

Waterlinks – a £50 million lottery bid for Somerset



Somerset's unique Waterlinks project is a tale of two ancient British kings - Alfred and Arthur - answering a 21st Century cry for help.

Somerset's low-lying landscape is particularly threatened by climate change and a number of its main towns, linked by historic river trading routes, are in urgent need of regeneration. Through Waterlinks, the County is rediscovering the potential of water, its most precious natural asset.

Waterlinks is inspired by Kings Alfred and Arthur, their Somerset associations with water, and wisdom from earlier times. Equally, it explores new ways to appreciate water and live in greater harmony with this essential element of life. Most importantly, Waterlinks emerges from the ambitions of local communities who want to manage water resources better to enhance their lives and live safely, and raise the profile of an often overlooked county.

Waterlinks is built around a simple plan. Alfred the Great might have sketched something similar at his Somerset hideout before beating the Danes. Waterlinks is a web of more than 20 projects, harnessing water in old and new ways for the benefit and enjoyment of local people, visitors, business, wildlife and the wider environment. The projects are based around several key sites located on, beside, and linked by water. They are also clearly categorised by theme so a visitor arriving at the Waterlinks network could focus on an interest in heritage, or wildlife, or active leisure pursuits, or education activities.

Alfred's dramatic sanctuary at Athelney island, overlooking the Somerset levels, is a key Waterlinks heritage site. It will be reached, as the other projects, by new and restored navigation, walking and cycling routes, accessible to all. Another heritage project is the recreation of Glastonbury Lake Village – man managing water in prehistoric times.

Beyond heritage, Waterlinks includes regeneration and education. It interprets both history and present day environmental issues to local people and visitors. There are recreational and leisure schemes, promoting water-based sport, leisure and healthier lifestyles. And there are natural environment projects, preserving and enhancing understanding and access to the flora and fauna of Somerset's Levels and Moors. The whole is underpinned by access, transport and water management initiatives, including the use of new woodland to help reduce flood risk.

How will Waterlinks make a difference? Waterlinks is made up of many separate water-based community projects, united into a coherent mass and force for change. The scheme will promote more sustainable lifestyles and working practices. It will engage and educate while involving local people and visitors in a wide range of absorbing and exciting new activities.

Challenges and opportunities linked to man's relationship with water have long been a priority in Somerset's vulnerable, low-lying landscapes. This historic emphasis now has new urgency in an age of concern about Climate Change.

Anne Fraser, Chair of Waterlinks: "Waterlinks tells the hidden, often mysterious, story of Somerset's role in shaping the history of this island. Waterlinks also provides a unique opportunity to create something truly remarkable, not only for today but for generations to come."

Programme and Project Descriptions

Programme Description

Somerset needs urgent regeneration, and being low-lying is particularly threatened by climate change. Communities here are revisiting water, their key natural asset and shaper of striking local landscapes.

They are merging past wisdom about water with newer ideas, to find sustainable solutions. *Waterlinks* structures 21 local initiatives harnessing water into a web of schemes & discoveries, focused on four centres with linking waterways and multi-user paths.

Projects are organised around four key themes: regeneration, access & activity, environment and learning. Through them, Waterlinks pilots a system approach to co-existence with nature. Water shaped Britain, and remains its fundamental resource and living landmark.

Project Descriptions

1. Lake Village

We will reconstruct an Iron Age village and Saxon surrounds in a historically representative landscape. To enjoy the site, we will offer visitors audio-visual interpretation and presentations on the landscape and history. There will be "hands-on" opportunities for travelling by punt through reeds beds to the island, and engaging in livelihoods and pastimes from history. The site will give free access to Beckery Mound (a Scheduled Ancient monument). The grounds will offer opportunities for walks, guided tours, bird watching and picnicking.

2. Kingfisher Water Centre

This project would create the Kingfisher Water Centre, a clubhouse with associated facilities to provide access to the water for rowers, canoeists and kayakers of all ages and abilities along a 4 km beautiful stretch of the Huntspill river. It is planned to establish a centre of excellence; a training and competition facility run by a voluntary group of local clubs. Sited within a National Nature Reserve that is home to kingfishers, barn owls, water voles and otters, the facility would also be of interest to environmental groups. Conservation and sensitive use would be key and so the Centre would provide educational material explaining the ecological significance of the area. A new Waterlinks pedestrian and cycleway running the length of the southern side of the river would link the Centre to Glastonbury to the east and Highbridge and Bridgwater to the west.

3. The Climate Change Centre

An iconic new building on the banks of the River Parrett north of Bridgwater and near to the M5. It will be the Climate Change Centre, a building that will house research, education and conference facilities on Climate Change, fledgling businesses in the emerging field of environmental technologies as well as a major Climate Change visitor attraction with interactive experiences. Near to the motorway it will also act as a gateway and interpretation

centre for Waterlinks, explaining the Waterlinks vision – a sustainable future-proofed offering for visitors and locals alike.

4. HOPE Project

A regenerated waterside at the heart of Bridgwater with illuminated historical features. It is planned to improve the Brick and Tile Museum and extend it to the river to provide enhanced workshop and education space. From there a new riverside path to the Black Bridge is planned. The Black Bridge itself would be restored and a new viewing platform built overlooking both the bridge and a proposed new artwork on the other side of the river replicating ships' masts, in celebration of the town's maritime heritage and association with Admiral Blake. It is also proposed to rebuild the Chandos Glass Cone using a contemporary glass and steel frame to create an iconic structure 38m high in which there could be an information centre, café and observation platform.

5. Maunsel Visitor Centre & Bridgwater to Taunton Canal Towpath Improvements

The Taunton to Bridgwater canal towpath is an existing route that requires upgrading works to encourage greater use and to reduce future maintenance costs. The route, crossing through the outstanding landscape of Somerset, will provide a safe off road route providing a key sustainable link between these two major towns and provide key links between other Waterlinks assets. The project will upgrade the towpath surface to make it safer and more user friendly and provide greater levels of use and Somerset County Council owned swing bridges along the route will also be upgraded as part of this. This will ensure continued navigation along the route and provide crossing points along the canal for the future. This upgraded recreational, leisure and commuter route will encourage a healthier more active lifestyle, and allow residents and visitors to access this outstanding environment in sustainable ways. In addition the project will provide a hi-tech audio-visual display at Maunsel visitors centre which will provide an engaging interpretation of the history canal and how it helped shape the landscape and economy of Somerset.

6. Tone through Taunton

This project will provide a new and iconic bridge for pedestrians and cyclists crossing over the river together with improved pedestrian and cycle access to 3 kilometres of the riverside through central Taunton. It will regenerate the semi derelict Firepool area, linking to the Waterlinks Navigation Project and replacing the existing weir with a new and exemplary structure. It will provide a new floating marina, a destination for boat traffic arriving from Bridgwater or Langport via the new navigation. There will be appropriate pick up and drop off facilities for sustainable waterborne tourism along the River Tone. It will provide new recreation facilities for existing water user/youth groups, including Taunton Canoe Club, Taunton Scouts and Taunton Sea Scouts. It will transform and revitalize the riverside environment through Taunton.

7. Wondertree

The Wondertree project will create a flagship 'eco attraction' for Taunton along the river corridor. It is conceived as a 'working arboretum' - in effect a 'managed wet woodland park' containing various attractions, and a 'tree factory'. Among the attractions will be the UK's first Green Cathedral (this would be a living willow structure 15m high). The Wondertree brand will be used to indicate on manufactured articles that the wood is from a sustainable and environmentally friendly source. Visitors and the community will be invited to sponsor the trees grown on site in anticipation of articles manufactured when the tree matures. Every tree planted will have a purpose.

8. Business Incubation Centre

The creation of 60 to 70 small business offices and workshops available on flexible leasehold terms to new and small businesses. The facility would include a strong and environmentally sound hi tech IT and design element, supporting the Waterlinks economic development theme and providing sustainable services to help promote sustainable lifestyles. The preferred location is adjacent to Somerset College - which enables strong links to be made to both the Genesis project (about sustainable construction) and other SCAT environmental facilities/ courses.

9. Taunton Timestream

The Taunton Timestream Project creates a museum of outstanding quality (the *Museum of Somerset*), located within the historic setting of Taunton's medieval castle on the banks of the River Tone. Part of the collection will be presented to tell the Waterlinks story. It will aim to inspire visitors to value Somerset's watery heritage and explore the rest of the Waterlinks network. In addition the Project will create purpose built storage for museum and other reserve collections and a new Somerset Record Office to preserve and make available Somerset's outstanding archival heritage. Learning and access will be at the heart of all three components of the Project, and the interaction of people and the environment will be their key intellectual theme.

10. Tone Floodplain Woodland

The Tone floodplain woodland project will create multifunctional wet to dry woodland, rich in wildlife and with access for people, on the floodplain of the River Tone and its tributaries. It will work with the Waterlinks Wondertree Project in Taunton to demonstrate how important woodland is in controlling water run off and improving water quality. Information boards will be included at all the sites to inform visitors about the special environment they are visiting

11. King Alfred's Sanctuary

This project provides a showcase for the Alfred story and a destination at Athelney, introducing visitors to the Waterlinks network of projects. The interpretation panels and exhibition explain the historic context of the site and invite visitors to explore a trail. The disused cider house forms an ideal setting for a tea room and exhibition, which would be opened in conjunction with the electric boat service and run in the first instance with the help of volunteers from the Somerset Waterways Development Trust. The views across the Somerset Levels from the Alfred monument and from the trail allow visitors to imagine the scene in Alfred's time, when the raised fortress surrounded by water and marshland would have created a formidable defence. There would be no charge for visiting the site

12. Langport Vision

The Langport Vision project integrates a number of small-scale environmental projects, new facilities to access the River Parrett for canoeing and boating and improved access to local pathways for disabled people. It extends the existing visitor centre in Langport to introduce the Waterlinks theme and improve the presentation of information about the Southern Moors. It adds CCTV access to nature reserves from the centre. This will act as a focal point for the other Waterlinks Projects in the Southern Moors Hub. It creates a destination for the navigation and waterside spokes and acts as a major gateway to the rest of the Waterlinks network of projects. The project will also involve the extraction from the River Parrett of the

Langport Lock Gates (to better facilitate navigation) The gates will be recovered and displayed for their historic significance

13. Industrial Heritage

The Industrial Heritage project is another part of the Waterlinks story of life on the Somerset Levels. It aims to reconnect the community with its rich and varied heritage of water in industry, which led to many mills and buildings across the Southern Moors area.

Project development to date has focused on the Parrett Works - an important grouping of mainly 19th century industrial mill buildings near Martock, set on the banks of the River Parrett. It is understood that there were mills here from at least 1086.

The Industrial Heritage project could revitalise the Parrett Works complex as a living and working heritage site, transforming important and semi derelict historic buildings, into vibrant areas for workspace and visitors. This project will also include additional industrial heritage interpretation developed in partnership with local history groups and community museums across South Somerset, with links to the Somerset Rope, Flax and Hemp industries, one of the oldest indigenous textile industries in England, manufacturing sailcloth, netting, rope and twine from the medieval period into the 20th century.

14. Hydropower Mills

This project delivers the installation of up to 10 water turbines in Somerset mills. Hydropower turbines producing 'green' electricity will put historic mill sites back where they belong at the heart of the community both as energy providers and educational facilities. This will raise awareness and understanding of our cultural and economic heritage and mitigate future climate change. This project links both the past and future Somerset water stories, offering present day access and educational benefits, through open days, and networking between mill owners.

15. Ecology and Landscape

This project helps local communities to create a wetland environmental / conservation area at a small local site, and to develop new ideas and skills for sustainable development. The sites will be created through conditioned "Waterlinks" grants, and local match funding (50:50) enabling community ownership. The total project costs can include purchase, landscaping, access (pathways, gates), signage and fencing. The application process will be an exciting opportunity for communities to develop a site proposal as part of their local actions to address climate change – for example where a small community is seeking to become "carbon neutral".

Park & Glide

The Park and Glide project provides trip boat services on the King Alfred's Web. Initially services will be set up between the Silk Mills park and ride car park and Taunton Town centre, and between Burrowbridge and King Alfred's Sanctuary at Athelney. Occasional trip boat services will also be made available on the rest of King Alfred's Web. Services will be provided using purpose built solar electric boats, which will be accessible to all. Initially volunteers from the Somerset Waterways Development Trust will run the services.

King Alfred's Web

The King Alfred' Web project will open up 50km of restored navigation between the towns of Bridgwater, Taunton and Langport using the Bridgwater & Taunton Canal, the River Tone and the River Parrett. Spurs will take visitors through the centre of Taunton town to a new marina near French Weir, and through the ancient port of Langport to Muchelney and beyond. The project provides a sustainable and environmentally friendly means of access to the Somerset levels and the other Waterlinks projects. It introduces development opportunities for marinas, boat sales, water based holidays, and the associated facilities and services. It also provides an attractive backdrop to the waterside paths, the town centre enhancements, the woodland and wetland sites and the visitor centres that will tell the Waterlinks story.

GWR Cycleway

This project will update and create 9.3 kms of safe, family friendly route that will link on to other Waterlinks sites. The route starting at Langport and travelling to Martock, via Muchelney abbey, will be environmentally sustainable and find an alternative use for a disused railway line (Great Western Railway). The route will allow users to access the unique Somerset levels without impacting on fragile areas and encourage sustainable and environmentally friendly travel to many Waterlinks assets in the South of Somerset. A variety of access controls throughout the route will take care of the needs of disabled users to ensure they are able to enjoy this spectacular journey. The route will be a link between two parishes encouraging links and networks to develop and encourage tourism and increase the viability and sustainability of local businesses.

Grand Western Canal Cycleway

A waterside trail will be created between Wellington and Taunton, via Nynehead, which will include 5kms of brand new, sensitively constructed off road pathway. The route follows the river tone and will then follow the line of the historic grand canal. The route will pass the remains of the first working boat lift through the outstanding Somerset countryside. The route will link with Sustrans route No. 3 creating a family friendly walking and cycling route that will allow users to enjoy the river tone, experience the route of the Grand Western Canal. The project will join with the park and ride facility in Taunton where there are plans to create a water taxi in to the centre of Taunton. This will help reduce congestion and provide a safe and alternative environmentally friendly route in to Taunton. The route will also be a safe and environmentally friendly commuter link between Taunton and Wellington.

Bridgwater Bay Cycleway

The project will develop a family friendly 70% off road waterside trail. The route will link the industrial town of Bridgwater to the tourist destination of Highbridge via Pawlett, Stretcholt, West Huntspill and Alston. Existing elements will be upgraded for multi-user use and to provide safe cycling and walking. New sensitively constructed off road sections will be developed to join the existing routes and to encourage multi-user use. The route will highlight the industrial nature and heritage of Bridgwater, the wildlife rich river Parrett and Parrett estuary, and the popular tourist town of Highbridge. The route will encourage more sustainable transport between the villages and towns along the route and allow increased links between businesses and communities increasing economic benefits for all. The provided route will encourage outdoor leisure activities and travel creating healthier and more active communities.

Pedal the Levels

The Glastonbury to Highbridge route will create a 75% off road largely waterside trail across the Somerset Levels and Moors following the path of the river Huntspill. The route will

AN

connect many of the small rural economies along the route increasing economic prospects. Visitor's centres along the route will also be linked to the route increasing their viability. A bus route will connect several Glastonbury tourist attractions to the Lake side village project giving increased mobility to residents and visitors. Somerset Levels and Moors is an area of international significance and importance. The route will be sensitive and environmentally friendly, allowing access to the public to this beautiful area whilst preserving it for the future. The linking of two highly popular tourist locations will encourage sustainable and environmentally friendly travel across Somerset.