report of** Head of planning services

**Subject** River Wensum Strategy update

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### **Purpose**

This report informs members about the forthcoming public consultation on the draft River Wensum Strategy, and encourages submission of comments during the consultation period.

### **Recommendation**

To note the forthcoming public consultation on 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:** Cllr Stonard, environment and inclusive growth

Cllr Kendrick, resources

### **Contact officers**

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### **Background documents**

None

# Report

## Summary

1. 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.
2. A draft River Wensum Strategy has been developed for public and stakeholder consultation in summer 2017. This 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.
3. The consultation period will commence on Wednesday 26 July and run until Friday 15 September. The purpose of this report is to bring the public consultation to members' attention and to encourage attendance at the consultation event and submission of responses within the consultation period.

## Background

4. On 26 February 2016, the panel considered a report which updated members on the progress and setting out the key strategy themes.
5. The draft strategy has been developed by the River Wensum Strategy Partnership (RWSP) which is led and project managed by the city council. Councillor Stonard is the member lead and chairs the RWSP Project Board. The RWSP was set up in 2014 to develop a vision and strategy for the River Wensum in partnership with key stakeholders. Partners comprise the Broads Authority, Norfolk County Council, the Environment Agency, and the Wensum River Parkway Partnership.
6. The draft strategy has been informed by a public consultation in summer 2015, followed by ongoing partner and stakeholder engagement. Timescales for the production of the draft strategy have slipped somewhat due to resource issues, and to the need to engage with both partners and a range of stakeholders in developing the policies and proposals within the document.
7. At its meeting in February 2016, the panel agreed that the draft strategy would be reported to the Panel during the consultation period (as well as to key committees of the partner bodies). It was however considered preferable to take a report for information at this stage, prior to commencement of the consultation period, rather than reporting the strategy to the panel towards the end of the consultation period at the meeting on 28 September (and as a consequence extending the consultation period).

## Overview of strategy and consultation

8. The public and stakeholder consultation will be launched with a consultation event on Wednesday, 26 July 2017 in Blackfriars Hall. This will consist of an exhibition, with information about the policies and proposals in the strategy. It will be staffed by representatives from the partner authorities, giving members of the public and stakeholders the opportunity to speak to members of the team. The event will run from 1 – 7pm to cover lunchtime and early evening in order to maximise attendance. The online consultation will run until 15 September. Comments on the

draft strategy should be submitted via an on-line form on the strategy webpage ([www.norwich.gov.uk/riverwensum](http://www.norwich.gov.uk/riverwensum)) which will be added to the webpage at the start of the consultation period.

9. The draft strategy document is not attached to this report as it will not be in the public realm until the start of public consultation. However key aspects of strategy are set out below for information, and a list of potential benefits.
10. 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.
11. The strategy vision is 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. The river 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’**.
12. The key strategy themes are set out below. Partnership working is a key aspect of the draft strategy, both in terms of management of the river and delivery of individual proposals.
  - **Management and funding:** A well-managed river corridor, with effective joint working between partners, is a prerequisite for the regeneration of the river corridor. The strategy will involve closer working between partners (particularly the city council and Broads Authority) to improve management of the river corridor, and working with external partners, including the business community, to deliver the strategy and access external funding. The strategy also aims to ensure that ongoing maintenance will be addressed for all projects so that they do not add to ongoing public maintenance expenditure.
  - **Access for walking and cycling:** The strategy aims to enhance green infrastructure and connections in the river corridor by completing key sections of the Riverside Walk within the city, increasing the walk’s accessibility and links to it from the wider city centre, and by ensuring greater connectivity between the Riverside Walk, the wider Norfolk Trails network, and Whitlingham Country Park.
  - **Waterways access:** The strategy aims to encourage greater activity on the river by encouraging provision of new river infrastructure (moorings and canoe launches for example) and greater commercial activity in the river corridor, and by clarifying areas for angling and mooring in order to address potential conflicting users, and promoting events and trails.
  - **Environment:** The strategy aims to improved water quality in the Wensum, to protect and enhance biodiversity and create habitat, improve open spaces to maximise use for leisure and recreation, and encourages renewable energy generation in the river corridor.
13. In addition to addressing the key themes above, the adopted strategy is likely to 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.
- Attracting investment: the strategy and action plan will assist identification of funding opportunities and has potential to attract private sector investment. The process of developing the strategy has already identified funding opportunities and enabled several funding bids to be submitted - for a river festival (Landscape Partnership funding) and for a number of green infrastructure related projects (CIL).
- 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.
- Partnership working and involvement of key stakeholders will improve access to funding opportunities and assist with project delivery.

## **Conclusion**

14. Members are encouraged to take part in the forthcoming public consultation and to comment on the draft strategy within the consultation period.
15. A report will be taken to sustainable development panel (anticipated in October) to report back on the consultation responses and outline proposed changes to the strategy.
16. It is anticipated that the final version of the strategy will be reported to cabinet in early 2018 for adoption.