

## Capital Commission: The river corridor context and scenario

### Introduction

*Confluence* seeks to locate this commission within the setting and context of the river corridor in Haverfordwest. The commission provides an opportunity for the selected artist to make a public artwork that has a tangible impact, and not only demonstrates the relationship between people and the place in which they live, but brings new insights, showing how art can be a force for catalysing change and thereby contribute on a multiplicity of levels toward 'regeneration'.

The commission is set to take place at an interesting time, on the cusp of plans for the redevelopment on a number of key sites along the river, including the former Riverside Market: and the riverside shopping centre, which may influence the direction taken by the artist in the development of the work.



**The Big model: An interactive model of Haverfordwest's riverside area, enabling Confluence to engage with the public. Model view looking south through the town.**

The artist may decide to respond to aspects of the investigative work undertaken by Confluence through the experimental 'Lab' programme. One such theme has been to link disparate sites, recreational spaces and 'hidden' locations in the river corridor, via a linear park having walks and cycle ways through greened spaces that would link the town centre

to the surrounding natural habitat and to more peripheral out-of-town shopping and leisure/ residential areas. The creation of a linear park presents a major opportunity to unite people and re-connect them to the river.

Re-purposing empty buildings and underused spaces is another central and related aim. This is currently being explored through a theme of 'ownership', which encompasses access-to-use, as well as 'civitas'; engendering the feeling of 'civic' belonging that has the potential to encourage a connection to place. A metaphor has been the 'Agora'; the physical 'market-place' in ancient Athens where not only trade and commerce was centred, but also a place where religious and intellectual life could take shape and find expression.

We are interested in this ancient metaphor (but one that acknowledges and celebrates difference) because it suggests clues as to how a meaningful collective vision (a People's Plan) could achieve a more diverse and therefore sustainable model for regeneration of the County town. By 'seeing the town differently' we aim to change people's perceptions of Haverfordwest, and in doing so open up new avenues of thought that explore how we live, work, play, learn and visit the town now and in the future.

The river Cleddau is a constant and key feature in the town's history, but it has been tamed, neutered, canalised and built over in the centre of Haverfordwest and ultimately separated from the town and its people.

New development along the floodplain and the need for flood defences have driven this, but there is no avoiding the predictions laid out in reports that draw on current research into climate change, pointing to higher peak tides with a significant increase in the likelihood of extensive flooding in the decades ahead that call for new thinking around how the built environment within the river corridor is adapted to meet this new challenge.

Once a thriving and busy tidal port, a place of commerce and industry that grew up around the river as a thoroughfare, serving the region and connecting it to the world (Haverford-in-the-west), the river now seems strangely placid. The commerce of yesteryear has not been replaced with the contemporary water sports, sailing and leisure pursuits found in most coastal, and many estuarine towns.

Admittedly the town is a long way from the sea-coast, but its location at the heart of the county, and at the head of a tidal reach leading into stunning estuary landscape in the one of the largest deep-water harbours in the world begs the question- what are we missing here?

Perhaps it's obvious that the river is the most underused asset, having the greatest potential of all.



**The Old Bridge: the town reconnected with its river for the raft race, August 2016. An event re-started in 2015 after an absence of many years.**

### **The setting**

The Cleddau flows north–south through Haverfordwest, overlooked by the Castle and the old town, which rises steeply from the river to the west with more recent development; new roads and shopping centres built on what was once tidal marshland in the flood plain to the East



**Riverside at Bridge meadow: a hidden gem just 5 minutes from the town centre**

The geography and the changing characteristics of the river can be categorised in a series of 'reaches' as the Cleddau approaches and flows through the town.

- Bridge Meadow: The upper reach above the town centre
- The Town Reach: encapsulated between the Old and New Bridges.
- The Quays: tidal wharfage above and below the town weir: County Hall and Picton playing fields opposite, and including the Priory ruins to the south
- Fortune's Frolic and the Saltmarshes: recreational space and natural tidal estuary cut off from the town by road and rail bridges to the north and ending where the Merlin brook joins the main river where the estuarine landscape begins



### **View from the 'Frolic': the tidal estuary**

Each section, or 'reach' of the river has it's own particular character, with a variety of under-used assets that could be better connected in a comprehensive plan. There are a number of vacant buildings in strategic locations in the town reach and along the Quays, which present opportunities for change and a greater engagement with the river.

### **Scenario**

*The commission* aims to investigate the opportunities to improve the built environment and reconnect the town to the water's edge, with the notion of encouraging programmatic activities that can support new and vibrant riverside communities, and 'place-making' through distinct interventions at the large and small scale.

This is a deliberately open brief within a two-stage commissioning process that will allow Initial ideas to be tested, prior to agreeing the proposed artwork for implementation within the available timescale.

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