

7 Longer term opportunities

7.1 Several longer term opportunity sites have been identified during the development of the strategy which, if developed, could contribute greatly to the regeneration of the river corridor with many benefits for residents, businesses and visitors to the area. All would require investigation of feasibility and funding opportunities to be taken forward.

New Mills Pumping Station

7.2 New Mills Pumping Station is an impressive Grade II listed Victorian pumping house, owned by Norwich City Council, situated in a prominent position on the River Wensum north-west of the city centre. It stands on the site of medieval watermills and was first used for pumping a water supply in 1583. Inside the current building is a restored pneumatic ejection sewage pump, the only other example of which is in the Houses of Parliament. The building has been unused for many years, however in recent years there has been some interest in exploring the site's potential for power generation. The site is currently leased by the council to an operator (New Mills Energy Centre Limited) which is developing plans for a renewable energy project on the site with associated commercial uses, although no firm proposals have come forward to date.

7.3 The pumping station effectively partitions the Wensum: the upper reach of the river is a freshwater system, whilst the lower reach is tidally influenced. This has had a significant effect on the species and habitat found either of the pumping station. Neither boaters nor aquatic species can navigate past New Mills which is detrimental both to biodiversity and to recreational opportunities.

New Mills Pumping Station



7.4 Partner organisations and feedback from the public consultations indicate that there is a desire to see greater use of New Mills for leisure purposes and to enhance connectivity between the upper and lower reaches of the river. Although the site has a number of significant constraints which may affect its development viability, including its location in a conservation area, Grade II listed status, and its historic pumping equipment, it has a range of potential opportunities that could make it attractive to an investor. These including the potential for power generation, subject to further investigation, and the potential to act as a leisure hub linking the upper and lower reaches of the Wensum, which could involve equipment hire, and historic and environmental interpretation. 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. There is a range of possible uses for the building which include leisure uses, educational / museum use, exhibition space, café and restaurant uses, business uses, and live-work units. There are currently no firm proposals for the pumping station site, however it is important that any future proposals address these considerations in order to maximise its potential to contribute to regeneration of this part of the River Wensum and the northern city centre area. An action plan project is proposed for New Mills which addresses some of the opportunities set out above: the proposed canoe portage point (W3) can be implemented in advance of a more comprehensive scheme for the site.

Boom Towers / wooded ridge

7.5 The Norwich Local Plan Policies map identifies a wooded ridge near Ber Street, linking the River Wensum with the city centre. This is also part of the green link network identified in the Green Infrastructure Strategy (2007¹⁵). The wooded ridge links to the best preserved sections of the medieval city wall including the only surviving boom towers in England. Few people are aware of this asset due to the lack of visibility of the structures, lack of promotion and interpretation, and poor path conditions.

7.6 There is the potential to explore the feasibility of an urban woodland park in this location which would enhance and link the woodland walks that connect the Boom Towers next to Carrow Bridge to Ber Street via the best preserved sections of city wall and the wooded ridge overlooking the Wensum Valley. The project could include path surface improvements, new path connections to link up routes, a pedestrian crossing to enable safe access from King Street to the city wall, tree management on the wooded ridge to improve views and habitat, robust interpretation and wayfinding signage, and vegetation clearance to reveal the city wall. This is considered to be a longer term aspiration within the strategy's lifetime (to 2028) given the site constraints (including the need to cross third party land, and the cost of future maintenance) and is likely to be very expensive. Constraints also include

¹⁵ GI Strategy 2007, Annex A, Figure 4.18 Access and Movement: Norwich Urban Area.

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 great benefits for the city's green infrastructure network, helping to serve major anticipated housing growth in east Norwich and the city centre, and with a range of positive benefits for biodiversity and health and wellbeing. Feasibility work is required to investigate the practicalities of creating this link, identify and address constraints, and estimate costings.

Bishops Bridge to Whitefriars Green Space enhancement

7.7 This is a potential multi-faceted enhancement project for the area of riverside walk and open space between Bishops Bridge and White Friars Bridge, centred on the open space around the Cow Tower. It has the potential to maximise biodiversity potential, improve recreational access and develop the tourism offer for this part of the River Wensum. Key elements are proposed to include:

- Biodiversity enhancements to improve the transition between land and water through greater diversity of planting, provision of floating vegetation platforms in suitable locations, and provision of additional landscaping and pond / inlet creation to provide a refuge for developing fish species;
- Heritage enhancements to maximise the area's heritage potential. This area played an important role in Kett's Rebellion of 1549. Connectivity between the Cow Tower and Kett's Heights in Thorpe Hamlet would also be considered to re-establish the relationship of these sites through environmental and interpretive enhancement.

7.8 These enhancements will help support greater recreational access to this green area. Additionally, there is a significant open space, Hospital Meadow, to the rear of the Cow Tower which forms part of the Great Hospital. This area is currently inaccessible but would provide valuable recreation space if it could be opened to the public on occasions for example for a river festival. Following consultation with the Great Hospital, the Master of the Great Hospital has indicated in-principle support for occasional use of the Hospital Meadow as part of a river festival or similar event, subject to further detailed discussions.

Mary Chapman Court redevelopment

7.9 The Mary Chapman Court site is owned by the Norwich City Council and currently leased to UEA for student accommodation. It was previously allocated for housing development in the now expired Northern City Centre Area Action Plan. Although it is not yet clear when this site will be redeveloped it is important that future development at this important riverside location maximises the site's contribution to the vitality of this part of the river through its design and range of appropriate uses. The development should be designed to relate closely with its river frontage, potentially facing the river at this point. The potential and range of uses on

the river frontage could include a café or restaurant and open space. Provision of access to the river would also be beneficial.

Wensum Park

7.10 Wensum Park is a historic Grade II listed park which was designed to take advantage of its sloping site to the River Wensum. It is formally laid out with shrub and flower beds, children's play areas and a paddling pool. The main entrance incorporates a viewing platform with long views down to the river. A decked walkway runs alongside the river's edge and there is some access to the river via concrete steps which used to lead to paddling pools within the river. An open-air swimming pool set back from the river was once a very popular recreational attraction; however this has been out of use for a long time and has been left to develop as a natural woodland area important for wildlife. There is potential to maximise the potential offered by Wensum Park's location by creating an access point to the river for canoes (although this may be restricted due to limited parking provision) and potentially by provision of mooring points. In the longer term there may be potential to open up the site for swimming, subject to water quality issues being addressed.