

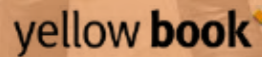


# BARNSTAPLE | VISION

JANUARY 2020



LAVIGNE LONSDALE



## **Our vision for Barnstaple town centre**

*We will restore and strengthen Barnstaple's status as the heart of civic, commercial, educational, cultural and community life in North Devon in the mid-21st century. This will not be achieved by trying to turn back the clock. We need to make the town centre attractive, appealing and fit for purpose in a new era, reflecting the way we live now. It needs to be resilient in the face of the challenges presented by the digital economy and the attractions of competing locations.*

*Barnstaple is a handsome town in a beautiful riverside setting. We will mobilise its rich array of heritage assets, ambitious businesses, cultural and community organisations. We will revitalise the iconic Pannier Market and build on the revival of Butchers' Row, establish a sustainable core of high quality retail in the heart of the town, and encourage diversification by regenerating and re-purposing what are now struggling secondary locations. We will encourage public buildings and community uses to cluster in the town centre. We will rebalance the town centre, by reconnecting it to the Taw, restoring place quality and coherence south of the river, and reducing the negative impacts of road traffic and surface parking.*

*Barnstaple will be recognised as one of England's liveliest, most attractive and prosperous small towns, the focal point for a large rural hinterland, and an essential part of the North Devon experience for UK and international visitors. The revived town centre will contribute to an enhanced quality of life, and its cosmopolitan appeal will make it an increasingly popular place to live and work, and especially attractive to young people and families.*

*This is an ambitious vision which reflects the insights and aspirations of the community. This document sets out a plan to make it happen, focusing on six key challenges.*

- Challenge 1:** *To make Barnstaple more attractive to residents and visitors by revitalising and diversifying the town centre economy*
- Challenge 2:** *To restore, reuse and celebrate Barnstaple's historic buildings and townscapes*
- Challenge 3:** *To put people first by encouraging walking and cycling and reducing the negative impact of traffic and parking*
- Challenge 4:** *To reconnect the town to the River Taw*
- Challenge 5:** *To establish a complementary relationship between the historic core and the retail parks on the south bank of the river*
- Challenge 6:** *To ensure that the regeneration of Barnstaple town centre contributes to the Devon Climate Declaration*

### Challenge 1:

**To make Barnstaple more attractive to residents and visitors by revitalising and diversifying the town centre economy.**

Barnstaple is performing better than many comparable town centres, but there are warning signs, including secondary retail locations with high vacancy rates and buildings in a poor state of repair. The quality of the shopping, food and drink offer is acceptable, but there is a lack of quality outlets to capture discretionary expenditure and appeal to visitors. There are plenty of independent businesses, but not enough that is locally distinctive. The town centre is tired and shabby in places and the non-retail economy is weak. There are some popular and attractive residential areas on the town centre fringes, but the Central ward is the most deprived in Barnstaple.



## Challenge 2:

### *To restore, reuse and celebrate Barnstaple's historic buildings and townscapes.*

Barnstaple is a special place in a memorable riverside setting. Its distinctive features are ably summarised in NDC's Barnstaple Conservation Area Character Appraisal. It has an extensive collection of 389 listed buildings, of which seven are Grade I and twelve Grade II\*. The historic form of the Saxon town remains largely intact and there are a number of fine townscapes. But this rich heritage is under-valued and under-appreciated and in places it is threatened by neglect. Over-engineered roads and tracts of surface parking (see below) have eroded the fabric of the town centre and diminished its appeal as a destination.

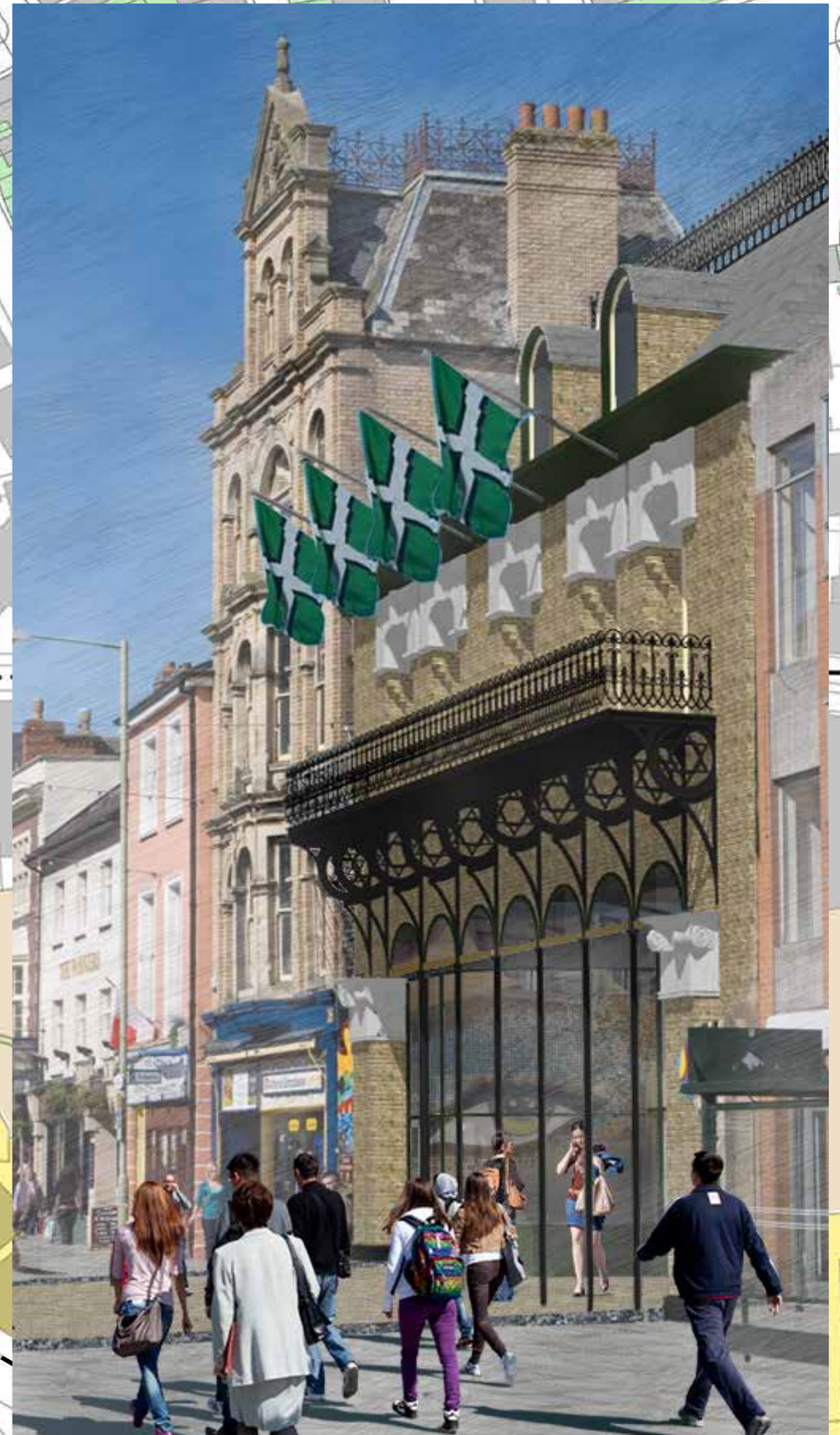


Image 1: Sketch image showing material in use in the town centre. The image shows the formation of Boutport street

### Challenge 3:

**To put people first by encouraging walking and cycling and reducing the negative impact of traffic and parking.**

Although traffic is excluded or restricted in the heart of the town centre, the visitor/shopper experience is still dominated by road traffic. The A39 (Alexandra Road), the A3125 (Belle Meadow Road/Long Bridge) and North Walk act as an inner ring road, encircling the town centre. The approaches to the town are defined by over-engineered roads which act as a barrier to movement between the town centre and the suburbs. Within the inner ring, vehicles are prohibited and restricted in some places, but large surface car parks (notably at the Cattle Market and Queen Street) and their associated access roads degrade parts of the historic core. The bus station, though somewhat dated, is conveniently located, but the railway station is in an edge-of-town location at Sticklepath, south of the river. Barnstaple's large rural hinterland makes it highly dependent on the car, but the climate emergency demands a radical approach to encourage more people to travel by bus and train and move around the town on foot and by bike.



Image 3: 'A sense of the place' - artists impression of the transformation of Cattle Market and Tuly Street

#### Challenge 4:

#### To reconnect the town to the River Taw.

We have noted Barnstaple's wonderful riverside setting, but our analysis and consultations confirm that it is an underutilised asset. Investment in The Strand, including the provision of a shared surface, has yielded somewhat disappointing results. The raised embankment contributes to flood protection but denies pedestrians a view of the river, and the landscaping scheme that connects the historic buildings is of indifferent quality. Once obtained, view across the river to the unsightly Anchorwood development is deeply disappointing. The problem is compounded by the shabby state of the lanes linking The Strand to the High Street.

- Grade 1 listed Queens Anne's Walk
- Opportunity for public art installation
- Underutilised frontage
- Bridge Chambers included in regeneration
- Potential foot bridge link
- Tarka trail
- Make active use of the water

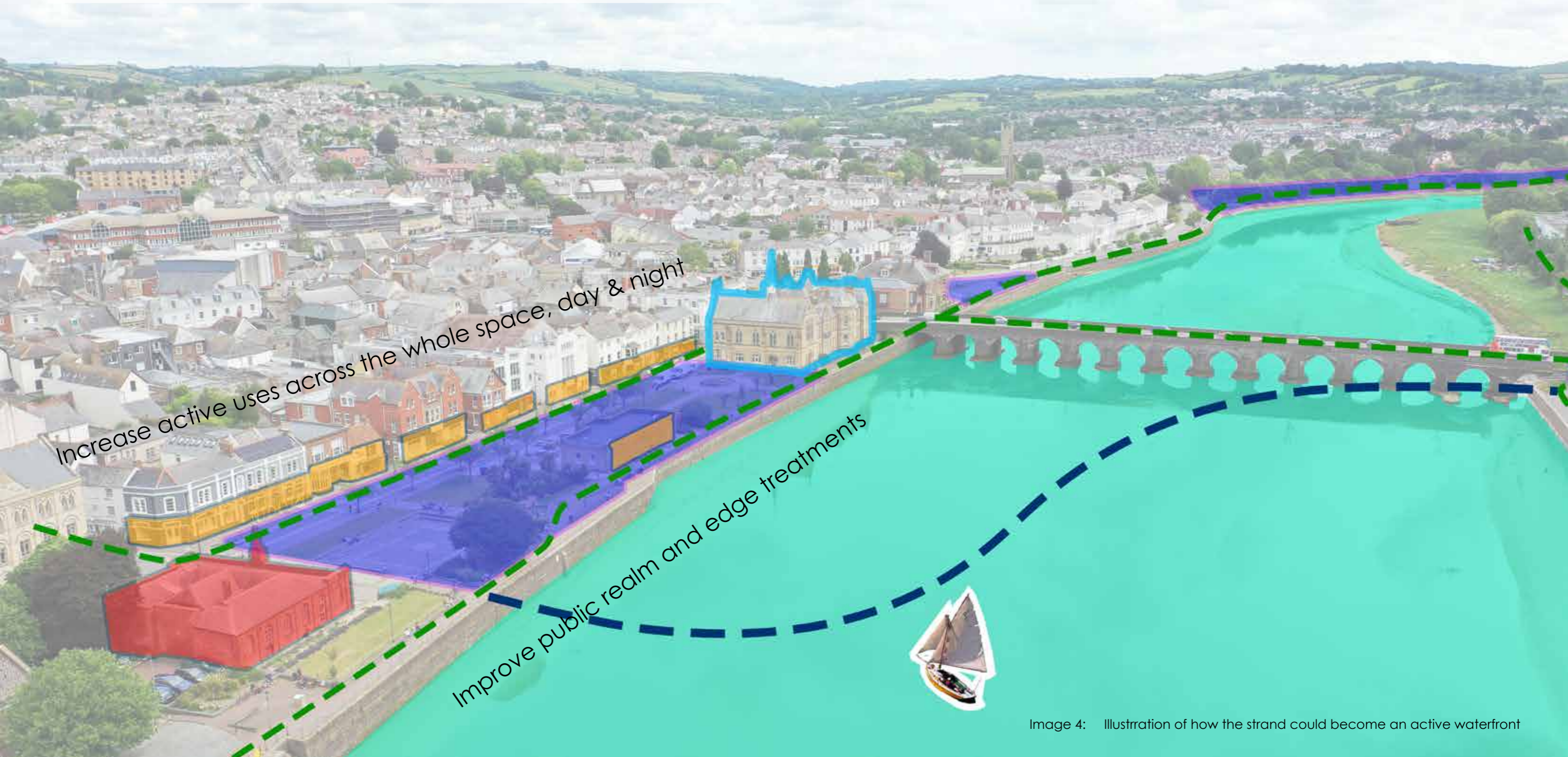


Image 4: Illustration of how the strand could become an active waterfront

### Challenge 5:

#### *To establish a complementary relationship between the historic core and the retail parks on the south bank of the river*

The commercial zone on the south bank of the river comprises the long-established Seven Brethren development and the retail/residential Anchorwood scheme which is still under development. The area includes some important assets such as large-footprint retail and trade units and sports facilities which it might be hard to accommodate in the town centre. Sadly, the quality of both phases of development is generally poor. The urban form is fragmented and incoherent and the road network serving both parts of the site is confusing for pedestrians and cyclists. It acts as a disincentive to "linked trips" across the river, and people moving to and from the railway station have to pass through this hostile environment. In placemaking terms the area has almost nothing to recommend it, but we are where we are, so NDC will have to play a long game. Much of the development at Seven Brethren is nearing the end of its life, so this creates opportunities to reconfigure the site to strengthen the urban form, enable pedestrian movement and raise the design bar. Anchorwood is a more intractable problem, but something can be salvaged by ensuring that the listed Oliver Buildings are restored and reused.



Image 5: Visualisation of train station regeneration

## Challenge 6:

*To ensure that the regeneration of Barnstaple town centre plays its part in implementing the Devon Climate Declaration*

North Devon Council is a signatory to the Devon Climate Declaration, and this needs to be reflected in every aspect of the town centre strategy. Meaningful action is required to reduce car dependency, encourage active travel and sustainable public transport usage. The drive towards zero-carbon needs to be underpinned by the reuse and repurposing of existing buildings wherever possible, the application of modern methods of construction (MMC), and energy efficient heating, lighting and waste disposal practices. Flood risk management is imperative in the context of the predicted increase



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