



Thinking Water

AVON ECHOES

An interdisciplinary audio guide for socio-ecological connectivity in
Stratford-upon-Avon

Proposal

All images are author's own



THE AUDIO GUIDE

Avon Echoes is a mobile based audio guide designed to bridge the significant information gap regarding the River Avon's vital role in Stratford-upon-Avon.

While the town is famous for its Shakespearean heritage, there is a lack of integrated resources that explore the river's ecological and socio-ecological complexity.

Grounded in the scholarly principles of Interdisciplinarity and Blue Space Theory, the guide aims to enhance human wellbeing and community engagement by highlighting how we shape the river and, in turn, how it shapes us.

An accompanying scholarly essay is provided with this proposal to explore the frameworks and themes behind the audio guide.



LET'S THINK WATER

The heart of this journey lies in Place-Based Education (PBE), a framework that transforms the town into a "living classroom" to deepen the community's connection to its local environment.

Unlike traditional teaching, this approach utilises "Think Water" prompts at every stop to turn the user from a passive listener into an active participant.

By encouraging users to use their imagination and interpret the story of the river for themselves, the guide fosters a sense of civic duty—a necessary emotional bridge for protecting the Avon against the exploitative pressures of pollution and climate change.





The Journey

MAPPING THE RIVER

The guide follows a route of seven carefully selected stops, chosen for their ability to demonstrate conflicts or synergies between human and natural forces. These sites are colour coded into three interdisciplinary themes. The following slides provide a script preview, location imagery and suggested Think Water! prompts to give a feel for the guide.

The Engineered Environment

Explores how the river has been "broken" to serve industry and transport, highlighting the hydrological trade-offs at Lucy's Mill and the Old Tramway Bridge.

Red

Recreation & Ecological Conflict

Examines the tension between the Shakespearean tourism driving the economy and the resulting environmental impacts, like soil compaction in the Swan Gardens.

Pink

Sacred & Sensory Spaces

Focuses on rare synergies, where the "keynote sounds" of the weir and the ancient sanctuary of Holy Trinity Church provide spaces for reflection and biodiversity.

Green

Stop 1

BANCROFT BASIN

The Engineered Environment

“This basin is the intersection of two different worlds: the natural flow of the River Avon and the man made precision of the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal. It’s a perfect example of how we have broken and reshaped the river to serve our own purposes, specifically for industry and transport. While it’s a beautiful spot today, it represents a deep history of hydrological control, where we’ve redirected water to fuel the town’s economy.”

Think Water!

Imagine yourself standing here before any of the man made developments were built. What do you think the river banks would’ve featured?



Stop 2

THE TRAMWAY BRIDGE

The Engineered Environment

“You are standing on a key piece of infrastructure that redefined the local area. The Tramway Bridge was once filled with people moving goods across the river. But notice the trade off, look over to the left and see the island there. Cox’s Island is specifically for nesting birds, providing them with an area unbothered by us, look how small it is. There once would have been many sites along the river just for the wildlife to use but with our development we’ve isolated these spaces. We can change this. Look further up river, past the road bridge, there you can just make out the nature reserve, an area that was once landfill now given back to nature.”

Think Water!

We’re looking at only a tiny stretch of one river. Think about all of the other rivers there are, how much of river nature do you think we’ve changed?



Stop 3

THE RECREATION GROUND

Recreation and Ecological Conflict

“The Recreation Ground has been a focal point for leisure in Stratford for centuries, but this history of boat club activities, regattas, and weekend rowers has a hidden impact. While the river is a playground for us, the constant traffic and noise push wildlife from its natural habitat and fundamentally change the river's character. We are seeing a direct conflict between our desire for recreation and the needs of the river's ecology. However, this is also where we see the rise of the citizen scientist. Local groups like SafeAvon are now using their recreational time to monitor water quality, proving that those who play on the water are often the best equipped to protect it.”

Think Water!

If you were a citizen scientist, what do you think you'd find in the river?



Stop 4

THE WEIR

Sacred and Sensory
Spaces

“Stop for a moment and put your phone away. Just listen. The sound of the weir is what composer R. Murray Schafer calls a “keynote sound”, the fundamental tone of the landscape. While the weir is man made, engineered for flood management, to our ears it sounds like a natural waterfall. This is where synergies instead of conflicts can arise on the river. A man made structure that ultimately interferes with the river actually creates a sensory experience that draws us closer to the water. This is what we call a Blue Space, a natural water environment that can help our health.”

Think Water!

What do you think about this blue space, how do you think these spaces can benefit our wellbeing?



Stop 5

LUCY'S MILL

The Engineered Environment

"At Lucy's Mill, we see the river as a source of power. For centuries, the Avon was the engine of the town, driving the industry that allowed this market town to flourish. But look at the water here, this is a heavily managed stretch. While the mill and the weir are landmarks, they act as barriers to the river's natural rhythm. That relaxing sound we explored at our last stop is also causing a conflict as well as a synergy. The weir is a tool to manage flood defences but we often don't notice our reliance on these systems until they are threatened by global events like climate change, leading to the extreme floods or droughts that put this infrastructure under immense stress."

Think Water!

Industry has moved away from the river, but the legacy remain. How much do you think we still rely on breaking and pollution of rivers for our modern lives?



Stop 6

HOLY TRINITY CHURCH

Sacred and Sensory
Spaces

“While much of the river has been transformed, this site has remained a sanctuary for over a thousand years. The churchyard offers a rare synergy, a place where the spiritual identity of the town meets the ecological edge of the water. The river acts as a natural boundary that has protected this space, allowing it to provide a bridge between land and water for both people and local wildlife. It is one of the few spots where human architecture and nature exist in a truly complimentary way. Spaces like these create a sanctuary, not just for us but for wildlife and plants as well”

Think Water!

Take a look around, how do you think a sanctuary site next to a river like this helps wildlife and plantlife flourish?



Stop 7

SWAN GARDENS

Recreation and
Ecological Conflict

“This final stop brings us back to the heart of Stratford’s identity: William Shakespeare. The Bard of Avon’s influence is everywhere, but that cultural legacy comes with a physical cost. Every year, thousands of us gather here for open air theatre and recreation, but this leads to significant soil compaction. This hidden damage actually increases our flood risk and threatens the very soil fertility needed for the gardens to thrive. It is a constant conflict between our desire to celebrate our culture and our need to protect the land it sits on.”

Think Water!

It’s 1610 and Shakespeare is writing *The Tempest*, a play featuring magic storms and the devastating effects of water. He’s seen the floods in the town and he draws inspiration. If you were a writer how would you use local water to inspire you?



THE GUIDE IN PRACTICE

To facilitate Place Based Education, the guide uses a simplistic, mobile based app that acts as a digital storyteller. By using location stamped audio, the narrative only unlocks when the user is physically present at each stop, ensuring the learning is contextually tied to the landscape.

To prevent the digital barrier where users focus more on their screens than the river, the app is intentionally stripped back to focus on the audio and a basic map. This ensures the technology supports, rather than distracts from, the sensory experience of the blue space.



BUILDING AN INTERDISCIPLINARY COMMUNITY

Success for Avon Echoes is measured by its ability to foster an inclusive, interdisciplinary community that feels a sense of civic duty toward the river. This requires an inclusive approach to both visibility and physical access.



Marketing & PR



Leveraging local news outlets and digital platforms to reach the community and visitors is essential. By inviting local journalists to experience the guide, we can drive interest beyond traditional tourist activities.

Physical Accessibility



While most of the riverbank is accessible, bridge stairs create barriers. To remain inclusive, the guide offers a single bank version, ensuring those with limited mobility can still experience the narrative without lengthy diversions.

Hearing Accessibility



To support the hearing impaired, a digital reading companion will be provided, ensuring the interdisciplinary insights are accessible to everyone, regardless of how they consume information.

THANK YOU

