

7 Taunton Waterways Strategy

The early sections of this Taunton Waterways Strategy and Guidance document have established the Vision and values, or Outcomes, behind the Strategy, and have set out the key challenges, issues and opportunities influencing potential investment in the town's Waterways corridors. The Management and Maintenance Plan summary (and Appendix B) describes in some detail the operational commitments specific to maintaining the primary function of the Waterways – to manage water resources to minimise the impacts of flooding and drought – which must not be compromised.

The remaining sections of the Strategy address the potential investments that sit outside of the primary water management functions but are compatible with those functions. The remaining sections, cover Strategic Goals, targets in the form of Prioritised Investments, Design Guidance in relation to major waterside development sites and guidance on Delivery.

7.1 The need for strategic goals

The Strategic Goals for the Waterways are framed by the overarching Vision for Taunton Garden Town which is for the town to be **“...flourishing, distinctive, and healthy ... a place where the outstanding natural environment, diverse and thriving economy and inspiring cultural offer, contribute to an exceptional quality of life and well-being.”**

In that context, **the primary aim of the Taunton Waterways Strategy and Guidance is to maximise the positive placemaking, environmental and community outcomes that can be achieved from every investment made in water management and waterside development.**

The Garden Town Vision defines the future Taunton, and the Waterways Strategy and Guidance outlines one of the key means of reaching that destination. The Strategic

Goals for the Waterways define the high-level deliverables that will move the town towards reaching its Vision, establishing a clear set of outline actions and targets that will frame the Prioritised Investments. The latter will need to include more precise actions and measurable outcomes and will rely on a coordinated partnership approach to delivery. The associated funding and officer capacity are not currently available and so achievement of the Goals is dependent upon appropriate financial and human resources being made secured.

The purpose of the Goals is to be the overarching structuring elements that will guide, facilitate and enable a concerted push towards delivering the Vision. The Goals will:

- Make it easier for organisations to work together towards a common purpose defined by the Outcomes from Investment
- provide a spatial framework to guide investment to the most appropriate locations

- engage with Taunton's residents and businesses to communicate key messages and encourage their active involvement in delivering the Vision
- stimulate everyone involved in the future of the Waterways to think more creatively about the benefits that could be achieved by a clearer focus on a broad range of positive outcomes
- demonstrate to potential investors that Taunton has a collective commitment to delivering its Garden Town Vision and is taking practical steps toward it
- help to position the Waterways at the heart of the town's cultural identity and enhance the sense of place; and
- respect the primacy of effective water management and flood risk avoidance

The Goals reflect the essential ingredients of urban regeneration and growth processes where: working together across organisations; agreeing the way forward; coordinating effort and investment; communicating success; building investor confidence; and strengthening the community's capacity to play on increasing role are all core to achieving and sustaining success over the long term.



Potential for placemaking



Stakeholder site walk over

They also reflect on the point that, despite an evident willingness from across the Stakeholder Team to work together more effectively, the organising elements necessary to support a coordinated approach are not yet in place.

7.2 Taunton Waterways strategic goals

The Goals for Taunton Waterways are expressed as ‘The Eight Cs’.

- Conveyance
- Collaboration
- Coordination
- Community
- Creativity
- Confidence
- Culture
- Connectivity

They need to be progressed in parallel with one another because each supports the others. Collectively they demonstrate

commitment to a resilient, progressive and influential process of positive change aligned with the Garden Town Vision.

7.2.1 The Eight Cs of Taunton’s Waterways

Strategic Goal 1: Conveyance of water

SG1 expresses the prime goal of effective water conveyance through the town to mitigate flood risk, without which there would be no prospect of achieving the Garden Town Vision. The Taunton Waterways Strategy and Guidance recognises that primacy and incorporates the Management and Maintenance Plan accordingly.

In addition, four significant areas of investment in the water conveyance infrastructure have been identified through the Waterways Strategy; Longrun Meadow, Goodland Gardens & Mill Stream, French Weir and Firepool Weir. These could have a substantial and potentially transformative

effect on the achievement of the Garden Town Vision across the town as a whole. If planned appropriately, in accordance with the Strategy, each would make a major contribution to the achievement of the desired Outcomes from Investment. Conversely, uncoordinated and piecemeal investment could prevent those Outcomes from being achieved.

Goal to be achieved: To deliver committed and emerging projects in accordance with the Management and Maintenance Plan, and to develop an outcomes-led approach to planning the four areas of opportunity, referred to in the next section as the Combined Projects.

Responsibility: Waterways Steering Group (see SG2)

Measure of success: In addition to implementing the committed projects in the Management and Maintenance Plan, progress the conceptual thinking around the four Combined Projects.

Timescale: On-going in line with the Management and Maintenance Plan. Demonstrate progress on all four Combined Projects in line with level of priority identified. A project management resource is to be secured by Somerset Council for high and medium priority projects. Within 12 months:

- High priorities to have an agreed development concept in place
- Medium priorities to have agreement on the key components of water infrastructure required and an action plan for delivery
- Low priority to have a plan of action to agree components and develop a concept

Strategic Goal 2: Collaborative working

It was evident during the process of preparing the Taunton Waterways Strategy that each of the key organisations in the Stakeholder Team was keen to work with the others, recognising the importance of collaboration for the achievement of the best possible outcomes from each

investment, and yet the extent of actual collaborative working is currently limited.

One of the Strategic Goals is therefore to establish a more formal and organised forum for discussion, debate, consideration of emerging proposals within the Waterways and, where appropriate, provide collective endorsement for investment proposals. The forum would not have statutory powers or regulatory authority but would provide decision-makers with considered guidance and advice and would help to steer emerging proposals to achieve both their functional purposes and the wider range of positive benefits defined by the Outcomes from Investment.

Goal to be achieved: To significantly improve collaboration across relevant bodies in order to facilitate the delivery of each of the other Strategic Goals and to progress Prioritised Investments in an efficient and coordinated manner.

Responsibility: Somerset Council Garden Town Team.

Measure of success: Working with the Stakeholder Team to secure an agreed approach to governance.

Timescale: Within 6 months.

Strategic Goal 3: Coordinated delivery

The Taunton Garden Town Vision provides clarity on the direction in which the town is moving, and considerable work has been carried out to provide the design guidance necessary to reflect the Garden Town aspirations. However, Local Plan policy predates the establishment of the Garden Town and there is no clear spatial plan for the Waterways, making it challenging to achieve coordinated decision-making about potential investments.

In the absence of clarity on the spatial plan, there is a high risk of projects and initiatives being implemented in a way that, at best, fails to optimise the wider opportunity and, at worst, conflicts with other beneficial opportunities and compromises the ability to deliver better project solutions with more positive outcomes in the longer term.

Over the longer term, that uncoordinated delivery of incremental investment will erode the opportunity that a better-planned approach could offer for achieving genuine transformation for the town.

There is a need to provide a structuring plan to frame all investments over the coming years in order that the multiple elements of incremental development that gradually come forward work together, complementing one another, expressing shared design traits and gradually building the picture of a cohesive linear park running throughout the Waterways Corridor.

Goal to be achieved: This Taunton Waterways Strategy and Guidance will become a material consideration in planning decisions, which will assist a rational approach to development. Additionally, a series of themed plans is required to coordinate the various types of investment such that the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts. The plans will provide consistency as a basis for assisting the Steering Group and Somerset Council's decision-makers.

Responsibility: Somerset Council Garden Town Team and/or Planning Team.

Measure of success: Acceptance by Somerset Council of the Taunton Waterways Strategy and Guidance as a material consideration.

Stakeholder endorsement of a 'Linear Water Park Concept Plan' for the Waterways Corridor. This will form the structuring plan upon which a series of frameworks can be developed for delivery of coordinated public realm, connectivity, biodiversity, recreation and the like, as referenced under 'Frameworks' in Section 8.

Timescale: Subject to funding, Linear Water Park Concept Plan to be complete within 12 months. Complementary Frameworks to be complete within two years.

Strategic Goal 4: Community involvement

The Taunton Waterways Strategy has been developed with the Stakeholder Team and

Consultant Team but has not yet had the benefit of wider community engagement and involvement. Public consultation will be carried out prior to adoption of the Strategy and Guidance. Post-adoption, implementation of the Strategy will require and benefit from community involvement, for example in the development of the structuring Frameworks and consulted on emerging concepts for the Combined Projects, both of which are explained in Section 8.

Community involvement in planning for the future of the Waterways is important for several reasons:

- it shares a host of new perspectives and reveals ideas that have not previously been aired
- it builds a community's understanding of the challenges that constrain investment and the development decisions, and the opportunities available
- it helps to manage expectations and understanding of the scope for realistic aspirations

- it can develop common ground and shared purpose; and
- it generates buy-in to the process and, often, support for emerging proposals

Community involvement should encompass the breadth of Taunton's communities - geographically and socio-economically. Every age group and social profile should be engaged, including residents and business communities, and visitors where appropriate.

A Garden Town Communication Strategy is due to be prepared. Consideration needs to be given to the suitability of that process and the corresponding deliverables to encompass a Waterways Community Framework, or whether an additional document is required.

Goal to be achieved: To involve the Taunton community in implementing the Strategy, introducing fresh thinking and building local knowledge, understanding and, therefore, capacity to advise on proposals that emerge long after the Consultant Team has completed its work.

Responsibility: Somerset Council Garden Town Team

Measure of success: Prepare a Community Framework (standalone or as part of the Garden Town Communication Strategy) to guide and organise a coordinated programme of community involvement. Work with the proposed Taunton Garden Town Community / Stakeholder Forum (or establish a new Taunton Waterways Community Advisory Group or Citizens Panel or similar if necessary), to provide focused community representation to work alongside the Steering Group. Increasing the level of participation in consultations, its understanding of placemaking, the extent to which the Taunton community believes it can influence outcomes and their satisfaction with the process.

Timescale: A Communication Strategy or Community Framework to be prepared and approved within 12 months. Establish Advisory Group or similar within 12 months. On-going measurement of participation

levels, with annual monitoring and reporting.

Strategic Goal 5: Creative thinking

The Waterways Strategy has adopted the outcomes-led approach to ensure that each investment made in the Waterways Corridor delivers the widest range of positive benefits. Prior to that approach, there has been a tendency for each investment to focus on narrow outcomes specific to the primary purpose of that investment, be that operational water management, footpath maintenance, nature conservation, and so on.

The great value of the process of defining the Strategy is that it has inspired the Stakeholder Team to think more creatively and laterally about what else those investments could achieve, besides the primary purpose.

Goal to be achieved: Inspire those involved in planning in the Waterway to think more positively and aspirationally about what can be achieved within the Corridors.

Realism is important, but that makes creative problem solving all the more essential.

Responsibility: Waterways Steering Group or an equivalent group with steering function yet to be agreed.

Measure of success: Achievement of multiple positive outcomes from each investment in the Waterways.

Timescale: On-going throughout implementation of the Strategy and beyond.

Strategic Goal 6: Confidence building

All investment relies on the confidence of the investor in the scheme to which they are considering committing. Urban regeneration and economic development are no different. As a general rule, investors and funding bodies tend to be more supportive if there is a clear vision, a set of goals agreed with key stakeholders and commitment to a plan of action. This provides confidence that a place has been properly planned with the right people and

that, as a consequence, there is a higher degree of certainty and a lower level of risk than for unplanned places.

Government or institutional investors tend to be interested in the degree to which their investment will result in tangible improvements over the longer term, related to particular agendas, funding criteria, positive legacies and longer term economic uplift. For example, the Government needs housing on a large scale, climate resilience, nature recovery, healthy living and well-designed places. The breadth of the Outcomes from Investment that effectively define the values behind the Waterways Strategy will help to secure investment that delivers positively against these agendas. There is more on funding criteria in Section 10.

Prospective developers or promoters of the allocated development sites within the Waterways Corridors will draw confidence from the on-going implementation of the Taunton Garden Town Vision and the emergence of a Waterways Strategy, which they would expect to enhance market

values and therefore improve commercial viability over time. A strategic approach that identifies opportunities within the Waterways Corridor with potential to support the viability of development sites, perhaps through phosphate management or provision of strategic green space and biodiversity, will help to build confidence among potential funders and investors.

Urban regeneration also relies on investment from within the Taunton community. If town centre and waterside businesses that rely on patronage gain confidence that the likely future population growth of the town will see large scale residential development on key sites within the Waterways Corridor, they are more likely to remain in the town, invest in maintaining their businesses or start new businesses in order to capitalise on that localised growth. Similarly, entrepreneurs and businesses that grow out of the Innovation Centre for example may be more likely to take space within the town centre if they anticipate it becoming more vibrant over the next decade.

That confidence comes from seeing a clear and approved Strategy.

Goal to be achieved: To build confidence among all potential investors and funders about the commitment to well-planned and viable growth in the town centre and Waterways Corridors. That will require clear communication of the vision, the role of the Waterways in achieving the Vision and stakeholder commitment to making things happen. Effective communication will benefit from storytelling around an ambitious and compelling plan in the form of the , supported by clear Goals, complementary Frameworks and the delivery of projects, including Quick Wins.

Responsibility: Somerset Council's Taunton Garden Town Team

Measure of success: Track both funding received from all sources for Waterways investment propositions, and the level of prospective developer interest in the waterside regeneration sites. Locally, work with the business community and

associated groups and take an annual (or at least biennial) poll to assess changing level of confidence in the town.

Timescale: On-going, with annual monitoring and reporting.

Strategic Goal 7: Cultural enhancement

Much of the town turns its back on the river and canal. Even in the centre of town, there are few urban spaces that engage positively with the water and treat it as a major placemaking asset. Water is not generally recognised as a being at the core of the town's identity on a day-to-day basis.

There is a substantial opportunity to change how the town thinks and feels about its natural and naturalistic assets, including the Waterways and the adjoining and surrounding countryside. The Garden Town initiative represented an enormous step in that direction, and identified the Waterways as the key to unlocking and redefining the town's relationship with the natural environment within which it sits.

This can be further achieved through a combination of water-related education, information, interpretation and events.

Goal to be achieved: For water to increasingly be seen and experienced as an important part of Taunton's cultural heritage, appeal, sense of identity and day-to-day life, including introducing more activity onto the water and or water's edge, whilst respecting ecological and operational requirements.

Responsibility: Somerset Council Taunton Garden Town Team

Measure of success: Increasing the number of residents, businesses and visitors who view the Waterways as being part of Taunton's appeal now and in the future, and who use the water in one way or another.

Timescale: On-going, with annual monitoring and reporting

Strategic Goal 8: Connectivity

Somerset Council recognises the positive links between active travel, physical and mental health, the environment, air quality and response to climate change, and the Waterways Corridor is a very substantial resource that can play a significant role in encouraging and increasing participation in active travel across the town and beyond.

The Council's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP), Local Transport Plan and 'Connecting our Garden Communities' plan provide the wider context for delivering improvement in active travel and serve as material considerations in planning decision-making. The Waterways Strategy must be consistent with these, whilst providing more clarity, definition and detail aimed at increasing the level of active travel within the Waterways Corridor specifically.

The Waterways offer additional, waterborne opportunities for participation in active travel - less so for commuting but certainly for recreation, health and fitness purposes.

Goal to be achieved: To delivery an increase in active travel participation throughout the Waterways Corridor, in accordance with the Council's wider commitments, proposals and initiatives.

Responsibility: Somerset Council Active Travel

Measure of success: Produce a Connectivity Framework specifically for the Waterways Corridor, that identifies, prioritises and details the investment required to implement positive change. Monitoring with the aim of evidencing an annual increase in the number of people using the Waterways Corridor for active travel purposes, be it commuting, recreational, healthy living or environmental reasons.

Timescale: Connectivity Framework to be completed within 18 months, with ongoing monitoring.

