

Space to live, space to play



A RECREATION STRATEGY FOR
THE RIVER THAMES

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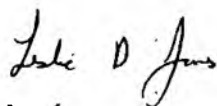
The River Thames Recreation Strategy began with a partnership between the NRA and the Sports Council, both of whom have responsibilities to promote the use of the river for sport and recreation.

This philosophy of cooperation continued through extensive research and consultation with river users, Local Authorities and interested organisations, resulting in a Strategy which reflects the views, opinions and hopes of a diverse range of interests.

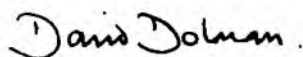
Despite the inevitable conflicts, the overriding message is the importance of achieving a level of recreational use which allows the river to flourish as a home to both wildlife and people. After all, it is the natural beauty of the Thames which is its principal attraction.

The Sports Council and the NRA will use this Strategy to influence both our own and others activity on the Thames. For us implementation will be via Catchment Management Plans, Regional Strategies for Sport, and in our day to day activities. We ask that Local Authorities use this document when preparing and reviewing Structure Plans, Local Plans, UDP's and Leisure Strategies. Governing Bodies of Sport are asked to consider it in the preparation of their Development Plans, and we encourage river users to act upon the policies, recommendations and actions which promote the safe sharing of the river, and enjoyment for all.

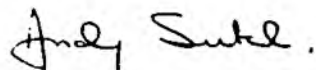
By producing this Strategy we are acting as a stimulus to future cooperation and partnership between everyone who wishes to see the Thames flourish, both as a natural resource and as a source of fun and relaxation. Let us all work together to achieve this, not only for ourselves but also for future generations.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Preparing a document which covers such a wide range of interests was a daunting task and one which has required time and support from many people.

The interest and enthusiasm shown by the river users, both commercial and recreational, proved to me that the Thames is one of the best loved places in the country. Many thanks to the clubs, Governing Body representatives, boatyards, and marinas who filled in questionnaires, gave interviews and responded to the consultation process.

Thanks also to the many local government officers and representatives of relevant agencies and interest groups who shared their experience and commented so comprehensively on the consultation draft.

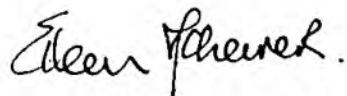
It would be impossible to name everyone who has helped, but there are a few who I would like to mention. The Project Steering Group have not only guided the work but have supported me throughout the project. Many thanks to John Redmond, Paul Chambers, Paul Bedford, David Lawrence and in particular Don Vickers who listened, advised and supported me on a day to day basis.

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Last but not least, thanks go to Elaine, Lisa and Paula who have organised a vast amount of paperwork quietly and without complaint.

With such a diverse range of interests it has been impossible to completely satisfy everyone. I only hope that I have reflected all views and given satisfactory explanations to those whose demands have not been met. The publication of this Strategy is not the end but the beginning, heralding a new impetus for cooperation on the Thames.

Over the past 2 years I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know the Thames, and have made many friends on the river. It has been lots of fun!



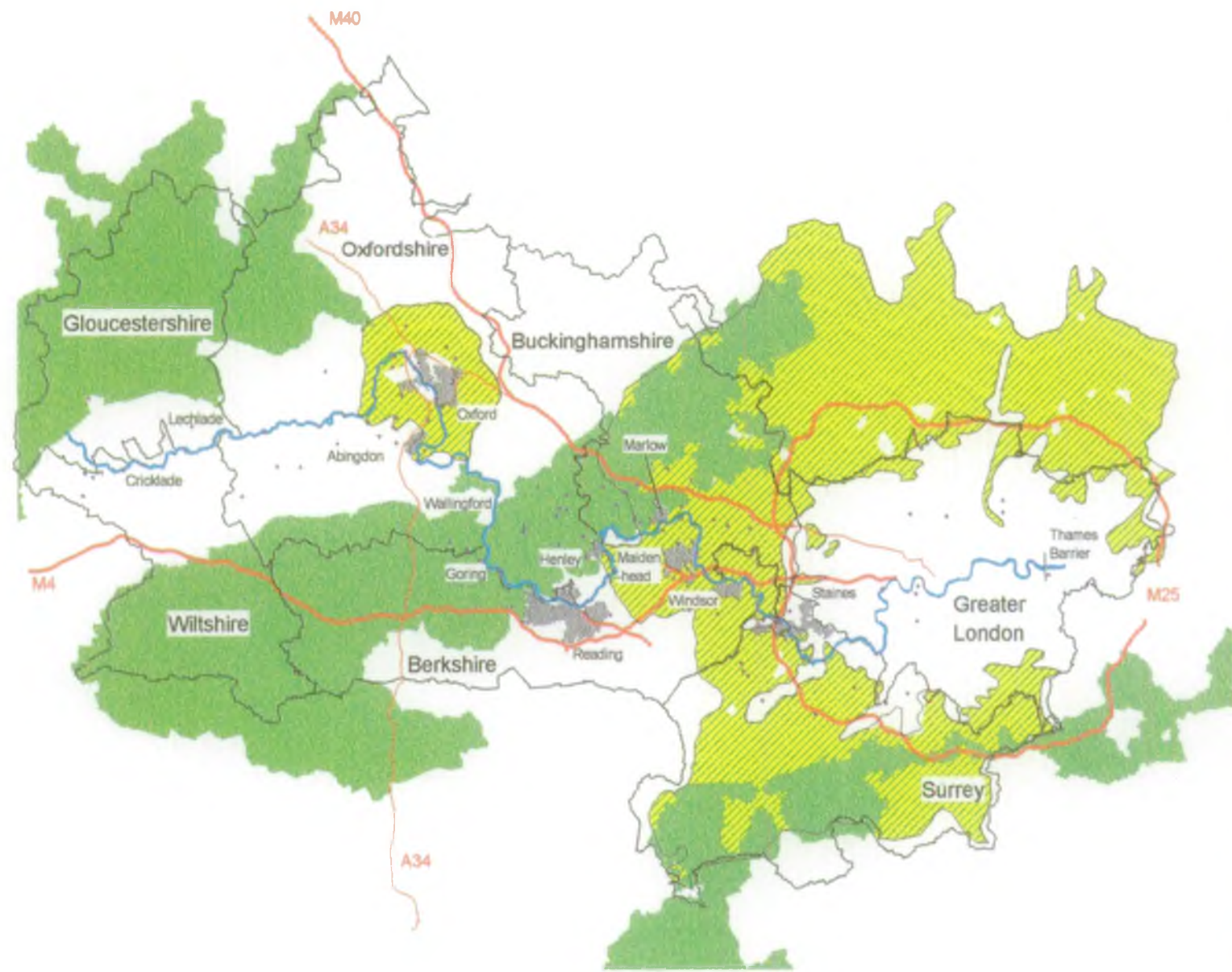
Eileen McKeever
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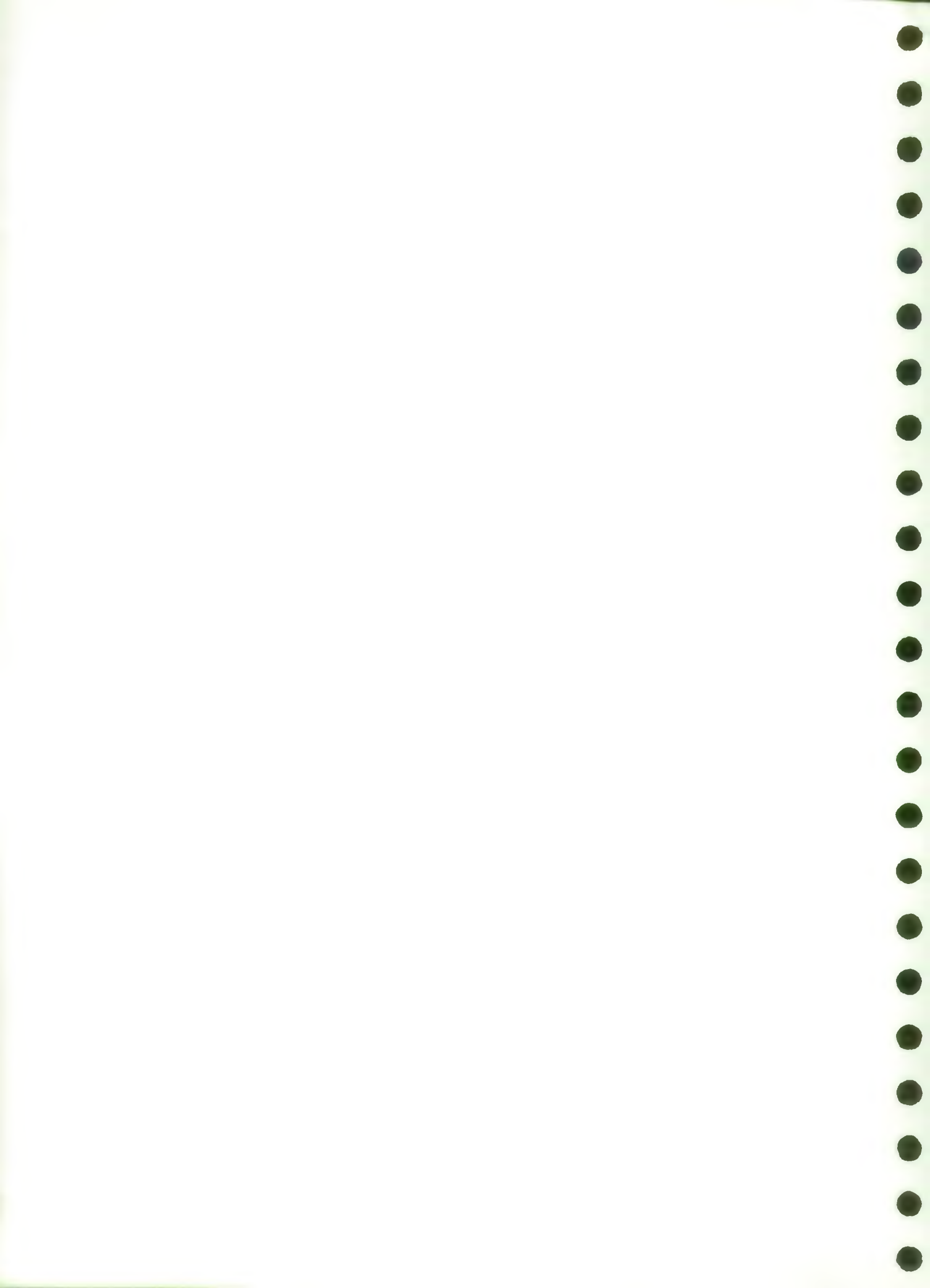
River Thames Recreation Strategy: River Thames - Source to Barrier

-  County & Thames Region Boundary
-  Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
-  Green Belt
-  Urban Areas
-  River Thames
-  Motorway
-  'A' Road
-  SSSI



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Planning for a Sustainable Leisure Resource

Waterways have always been an integral part of the way many people spend their leisure time. Rowing, cruising, sailing and fishing have been popular water sports for many years, but it is also for its aesthetic value that millions of people visit a waterside environment while at leisure. Pubs, parks, and footpaths located along rivers, canals and on the seafront are honeypots for visitors who just enjoy being by water.

The demand for countryside recreation, and in particular opportunities for water based recreation, is increasing significantly. Those who have responsibility for managing the countryside now have to ask:

- *How do we satisfy recreational demands while conserving the countryside as a flourishing natural habitat, on which the recreation depends?*

This issue of 'sustainability' is one of the most important which the leisure and tourism industries are having to consider at present. Achieving a level of recreational activity which can be sustained by the natural environment requires planning, management and monitoring. The first step in this process is to prepare a strategy which coordinates and guides the numerous, often conflicting, interests, and to advise on the most appropriate course of action.

As both a valuable natural resource and one of the busiest waterways in Europe, with a vast diversity of users who have different expectations, achieving a sustainable level of recreational use on the Thames is a priority for all those involved in its management.

Recreation on the Thames

The recreational use of the Thames is not new. People have been boating, fishing and walking along the Thames for hundreds of years. It is home to some 21,000 boats - cruisers, canoes, rowing eights, skiffs, punts and passenger boats. It is also an important fishery for over 200 angling clubs and numerous casual anglers.

Then there are the millions who walk, picnic, fly kites and "river watch". For them the Thames corridor is a series of parks where they can relax and enjoy the countryside and the wildlife.

Reconciling this myriad of uses is certainly a challenge, but of even greater importance is the need to protect and enhance the Thames, ensuring that it flourishes as a natural resource which is home to a diverse range of birds, plants and animals. This is important not only for the ecology of the river but also for recreation, as its natural beauty is fundamental to the popularity of the Thames as a leisure resource.

Defining the recreational capacity which can be sustained by the natural resource is the real challenge. Research which measures the impact of recreation on a changing natural resource, such as the Thames, has not yet been carried out. Until there is further research, answers as to whether levels of activity are sustainable will be based on the judgement of those who understand natural processes. This Strategy takes a precautionary approach, aiming to ensure that at least the current water environment is not harmed.

The NRA and the Sports Council recognise that the advice given in this document is based on a combination of

historical data, current and future trends, and the advice of specialists. As methods of establishing recreational capacities which are environmentally sustainable become available, the policies within this Strategy will be updated as necessary.

Why a Recreation Strategy for the Thames?

The Thames and how it is used has changed over the years. In general its recreational use has evolved without very much influence from river "managers". So why is there any need to interfere now? The whole philosophy of leisure is that it is time which is not managed, where individuals have a choice. Why propose a Strategy to influence how people spend their relaxation time?

There are several very good reasons why we need a strategy for recreation on the Thames, primarily the increasing popularity and diversity of outdoor activities, and the need to protect the environment on which they all depend. An important factor is the management of conflict, both between active recreational use and the conservation of the natural habitat, and between different recreational users.

Many people enjoy the Thames but there are numerous others who have never experienced cruising, going through a lock, or just being by the river.

Recreational facilities and access routes to the Thames are not static. Some are lost and others are created as a result of changes in management style, economic conditions and local influences. A coordinated approach to the recreational use of the Thames will help provide optimal access for a wider section of the population.

In 1992 the National Rivers Authority and the Sports Council initiated a project to prepare a Strategy for the Thames, which has the following aim:

'To produce a Strategy for the River Thames and its corridor, which optimises its recreational potential, while conserving and enhancing the ecological, landscape and heritage value'

Although this Strategy document is the ultimate goal of the project, the process of research and consultation has been very important. It has raised awareness of the importance of recreation on the Thames, which will hopefully ease the implementation of the policies and action plans.

Working in Partnership

The last time an exercise like this was undertaken the result was the Report of the Working Party on the River Thames Leisure Policy (Boating) 1980. The river has changed over the past 15 years and this document is the result of the NRA and Sports Council's wish to produce new advice on recreation to planners, users and managers of the Thames. Both the NRA and the Sports Council view their role as that of coordinators, researching and reflecting the views, needs and aspirations of all those involved with the Thames.

The riparian Local Authorities have a key role to play in both the preparation and implementation of this Strategy. Through their statutory planning responsibilities they have powers to affect the Thames and its banks. These Authorities will be invited to adopt policies within this Strategy into Structure Plans, Local Plans, Unitary Development Plans and Leisure Strategies, so influencing how the Thames is developed.

Key influence groups are those who use the river, either for recreation or commercially. They will be most affected by the policies and their ownership of the issues and recommendations is crucial to successful implementation of the Strategy.

Others involved in the project include the numerous interested groups and agencies such as English Nature, RSPB, London Rivers Association, and the Governing Bodies for the various sports using the Thames.

The Process

The Strategy document includes a review of countryside and water recreation both nationally and locally. Much of the local information is based on primary research and discussions with the representatives of the various activities involved. It is from this process of information gathering that the policies and recommendations were formulated. The subsequent action plans are part of making this an 'active' Strategy, giving various organisations responsibility for implementation.

The Issues and Policies

The same issues recur again and again throughout the policy section. They include: access; information; conflict between users; environmental protection and awareness; recreational capacity; and financial resources. Other more specific issues are: the number and location of moorings; visitor facilities, including toilets and refreshments; customer awareness among those who manage and work on the river; the availability of slipways; provision of safety equipment and information; and the communications network between river users and managers.

These and other issues are discussed in a total of 32 Policy statements. The key Policies which set the context for all recreational activity on the river are listed below.

Sustainable Recreation on the Thames (Policy 1)

The remote, rural areas of the Thames will be protected from development which will affect its tranquil nature. The enjoyment of these rural areas for recreation should be encouraged, through positive visitor management which is sensitive to nature conservation and to the characteristic river valley landscape.

In urban areas of the river, open spaces will be protected from development and enhanced where appropriate. The well established recreational use of the Thames and its banks should be encouraged by improving and promoting access to areas which are environmentally robust.

The Thames in London will be protected as valuable open space and an important landscape feature. Access to and along the river banks will be improved and promoted where safe and environmentally acceptable.

Developments close to the Thames should reflect its special character, in terms of height, scale and quality, enhancing rather than detracting from the river landscape.

The management of the Thames and its banks should be coordinated to ensure that there is consistency and cooperation, with an clear understanding of individual responsibilities, both among river 'managers' and the public.

The Balance between Recreation and Conservation (Policy 2)

Recreation and conservation interests must recognise each others importance, discuss issues where there may be conflict and be prepared to find a mutually acceptable solution. The recreational use of the Thames and access to it will not be created or promoted where it will cause irreversible, detrimental change to the natural environment and river landscape.

Water Quality (Policy 4)

Those who have responsibility for water quality will continue to work to maintain, and where possible improve, the quality of water in the Thames.

Water Safety (Policy 5)

All river users and the general public will be encouraged to act in a safe and responsible manner when on or close to the river.

Those taking part in water sports should be aware of safety regulations with regards to their activity, equipment and crew, and abide by the Codes of Practice issued by their Governing Body of Sport. Swimming in the Thames will be discouraged.

Access for All (Policy 6)

The use of the Thames and its banks for informal recreation, including walking, will be encouraged, and the resource maintained and managed to accommodate appropriate activities where there is potential and it is appropriate to do so. Developments along the Thames should include the river as a positive feature, enhancing it where possible, improving public access and protecting historical views.

Where it is possible and safe, access

routes and associated facilities and services will include provision for the disabled. These will be promoted to relevant organisations and those with a disability will be encouraged to enjoy the Thames.

Information for Recreation (Policy 7)

All agencies involved with visitors to the Thames should seek to coordinate their information and publicity material, especially the provision and promotion of good visitor guides, information points and databases.

Facilities for Recreation (Policy 8)

The provision of visitor facilities, including toilets, should be a priority as they are a prerequisite for a good service to visitors to the Thames. Current provision should be reviewed, and action taken to fill in gaps where appropriate and acceptable, taking the local environment into consideration.

Where there is potential to negotiate a planning obligation in respect of development on or near the Thames, through a Section 106 agreement (Town and Country Planning Act), this obligation should be used where appropriate to benefit the needs of recreational users of the river and its banks.

Good Service on the Thames (Policy 9)

Priority should be given to ensuring the provision and delivery of a quality service to those who use the Thames and its banks for recreation.

Managing Recreational Conflict (Policy 13)

All river users should recognise that the Thames is a shared resource and that tolerance of other activities is required.

Conflict is best resolved by cooperation and river users should understand the activities of others and learn how to react when they meet on the river, through novice training programmes which explain other activities and provide guidance on the responsible use of the river and bank.

River User Groups (Policy 31)

The system of River User Groups will continue to be supported by the NRA and the PLA, and their role as the a vital communications link between users and managers will be developed.

Implementation of the River Thames Recreation Strategy (Policy 32)

Implementation of the River Thames Recreation Strategy should be given priority by the agencies involved:

- * National Rivers Authority*
- * Sports Council (Southern, South East and Greater London Regions)*
- * Regional Councils for Sport and Recreation*
- * Riparian Local Authorities*
- * Port of London Authority*
- * Governing Bodies of Sport and Clubs*

Cooperation is Better than Conflict

There are clearly no easy answers to resolving the many conflicts that exist between the various uses and users of the river. This Strategy seeks to minimise these conflicts through better information and improved communication. Its role is not to dictate but to educate, encourage, and influence those using and managing the river to make the best possible decisions for both the environment and those who use the river for recreation.

What Next?

The next stage is to ensure that the policies are adopted, primarily by Local Authorities, and within the NRA. Although for one organisation to take responsibility for implementation seems an obvious route, the most effective way to ensure the policies are fulfilled is to convince all those concerned to adopt the philosophy of the Strategy into their everyday thinking and operations.

This document will become an influential part of the NRA's Catchment Planning process which provides a method of integrating and coordinating all the issues related to the water environment, and translating them into action plans. The Catchment Management Plan will be one way in which implementation of the Strategy will be monitored and reviewed.

In 1996 it is proposed that a new Environment Agency will take over the responsibilities of the NRA, including the implementation of this Strategy which will play a vital role in ensuring that the Thames continues to be managed as one of the most important resources for outdoor recreation in Britain.

Finally, this is a working Strategy. It is not cast in stone, nor has it been given a timescale. Implementation will be led by the partnership of the NRA and the Sports Council, working with local Authorities, river users, interest groups and relevant agencies. They will listen to, influence, coordinate and encourage, to ensure that the Strategy is implemented and the Thames continues to be 'home' to the millions of people for whom it is such a source of adventure, fun and relaxation.

S

SECTION 1

THE THAMES:
A NATIONAL
RECREATIONAL
ASSET







THE THAMES: A NATIONAL RECREATIONAL ASSET

The changes in the Thames corridor over the years reflect the developments of both the local and national economies, and the trends in public knowledge and opinion. The intimate connection between the river and its riparian corridor, including the flood plain, has not always been recognised or respected in decision making.

The Thames has a variety of inter-related strategic functions:

- As a source of water and for drainage.
- As a conservation, wildlife and ecological resource.
- As a recreational and tourist resource, both the river and its banks.
- As a major part of the urban fabric of towns and cities on the Thames, especially London.
- As a transport route for passengers and freight, the latter being limited to the tidal Thames.

There are numerous different organisations with responsibilities for managing and advising on these functions of the Thames, as well as the many different river users, some of whom have potentially conflicting views on how it should be managed.

Historically the River Thames was a major transport route used by many industries. Towns grew up along its banks, particularly at crossing points. These urban communities needed rest and relaxation, but although the Thames was used for recreation, this was very much a secondary activity.

Developments in transport and changes in industry in the last century have transformed the primary role of the

Thames from an industrial artery, to a recreational resource, used not only by the millions of people who live within the Thames Valley, but also by the vast number of tourists who visit the area. The only exception to this is the lower reaches of the tidal Thames and the estuary which functions as London's commercial port, still the largest in the UK.

The growth of recreation on the Thames has been ad hoc, with sporadic advice from the various organisations involved. Obviously there is not an endless supply of space either on or around the Thames. The dilemma for those managing the river and its corridor is how to encourage access while conserving its natural heritage.

1.1. Managing the Thames - Who is Involved?

One of the key functions of a Recreation Strategy for the Thames will be to coordinate the actions of the numerous organisations who are involved with its 'management'.

The NRA, County Councils, District and Borough Councils, the Port of London Authority (PLA) and the Marine Safety Agency all have direct, statutory responsibilities, many of which are overlapping and sometimes potentially conflicting. The role of the PLA as the Navigation Authority for the tidal Thames is described in Section 4. In addition there are other government agencies who are involved with specific projects, such as the Countryside Commission on the Thames Path, the Sports Council on water and countryside sports and recreation, and English Nature on the Thames Estuary Management Plan. As well as the public sector there are the



numerous voluntary organisations who have an interest in the Thames, for example the River Thames Society and the River User Groups who, in the main, represent those who use the Thames.

Finally, there are the landowners and commercial operators who live or operate their businesses on or beside the Thames, and influence its use and management.

Coordinating the needs and views of all of these vested interests is not an easy task but one which is very important if a consensus is to be achieved. This section describes the various roles of those who have most impact on the management of the Thames.

1.2. The National Rivers Authority - Guardians of the Waterway

The NRA have a responsibility for many aspects of river management. This means taking account of flood defence, water resources, water quality, fisheries, conservation, recreation and navigation.

With such a wide variety of responsibilities, there are inevitable conflicts of interest. By adopting an integrated approach to the management of the river the NRA is aiming to resolve these conflicts, through the preparation of Catchment Management Plans (CMP). Having reviewed the water-related values of a catchment and identified problems which need to be solved, the CMP will set out a vision, a series of objectives and a list of actions for the NRA and others with responsibilities for the water environment. The River Thames Recreation Strategy will form an important part of the catchment management planning process, providing guidelines for the management of the River Thames and its corridor as a

recreational resource. (See Appendix 1 for River Thames CMP programme).

The NRA has a number of initiatives and studies which have relevance to recreation on the Thames. Further details are included in Appendix 1:

- * Thames 21 - A Planning Perspective and a Sustainable Strategy for Thames Region (consultation draft published in September 1994);
- * Thames Environment Design Handbook (1992);
- * River Corridor and Ornithological Survey of the Tidal Thames (available 1995).

1.2.1. The NRA's Recreation Responsibilities

The origins of the River Thames Recreation Strategy are in the 1989 Water Act (Section 8/4), now embodied in the 1991 Water Resources Act, which gave the National Rivers Authority responsibilities:

To promote the use of inland and coastal waters, and of land associated with such waters for recreation purposes.'

On a national scale the NRA has a recreation strategy¹ the principal aim of which is to:

- * *develop the amenity and recreational potential of inland and coastal waters and associated land.*

Specific objectives are:

- * *to maintain, develop and improve recreational use of NRA sites;*
- * *to take account of recreation proposals relating to any NRA function;*
- * *to promote the use of water and associated land for recreation purposes.*

As part of fulfilling these objectives the NRA Thames Region decided to take a strategic role. As the only organisation with responsibilities which cover the Thames from its source to the estuary, it is in a unique position in terms of river management.

1.3. The Sports Council

The Sports Council are co-funders of the Thames Recreation Strategy project. This interest stems from its overall responsibilities for sport and recreation. In recent years the increasing pressures on the countryside has generated interest within the Sports Council on the use of the countryside for sport. In 1992, following wide consultation, it published a policy statement entitled: 'A Countryside for Sport'². The key policies set out in this document are:

- *to apply the principles of Sport for All to the countryside;*
- *to promote a strategic planning approach to the provision of access to natural resources, for the local community and for visitors where necessary;*
- *to encourage the production of strategic plans for the development of countryside activities at national, local and regional level.*

As part of fulfilling these objectives the Southern and Greater London Regions of the Sports Council have supported the development of a Recreation Strategy for the River Thames.

1.4. National Government: Department of the Environment

The White Paper 'This Common Inheritance'³ sets out the Government's environmental strategy, including its

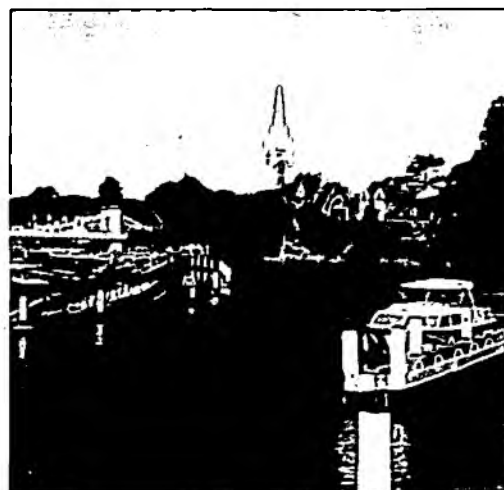
policies for the countryside and its sustainability. In terms of recreation the aims are:

- *to conserve and improve the landscape, and encourage opportunities for recreation.*

In 1994 the DOE published the 'Sustainable Development – The UK Strategy'⁴ which includes a chapter on leisure. The document suggests a framework for sustainable recreation, the aims of which are:

- *to maintain the quality of the environment in which leisure takes place for future generations to enjoy;*
- *to contribute to the health, well being and quality of life of those taking part in leisure activities without destroying the natural resources upon which leisure depends;*
- *to ensure that leisure activities are a major means of creating awareness of, and appreciation for, the environment.*

As part of its guidance for those involved in land use planning, the DOE have issued Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) notes which set out Government policy on a number of issues. Those of most



relevance to recreation are PPG 17: Sport and Recreation (September 1991); PPG 7: The Countryside and the Rural Economy (January 1992); and PPG 9 Nature Conservation (October 1994).

1.4.1. PPG 17: Sport and Recreation

This PPG encourages Local Authorities to ensure *'that through the preparation of development plans adequate land and water resources are allocated both for organised sport and informal recreation.'* It also reminds those responsible for development control *'of the communities' need for recreational space, to have regard for current levels of provision and deficiencies, and to resist pressures for the development of open space which conflicts with the wider public interest.'*

PPG 17 does not prescribe national standards of recreational provision. The Government recognises that circumstances differ greatly from one area to another, and it recommends that planning authorities draw up their own standards of provision based on local assessment of need, and include those standards in their local plans.

It also suggests that *'local plan policies should take into account the needs of recreational tourists and where appropriate encourage the development of facilities that benefit both visitors and residents.'*

This recommendation is reinforced through the Sport and Recreation Strategies produced by the Regional Councils for Sport and Recreation, which advise local authorities on priorities for the provision of leisure facilities and services.

The PPG also gives advice for specific sports and countryside activities

including water sports, where it places particular emphasis on mooring facilities: *'There is a widespread shortage of mooring facilities for boats both on inland waterways and on the coast. Development plans may encourage the imaginative use of redundant mineral workings, disused commercial docks and redundant agricultural land in close proximity to inland or tidal water. Such use can provide extensive new moorings without undue detriment to local interest or the natural environment.'*

1.4.2. PPG 7: The Countryside and the Rural Economy

This PPG gives general policy guidelines on the countryside. It provides the detail behind the overall Government view *'that the countryside should be safeguarded for its own sake and that non-renewable and natural resources should be afforded protection'*. Local Authorities are asked to determine more specific policies that reflect the different types of countryside found in their areas.

1.4.3. PPG 9: Nature Conservation

This PPG sets out the Government's policies for nature conservation. It emphasises the importance of both designated and undesignated areas for nature conservation and includes development control criteria, particularly for SSSIs and other sites with national and international designations.

With regard to recreation taking place in sensitive areas PPG 9 suggests, *'Some SSSIs are seasonal in their sensitivity; others can accommodate recreational activities without risk to their features of special interest. In some cases an Authority may be able to mitigate potential damage to its satisfaction by imposing conditions to regulate the proposed use'*.

1.4.4. Regional Planning Guidance

The Department of the Environment has also issued planning guidance at a regional level. Of relevance to the Thames is 'Regional Planning Guidance for the South East' (RPG 9)⁹ and for the South West (RPG 10)⁹. In particular they encourage Local Authorities to promote and support initiatives to conserve, restore and enhance river valleys and the water environment. With regard to recreation and leisure, the guidance provides the following advice:

- *facilities for recreation, including sports and leisure activities, enhance people's quality of life, and their development should be actively encouraged where this is compatible with the principles of sustainable development.*
- *the River Thames is identified as an important recreational resource for the South East Region, providing many opportunities for informal recreation. There is, however, a need to strike a balance between all the conflicting pressures which impinge on the river.*
- *the Government places great value on the retention of recreational land and amenity open space in urban areas. This is particularly important for its contribution to the quality of urban life.*

The Government has asked the London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC) to undertake a review of London's strategic planning framework. LPAC's 1994 'Advice on Strategic Planning Guidance for London'¹⁰ has been submitted to the Government Office for London as a basis for revising regional planning guidance for the capital. With regard to the River Thames and recreation, LPAC's advice:

- *identifies the River Thames as the backbone of London's open space framework and as the premier Area of Special Character.*
- *recognises the importance of the river as a heavily used sport and recreational resource.*
- *stresses the importance of maintaining and enhancing public access to the river. Particular attention is paid to completion of the Countryside Commission's Thames Path and where appropriate the London Walking Forum's Metropolitan Walks and Potential Green Chains.*

Also of relevance is LPAC's advice on Open Space and Leisure within London which recognises that the value of open space is not confined to leisure and recreation but has important educational, social, structural, cultural and amenity roles. As one of the most important open spaces in London, the Thames has a major impact on the quality of life for both residents and visitors.

1.4.5. Other Government initiatives include:

- the Department of the Environment's Task Force for the Thames Gateway (formerly East Thames Corridor).
- the Government Office for London's supplementary strategic guidance for the River Thames in London (due to be published in 1995).
- the Department of Transport's River Thames Working Group - A Report into Transport on the River Thames (1994)¹¹.



1.5. Local Government

1.5.1. Local Authority Development Plans

At a strategic level planning policy is set by County Councils who produce Structure Plans and Minerals Local Plans. Policies in both of these Plans affect recreation on the Thames, in some areas more than others. There are currently 6 riparian counties on the Thames within the study area (see Map 1 and Appendix 1).

At a local level District and Borough Councils have a responsibility to set specific plans for the area which they cover. Local Plans are set within the context of the Structure Plan but are much more specific and detailed in terms of location. Unitary Development Plans for the London Boroughs form both the Strategic and the Local Plan. There are a total of 37 riparian District and Borough Councils on the Thames, in the study area, including 14 London Boroughs (see all Maps and Appendix 1).

1.5.2. The Impact of Local Government on the Thames

The River Thames forms part of the boundary of all of these Authorities, with only 4 having responsibilities for sizeable areas on both banks of the river: Oxford City Council; Reading Borough Council; Windsor and Maidenhead Borough

Council; and The London Borough of Richmond.

This peripheral position of the Thames within Local Authorities has led to it being forgotten in some areas, with the result that it has been given a low priority. Subsequently its potential as a recreational resource has not been investigated and the intimate relationship between the river and its riparian corridor often ignored.

Some Local Authorities have taken a decision to maintain the Thames in its 'natural' state, i.e. flood plains used for agriculture, with limited access for the public. Others have a more pro-active approach to recreation on and along the river. These differing attitudes, and a lack of communication between neighbouring Local Authorities, can cause inconsistencies in how the river and its corridor is 'managed'.

Leisure Strategies, which include management plans for sports which take place on the Thames, have been produced by a few Local Authorities. The Sports Council encourages the production of these District-wide strategies for leisure to help coordinate opportunities for sport and recreation.

Some Local Authorities also produce Conservation Strategies, for both the natural and built environment.



1.6. Other Agencies With Responsibilities for the Thames

There are several other agencies with responsibilities for, or an interest in the Thames. They include the following:

- *English Nature*, which has a statutory duty to conserve, maintain, and enhance the natural environment, and has designated a number of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Nature Reserves (NR) along the Thames. Of particular relevance is English Nature's Thames Estuary Management Plan which is due to be published in 1996.
- *The Countryside Commission*, who have responsibilities for landscape, promoting conservation and the recreational use of the countryside. It is implementing the creation of the Thames Path, a new long distance trail along the river due to be opened in 1996.
- *English Heritage*, whose has responsibilities for protecting and enhancing historical sites and structures.

Other organisations who have an interest in the Thames are listed in Appendix 6.





E C T I O N 2

THE
RECREATIONAL
VALUE OF
THE COUNTRYSIDE:
THE NATIONAL
SCENE







THE RECREATIONAL VALUE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE: THE NATIONAL SCENE

Putting a monetary value on the countryside in terms of its recreational and amenity value is very difficult. Charging for the use of open space is equally difficult as there is a strong belief that it should be 'free'. The provision and maintenance of open space for recreation and relaxation has traditionally been viewed as being important to achieving a good quality of life. As such, Local Authorities and Government Departments have provided public open space, both within rural and urban environments. In recent years, due to pressure on public sector finances, the provision of 'free' open space has been threatened.

As the Thames is a public navigation it must be maintained, and waterway managers recover the costs of this maintenance from those using boats on the river, as do Fisheries managers from anglers. There are subsequent benefits, which are difficult to measure, to those who use the river for informal recreation, as a 'free' open space.

Countryside recreation has many economic benefits which are often undervalued. Research by the Countryside Commission shows that half of all trips to the countryside involve spending money during the visit. In 1990 that spending amounted to an estimated £12,432 million in England¹¹. The average spend per trip was shown to be £7.52. This spending is concentrated on services and products, including food and crafts, which are provided by local communities.

The value of countryside recreation in terms of both personal and economic

benefit is constantly underestimated and subsequently underfunded by many agencies. In the short term lack of public sector funding will exacerbate this situation. It is hoped that the continuing pressure for the recreational use of the countryside, and its inclusion within Recreation Strategies, will raise its profile as an invaluable resource, securing additional resources in the longer term.

2.1. Participation in Countryside Recreation

Visiting and relaxing in the countryside is a national recreational pursuit. Up to 18 million trips are made to the countryside on typical Sundays in summer, with over 75% of the population of England visiting the countryside at least once a year. Of these countryside trips, 19% are to a river or canal. Translating this figure to numbers, in the Spring quarter of 1993 there were 29 million visits to a canal or river. (Statistics from the UK Day Visitor Survey Spring 1993¹²).

The Day Visitor Study reports that the average distance people are prepared to travel to the countryside is 16.4 miles. For trips specifically to canals and rivers the average is 28.9 miles. The availability of a car is very important and as mobility increases, the countryside becomes more accessible to a greater number of people who want to enjoy the freedom of being in the open air.

Walking is one of the most popular recreational activities, with 38% of the population participating at least once a month¹³. The importance of water to walking is highlighted by the fact it is mentioned as a feature in one in three of all walking trips¹⁴. Although there are seasonal and daily variations in activity,

walking continues to be popular with a significant minority throughout the year.

With numbers such as this involved, the countryside is obviously very much in demand as a place for recreation. In urban areas attractive open space is at a premium and although not termed 'countryside' its function as a recreational resource is similar in that it provides outdoor areas for relaxation, walking, picnicking and being close to nature. For inner cities where access to rural areas is difficult, the value of open space can never be overstated.

2.2. Water-Related Sports Activities

Some estimates show that up to 17% of the population regularly take part in water-related activities. Angling is the most popular activity with a recent NRA survey¹¹ suggesting that 5.4% of the population take part on a regular basis. Research in 1989 by Leisure Consultants¹⁵ confirms water sports to be a significant minority interest, with participation figures for angling even higher at 7%, as described in Table 1.0.

Although these activities are popular all year round there are clear seasonal variations. For example, 55% of all

professional and managerial households (A and B social groups) are three times as likely to visit the countryside as those angling takes place from July to September, as does 54% of sailing. The popularity of the summer season is confirmed by statistics from the National Survey of Boating Activities¹⁶ which show that on a national scale, only 18% of participants are active in winter, although for those taking part in competitive water sports training continues throughout the year.

2.2.1. Influences on Participation: Age, Gender and Social Class

Unlike many more active forms of leisure, informal countryside recreation has participants from all ages, and is equally popular among males and females. Walking is unusual among the active pursuits in that its popularity continues as participants get older. The more active water sports however are dominated by young men, with over half of all participants aged between 15 years and 24 years¹⁵. Female participants form one third or less of the total. Taking individual water sports, sailing is the most popular and angling the least popular among women.

Table 1.0: Participation in Water Sports

Activities	Percentage %
Angling	7.0%
Sailing	3.4%
Powered Boating	2.3%
Windsurfing	1.4%
Canoeing	1.8%
Rowing	0.9%
Sub-Aqua	0.2%
Water-Skiing	0.9%
Jet-Skiing	0.2%

Source: Leisure Consultants 1989¹⁵

A greater influence on participation than age or gender is social class. Those from professional and managerial households (A and B social groups) are three times as likely to visit the countryside as those on minimum incomes. This relates directly to car ownership, residential location and housing environment.

Angling has the broadest range of participants, and is much more popular among manual workers (C2, D and E social groups) than other water sports (see Table 1.1.)



Table 1.1: Socio-economic Variations in Participation in all Active Water Sports

Social Class	AB %	C1 %	C2 %	D %	E %
Proportion of active water sports participants	23	30	29	13	5
Proportion in overall population	14	23	30	19	15

Source: Leisure Consultants¹⁵

2.2.2. Casual and Club-Based Participation

Most people who visit the countryside do so on a casual, informal basis, although there are several organisations associated with the countryside such as the Ramblers Association, National Trust, RSPB and the YHA. Approximately 33% of all visitors are members of such groups, and they tend to visit twice as much as people who are not members.

Most water sports are well served by clubs and governing bodies, but research has shown that club-based participation represents only a small proportion of the total interest. Club membership is more likely where there is a high degree of institutional participation (eg rowing), where membership provides access to good facilities, equipment and resources (eg waterskiing, fishing), or where there

is a high content of competition (eg rowing).

For many water sports large numbers of regular participants are not members of clubs, eg canoeing, waterskiing, cruising. The RYA estimates that around 16% of boaters belong to a club, with most of these being sailors rather than owners of powered craft.

2.3. Individual Recreational Activities: Current Status

This section summarises some national facts, figures and trends for various water-based activities¹⁷. Section 3 will look in more detail at each activity as it occurs on or around the river Thames.

2.3.1. Angling

- One of the most popular forms of outdoor recreation with 5.4% participating on a regular basis



(estimate from the most recent NRA survey)¹¹

- * Heavily male dominated (approx. 10:1)
- * More diverse social profile than other water sports. Greater longevity in age profile, but high turnover of participants.
- * Stable participation overall; growth in day ticket fishing. Table 1.2 shows trends in membership of the National Federation of Anglers which has experienced a decrease both in the number of clubs and individual members within these clubs. Many new clubs joining the NFA are the smaller, match orientated groups.
- * Membership of the Salmon and Trout Association is increasing, as is membership of the National Association of Fisheries and Angling Consultative (NFAC), which has 29 Consultatives representing 364,000 anglers nationally
- * Provision of water spaces for angling is felt to be good, although better access is needed to some areas.

Table 1.2: Trends in Club and Association Membership (National Federation of Anglers)

Year	No. of Affiliated Associations	No. of Members in Affiliated Assoc..
1975	265	451,000
1980	374	478,000
1985	431	332,934
1990	534	285,984
1992	523	259,265
1993	517	244,758
1994	513	221,699

Source: National Federation of Anglers

2.3.2. Boating - Sailing and Power Boating

- * Estimates of up to 2.5 million participants for powered and unpowered boating, of which an estimated 1.8 million participate in sailing on a regular basis. The total number of boats nationally is approximately 700,000, with around one in three participants owning boats.
- * Fairly diverse participation profile, with more female and younger participants, especially in sailing, than many other water sports. Generally good longevity in participation.
- * The Royal Yachting Association (RYA), the governing body, has seen major growth in the 70's and 80's. Since the mid 80's this growth has slowed to a steady pace, but Leisure Consultants¹⁵ in a survey in 1989 forecast a 40% growth in participation to the year 2000. Under recessionary conditions this rate of growth is unlikely.
- * Any growth in participation will be influenced by several limiting factors, primarily mooring facilities, including access to water and sanitary facilities. The 1989 survey suggests that 85% of inland marinas and berthing places having waiting lists, and that a further 85,000 moorings will be needed by the end of the century.
- * Less than 20% of boaters are members of the RYA, although many belong to RYA affiliated clubs. Users of powerboats are in general under represented within the RYA. Other organisations representing boaters include the Inland Waterways Association (IWA), the National Association of Boat Owners (NABO), and the Residential Boat Owners Association (RBOA).

Table 1.3: Trends in Membership of the Royal Yachting Association.

Year	No. of Affiliated Associations	No. of Members in Affiliated Assoc.
1988	1487	63,927
1989	1500	67,734
1990	1510	-
1991	1508	69,322
1992	1517	73,060
1993	1470	72,080
1994	1590	76,586

Source: RYA 1995.

2.3.3. Canoeing

- Canoeing is one of the most popular water sports, although statistics for participation vary widely. The British Canoe Union (BCU) estimate there to be more than 100,000 participants, with under half of these members of the BCU or of BCU affiliated clubs. The Leisure Consultants survey suggests that there are up to 800,000 canoeists, including holiday and casual participants (1989).
- Young adults are particularly dominant among participants (80% are in the 16-25 year age group), but canoeing has a wide appeal, with more women and lower social economic groups than other water sports.
- The inexpensive nature of canoeing and the fact that it is relatively easy to learn make it one of the most popular water sports, appealing to family groups and to the less affluent. It is forecast to grow by 15% by the year 2000¹⁵.
- Key issues are lack of access to suitable watercourses, conflict with other users and a lack of overnight facilities for touring canoeists.

2.3.4. Rowing

- Rowing is unusual among water sports in its domination by competitive activity and the number of participants who are club or institution based. Opportunities for casual activity are limited.
- Due to the competitive nature of rowing, membership of the Amateur Rowing Association (ARA) reflects participation reasonably accurately. In 1994 the ARA estimated that there were 30,000 active participants, of which 14,000 were individual members. Most of the others belong to ARA affiliated clubs.
- Participation is generated primarily through schools and universities. It is estimated that 25% of participants are under 16 years and 25% are female. The growth in the number of female rowers is continuing.
- Around 40% of rowing takes place in London and the south east.
- In general, participation in rowing has declined since the 70's and is now static. The ARA are currently working to develop the sport and broaden its interest base.

2.4. Other Water Sports

The following sports either do not occur on the Thames or are very much in the minority, due to the unsuitability of the water space, speed limits and overcrowding. It is however important to review their position nationally. If there is demand which cannot be satisfied on the Thames alternative facilities need to be investigated.

2.4.1. Sub-Aqua

- Access to sub-aqua is relatively difficult and national participation levels are low at around 70,000.
- Participation is male dominated (75%), and most popular in the 20-40 year age range.
- Diving continues to grow in popularity, especially with the availability of holiday training courses, both in the UK and abroad. More dedicated inland sites are required for the training of divers in the UK.

2.4.2. Windsurfing

- Participation estimates range from 500,000 to 600,000, although the figure for board owners is 160,000. After rapid growth in the mid 80's, it is now stabilising. Young males dominate.
- Prospects are for future growth as access is generally easy, but lack of suitable open water space is a problem. Currently activity is centred on coastal areas close to beaches and on designated inland waters.

2.4.3. Waterskiing

- Participation estimates range from 150,000 to over 300,000, with young males dominating.
- Despite increasing opposition, even at established sites, waterskiing is continuing to grow in popularity.
- The sport is now capacity constrained, with several sites operating at saturation levels. New sites are required, as is greater planning support and a strategic approach to provision.

2.4.4. Personal Watercraft

- Jet-skiing has 5,000 regular participants, with around 3,000 jet skis in private ownership. Market analysts

estimate 90,000 adults taking part annually, including holiday participation and other casual hire.

- Participation is dominated by young males, with 16 years being the recommended minimum age for participation.
- Jet-skiing is often perceived as being intrusive and the number of sites permitting the activity is limited. Further sites, particularly on sheltered, enclosed, inland water are required, both for competitive and recreational use, although issues on the conservation of the natural environment need to be considered.

2.5. Countryside Recreation

2.5.1 Walking

- Recreational walking is the most popular outdoor activity in the UK with the General Household Survey (1989)¹⁵ finding that 38% of the adult population walk for pleasure (more than 2 miles), in any 4 week period.
- As well as shorter walks the UK Day Visitors survey¹² in 1993 showed the increasing popularity of long distance walking, especially important for the Thames corridor in light of the Thames Path and other long distance walks linking to it.
- The survey particularly noted the popularity of water sites for walking.

2.5.2. Cycling

- Cycling has grown dramatically in popularity since the advent of the mountain bike in the 1970's. The suitability of these bikes for 'off-road' cycling has led to increasing numbers of people cycling on tracks and bridleways.

- Of the 15 million bicycles in ownership in the UK, 5.5 million are mountain bikes.
- Off-road cycling was one of the fastest growing sports of the 1980's, with 500,000 regular participants (British Mountain Bike Federation). Only 2,200 are members of mountain bike clubs.
- There is conflict on some paths and bridleways between cyclists and other users, and this is seen on the banks of the Thames. Pressure continues for more facilities for off-road cycling.

Several other less formal types of recreation take place in the countryside, and many of these are impossible to quantify, for example, sightseeing, bird and nature watching, picnicking, and general relaxation. On the water there is rafting, punting and, although not usually encouraged, swimming.

Part of any planning process is ensuring that these activities are provided for, in appropriate places, while minimising detriment to each other and the environment. It also includes forecasting what is likely to happen in the future. Although this is very difficult to do accurately, it is very important to have general forecasts to work to.

2.6. Future Trends in Water Sports Participation

Sports participation overall has risen steadily over recent years. Currently around 46% of the population takes part in at least one sport. Although more men (57%) than women (37%), take part, women's participation has been increasing faster than men's. Participation has increased in all age groups since the late 1970's, but due to demographic



changes the percentage of young people involved in sport is now falling. For outdoor activities in particular, recent growth has occurred in the over-25 age group, and these outdoor activities seem to maintain their appeal longer than indoor sports, for example fishing, sailing and walking.

In tandem with sporting activities in general, water sports enjoyed steady growth throughout the 70's and 80's. The recent recession has slowed this growth, especially in activities which require substantial capital investment in equipment. This static phase, or at best slow growth, appears likely to hold true in the coming years, although changes in the quality and diversity of facilities available, and the level of promotion, will raise or lower demand locally.

In the light of these trends, the key factors which will affect participation in water related recreation in the coming years are as follows:¹⁷

2.6.1. Demographic Changes

Given the dominance in many water sports of young adults, any changes in the population structure will influence the scale of participation. The recent decline in the number of children will

lead to a fall in the number of 16-24 year olds in the mid 1990's by almost 2 million. These young adults form a substantial proportion of the water sports market and in terms of the population base, active water sports appear to be negatively affected to the year 2000.

There has been a corresponding increase in the number of people over 50 years of age. The increased fitness of these older age groups is producing a market segment of older, more affluent people with time on their hands and an interest in outdoor activities. Walking, cruising and sailing are the activities which will benefit most from this age group.

2.6.2. Standard of Living and Affluence

Many water based activities, particularly those which involve boats, are relatively expensive and are strongly influenced by the standard of living. The recent recession has had a major negative influence on boat related recreation. Forecasts for the next 5 years predict economic growth and an increase in personal prosperity. If this prediction is accurate there may be a resurgence in boat based activity, especially among older members of the population.

2.6.3. Leisure Time

In the last 20 years increases in leisure time have been an important factor in the growth of active leisure. This trend is predicted to continue although more slowly, at 0.5% per annum, giving people an extra 150 hours of leisure time per year by 2000. More important are the trends towards self-employment, working from home, flexible working hours and part-time employment which will enable people to have more time when they

want it, and in longer blocks. This will significantly benefit water sports and countryside activities, many of which need longer time spans.

2.6.4. Active Lifestyles

Together with this increase in leisure time there has been an increase in awareness of sports which before were only available to the few. There has also been a growth in knowledge, and in the confidence of individuals to do things they may never have done before. This trend will continue, especially among the 'new' retired who are more familiar with spending their time actively than those from earlier generations.

The relationship between health and active leisure has grown in the last decade, as has health consciousness in general. This has led to the development of health related fitness campaigns and also 'healthy' outdoor activities. Again this trend is set to continue and will add to the demand for opportunities to take part in active leisure.

2.6.5. Awareness of the Environment

The last few years have seen a growth in public awareness of the need to conserve the environment. The 'green' lobby is not just a passing campaign but is now a part of everyday life. This has, and will continue to have, an effect on recreation, in particular motorised sports in the countryside. It will also bring a change in priority for many parts of the countryside. In areas where recreational use is well established, such as the Thames, the trend will be to protect sensitive areas through public education and the encouragement of self regulation.



2.6.6. Public Sector Financial Constraints

In the past 30 years many of our recreational facilities, such as public parks, leisure centres, and amenity areas have been funded by the public sector. This funding included much needed grant aid to the voluntary sector. Significant cuts in public spending have already had a detrimental effect on both the development of new and the maintenance and repair of existing facilities. To maintain present levels of supply and make improvements other sources of funding will need to be sought. The effect of this will be a change in the role of the public sector from one of primary supplier to facilitator, working in partnership with others, including commercial operators and the voluntary sector, and providing strategic plans, grant aid and advice to stimulate the provision of opportunities for recreation.

2.6.7. Water Quality

Fundamental to the recreational use of waterways is the issue of water quality. All those who take part in water sports are in contact with the water to some degree and in waters which are not of bathing standard there are potential risks. Those who take part regularly are more likely to be aware of these risks, but it is the casual user who has least knowledge and is therefore more at risk. Growing interest in the environment will increase pressure to improve water quality and provide better information. This would have a positive effect on water sports participation.

2.7. Countryside Recreation in the Next 10 Years?

Putting all these factors together with the statistical information, the prediction is

that the countryside is set to increase in popularity as a leisure destination, both for informal activities such as walking, and more formal trips, such as visiting specific sites of interest.

For water sports the prediction under current circumstances is for slow but steady growth, slower for some activities than others. If there is a strong recovery in the economy it is predicted that the recent decline in some of the more expensive water sports will be reversed.

Bird watching and rambling are two activities which, although they do not depend on water, tend to be more popular in an environment where there is water. Both of these activities have seen significant growth in the last few years and that trend is predicted to continue.

Cycling is another growth activity which is popular in the countryside. As many footpaths are not suitable for cycling there are potential problems. This is an issue which will need to be addressed in planning for outdoor recreation.

All of these issues will affect recreation on the Thames, but there are also additional local factors which will have an impact on the future of the river.

At present recreation on the Thames is supply rather than demand led, with relatively little promotion of activities and a limit on the potential for the development of new facilities. This Strategy will review both the supply and demand for recreation on the Thames and seek to match these in locations where it will be environmentally and strategically acceptable.

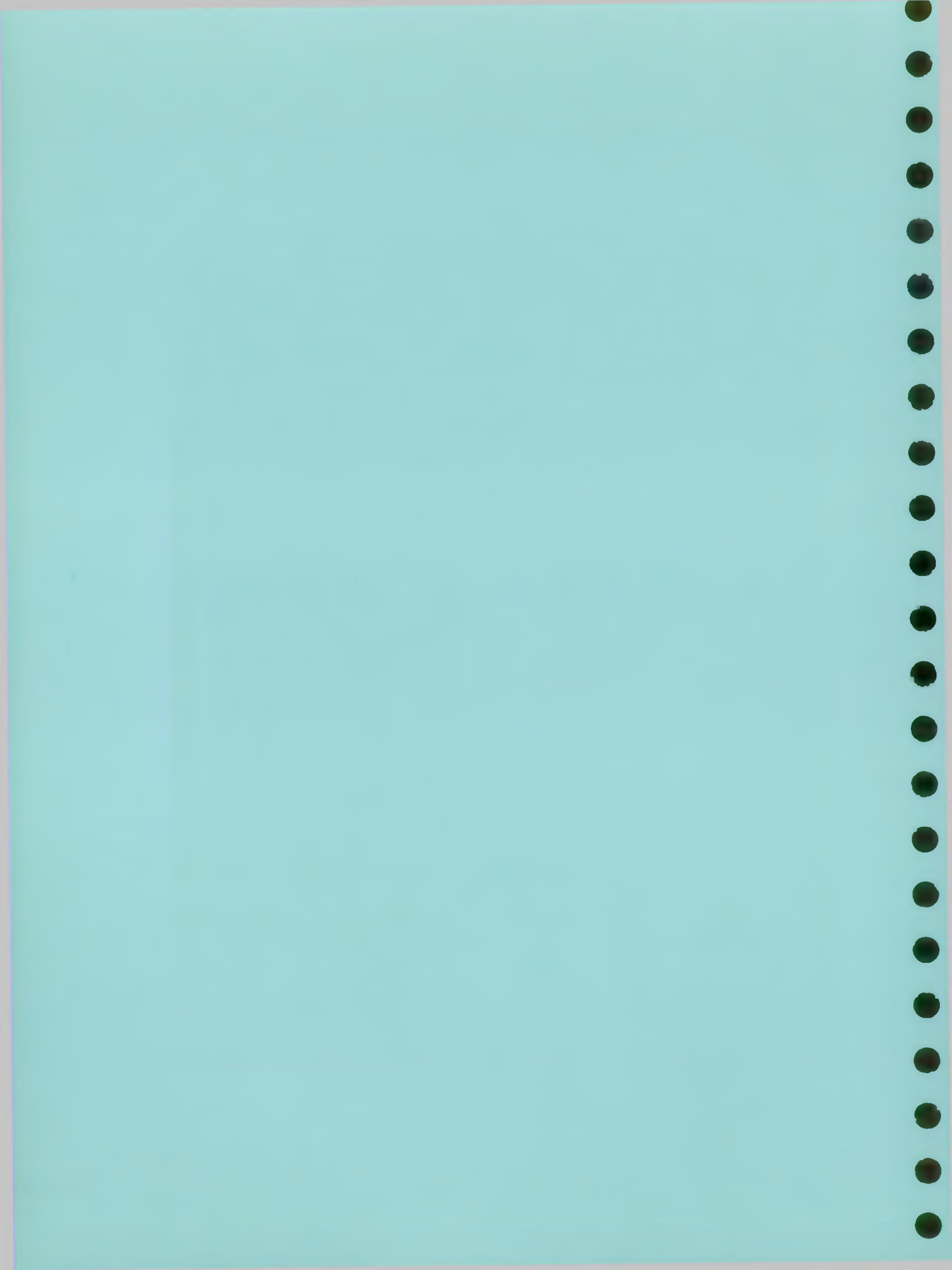


S

E C T I O N 3

RECREATION ON
THE THAMES:
SETTING
THE LOCAL
SCENE







RECREATION ON THE THAMES: SETTING THE LOCAL SCENE

A review of the national scene is important in providing an overview of countryside recreation and water sports, their past, present and future development. However, local circumstances often create a different scene, especially in the Thames Valley which is one of the most urbanised and densely populated areas in the country.

As part of preparing the Thames Recreation Strategy a series of primary research projects were conducted to provide first hand, up-to-date information on current and future patterns of recreation on the Thames.

Project-dedicated research took the form of three major customer surveys and a series of meetings with a cross-section of river users.

Thames Recreation Surveys

- Survey of Recreational Clubs which are based on the Thames.
- Survey of Leisure Related Commercial Operators on the Thames.
- Sample survey of Cruisers using the Thames in summer 1993.

The results of research projects being undertaken by other agencies were reviewed to provide additional information on how the Thames is used as a leisure resource. The most important of these was the Countryside Commission's Thames Path User Survey[™] conducted along the Thames path during the summer months in 1993. This survey is discussed in detail later in this section when reviewing the use of the banks of the Thames for informal recreation. Much of the survey work on water sports

was concentrated on the more formal club user, yet for activities the number of casual participants outweighs the number of club users. To gain a regional overview and identify general issues affecting recreation on the Thames, the research phase also included interviews with regional representatives of the relevant Governing Bodies of Sport.

3.1. Club Based Water Sports on the Thames

There are approximately 370 sports/recreational clubs based on the Thames (see Table 2.0.). Some have been there for many years and have adapted as the river scene has changed. Others are relative newcomers, but all have one thing in common, their desire to see the Thames maintained as an open space where they can enjoy the countryside, the water environment and the camaraderie they experience while taking part in their sport.

A questionnaire was issued to a sample of clubs on the Thames (257), both as an inventory exercise, ie how many members, what facilities, etc, and also to give clubs the opportunity to influence the Recreation Strategy by highlighting issues important to their activity. The questionnaire and full results are detailed in Appendix 2.

3.1.1. Summary of Club Survey

As the most popular form of water based recreation it is not surprising that angling clubs form 24% of the total of all clubs based on the Thames. According to available records there are approximately 90 clubs leasing angling rights along the Thames, although some of the Associations such as the Oxford and District Angling Association represent

numerous local clubs. Many anglers never join a club and although we do not have accurate figures for casual anglers on the Thames, their numbers are significant and it is important not to forget them.

Unlike angling, rowing clubs represent more or less all rowers on the Thames. It is almost always a club-based, competitive sport, with the Thames being home to 40% of all British rowers, a total of 148 clubs (39% of all clubs). Of this total a significant 62 are University based clubs, 37 of these at Oxford Colleges. In addition there are 42 schools based clubs on the Thames.

Sailing and canoeing have a similar number of clubs on the Thames, both 9% of the total. The difference with canoeing is the large number of participants who are not members of clubs. The same is true for those cruising the river, most of whom do not join a club. There are however 55 cruising clubs based on the Thames above the Barrier, forming 15% of all clubs (see also boat traffic surveys in Section 4).

Most clubs have secondary activities, for example 45% of canoe clubs offer sailing, and 32% offer rowing. Sailing is also popular with cruising clubs. There is less crossover between land-based and water-based activities, for example angling and boating.

Many other club-based recreational activities occur on and around the Thames, although they make up no more than 1% of the total number of clubs. They include: scuba diving; bird watching; photography; nature study; social outings; rafting; cycling; dragon boat racing and windsurfing.

Table 2 - Type of Boat

Water Sports	No. of Clubs on the Thames	% of Clubs on the Thames
Angling	89	24
Rowing	148	39
Sailing	33	9
Canoeing	33	9
Cruising	55	15
Sea Cadets & Water Sport Centres	13	3
Skiff & Punting	3	1
TOTAL	374	100

(For the geographic distribution of these clubs see Table 2 in Appendix 2.)

From a management viewpoint, a key advantage of having such a well-developed network of clubs is the communication system which it provides. This helps to coordinate the use of the river by activities which are in some instances incompatible.

The results of the club survey illustrate trends, preferences and opinions which are important in helping to formulate a plan for the future of the river. However, the casual users or 'unclubbables', for whom the Thames is an important resource, must not be forgotten. These are much more difficult to contact and therefore 'manage', but are equally important when preparing and putting a strategy for the Thames into action.

3.1.2. Key Points from the Club Survey

- The recreational use of the Thames is long established, as are many of the clubs some of which have been in existence since the last century. As with all ventures managed by volunteers they have a chequered



history regarding participation levels. In the last few years activity on the river has at best been static with some clubs in decline.

- The density of clubs and activity on the Thames increases as it flows downstream, and is relative to the number of bridging points and the areas of urbanisation. In the Upper Thames most activity is based around Oxford and the few riverside towns.
- There are significantly more Thames based rowing clubs than any other activity, followed by angling, cruising, canoeing and sailing. Rambling clubs however have most members and are the fastest growing, while the angling clubs are in decline, despite the fact that the number of casual anglers is growing
- Most clubs believe that there is latent demand for their activity. This demand has not been tapped as clubs rarely 'market' themselves. Some do not have a system for coping with new members and/or novices and for others there is a dilemma between the existing equilibrium of resources, and generating new interest.
- In general, clubs on the Thames have

some facilities whether it be a boat-house, clubhouse, or a small landing stage. The most commonly cited 'issue' (a problem for some) is overcrowding on the river, bringing conflict with other users.

- Although the keen club members use the river all year round and throughout the week, most use is, as expected, at the weekends, with Sunday being by far the busiest day and July the busiest month. This very obvious peak time activity is the main cause of overcrowding and the subsequent conflict.
- Other more practical problems include poor access to the river via slipways, and poor car parking and toilet facilities, not necessarily at the club base but in other areas of the river which they use.

3.1.3. Summary

Clubs on the non-tidal Thames appear to be reasonably satisfied with their activity and the conditions on the river. The view of the tidal Thames is less positive as it is believed that facilities and services, especially for cruising craft, are lacking.

For most clubs conflict with other users is an issue but it is generally confined to specific, one-off incidents. Unfortunately these can have a long-lasting effect on those involved. For others shared use is all part of the experience and 'fun' of the Thames.

A major part of this Strategy is to minimise conflict, while ensuring the Thames is accessible to those who want to use it. Improving lines of communication between activities and clubs, educating users about each others activity, and development of the River

User Group system should help to reduce conflict and increase a mutual understanding.

3.2. Casual Recreation on the Thames

A difficult but important task is to make contact with the casual or 'unclubbable' river user. It is difficult to quantify the level of casual use of the Thames for recreation. This includes most forms of bankside recreation and boaters and fishermen who are not members of clubs. The system of boat registration which operates on the non-tidal Thames provides accurate numbers of boats on the river and the boaters survey discussed in Section 4 provides information on user profiles and patterns of use.

One of the key areas not yet discussed is the casual use of the river bank for recreation and relaxation. There have been several surveys in the last few years which give a good indication of river bank use. One of these was an NRA survey carried out in 1990 which found that there are approximately 7 million visits to lock sites on the Thames every year. Many of these were local people, with one third visiting at least once a week. For them the Thames is a regular local destination for walking and relaxation.

3.2.1. Thames Path Visitor Survey

Additional information on those who walk along the Thames was gathered by the Countryside Commission's National Trails Survey¹¹ which was carried out on the Thames Path in 1993. Although the survey focused on the National Trail, it revealed useful information about the use of the bank of the Thames for casual recreation.

The survey interviewed over 1300 people at 20 locations on the Thames Path. From the results it is estimated that between May and September there are approximately 230,000 visits to walk along the banks of the Thames. In terms of total use of the Thames banks this is a significant underestimation as the interview sites were away from the key honeypot sites, many of which are lock sites and local parks. It is difficult to accurately establish the number of visitors to the Thames as the sites vary so much in their density of use. In the future the NRA will have more accurate information as there are now automated pedestrian counters at key sites along the river bank. First indications from these show that to one lock site alone (Hurley Lock) there are 160,000 visits annually.

3.2.2. Who are these Casual Users?

The Thames is primarily a 'local' facility. Almost all people on short walks live within 30 miles (93%), with 65% living within 10 miles. Although there is use of the Thames bank by tourists, the vast majority come directly from home and spend a short time on the trail. Many are 'regulars' with 32% visiting the Thames at least once a month. Only 23% of those in the survey were on their first visit.

The most common user profile is adults over 45 years (50%), male (64%), and with a partner. Although over half are in full-time employment, a significant 16% are retired. In comparison with surveys of other trails, the age profile of those who use the Thames is older, probably because of the level and therefore less arduous nature of the Thames Path.

As reflected in national statistics a significant number of those who visit the countryside are members of



organisations such as the National Trust and RSPB. On the Thames this applies to almost a third of those on short walks, and two thirds of those on long walks.

3.2.3. Type of Use

The Thames forms part of numerous circular routes, and a significant 25% of users follow one of these routes. Although 38% had walked from home to the Thames, over half had travelled by car. Afternoons are busiest with most people using the paths between 2pm and 4pm. Although summer is the most popular time, 73% also visit in winter.

The most popular areas to visit tend to be the villages and towns where there is good access and facilities, with the remoter areas upstream of Cricklade being least popular.

3.2.4. Why the Thames is Popular

Most people who visit the Thames see it as the 'countryside' and enjoy the peace and quiet, as well as the scenery. Only 7% mentioned the river as a key attraction.

Few people had complaints and any negative comments focused on litter, mountain bikes, noise pollution (in built up areas) and overcrowding.

There is, however, dissatisfaction with information provision such as waymarking, information boards and guide books. Long distance walkers use guides much more than those on short walks, and most of the guides are aimed at the long distance market. Local people tend to visit areas they are already familiar with. A review of information sources on the Thames and how that information is distributed is part of an ongoing work programme within the NRA's Recreation Section.

Facilities such as toilets, car parking and litter bins are felt to be lacking by over half of the users. Obviously these are more important to the long distance users.

3.2.5. Expenditure by Casual Users

Over 50% of casual visitors to the Thames do not spend anything. These are the locals who use the bank to walk the dog or have a stroll. Of those that do spend, for the majority this is less than £5. On the other hand almost all of those on a long distance walk do spend, with 50% spending more than £10 per day. Pubs receive the majority of this, followed by hotels, restaurants and food stores.

3.2.6. Awareness of the Thames Path

In an earlier study undertaken by the Countryside Commission, over 1000 Thames Valley residents were asked about their awareness of the Thames Path. One in five (20%) were aware that it existed, although 75% had in fact used it for short walks without realising it was a National Trail.

3.2.7. Summary

- The banks of the Thames provide a summer playground for millions of people, many of whom visit on a regular basis. The most popular activities are walking, watching, and just being outdoors.
- The casual users are generally satisfied with their experience of the Thames bank, although 50% would like to see improvements in facilities such as toilets, car parks and litter bins.
- Unlike boaters, over 50% of casual bankside users do not spend anything. Of those that do, the majority spend

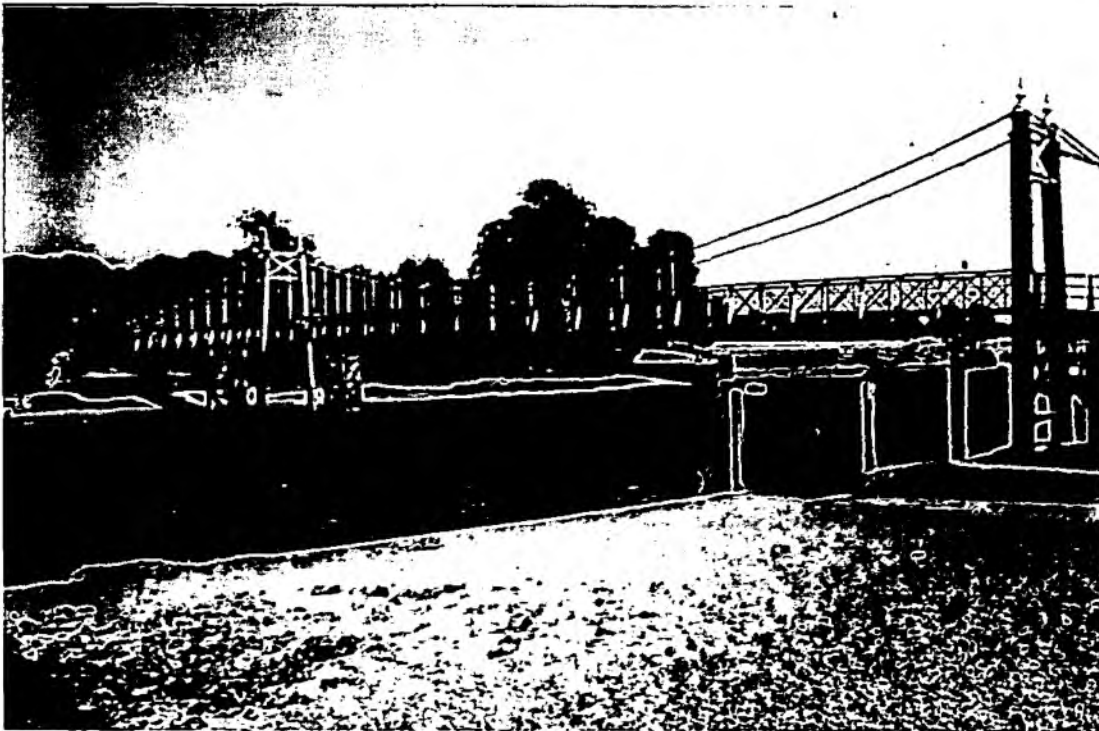
less than £5. In most cases the user is only a short distance from home.

The value of the banks of the Thames as a recreational destination is often forgotten. In many areas it is taken for granted as public open space to be used by local residents for casual recreation. In terms of a Recreation Strategy it is very important to emphasise this less formal yet very important use of the Thames by many people.

With the official opening of the Thames path in 1996 the profile of the river as a countryside destination will be raised substantially. This will have a significant effect on the Thames and the areas which it runs through, with more people needing facilities and better information.

A very important underlying issue is who will pay both for maintaining the resource and improving the facilities. Will it continue to be the NRA, or will it become the responsibility of Local Authorities, Central Government, or the Users? The most effective method of resolving both financial and management issues will be through partnerships. A list of possible sources of funding for projects on the Thames is included in Appendix 8.

What is clear is that the Thames and its banks is a very important recreational resource, which is taken for granted by both regular and casual users. Part of this Strategy must be to inform, enlighten and encourage the users to appreciate and sustain this outdoor playground.



S

E C T I O N 4

PLEASURE
BOATING
ON THE
THAMES







PLEASURE BOATING ON THE THAMES

As a public highway the Thames is one of the best used waterways in the country. These days most traffic is leisure craft and the Thames is now home to some 19,400 registered boats (non-tidal Thames). The management of the navigation is divided between the National Rivers Authority (NRA) and the Port of London Authority (PLA). The NRA are the navigation authority for the non-tidal Thames from Cricklade High Bridge to Teddington, while the PLA are the navigation authority for the tidal Thames, from Teddington to the sea.

The geography of the tidal and non-tidal Thames is very different and leads to different types of use. The lower section of the tidal Thames is still a commercial port and below Putney Bridge commercial traffic dominate over leisure craft.

4.1. The Non-Tidal Navigation: Cricklade to Teddington

As the navigation authority for the non-tidal Thames the NRA have been given statutory responsibilities, which must be fulfilled in a way which integrates with all the other NRA functions.

The NRA's principal aim in relation to navigation¹⁹ is:

'to improve and maintain inland waters and their facilities for use by the public where the NRA is the navigation authority.'

Part of fulfilling this aim includes:

'regulating NRA navigations through the enforcement of a consistent series of licences, orders, byelaws, and statutes;'

'maintaining and improving the NRA navigation fairway, facilities and standards;'

'recovering from the users the costs of providing specific navigation facilities and a reasonable proportion of the costs of maintaining the navigation.'

To fulfil these responsibilities on the Thames the NRA have a team of navigation staff who 'manage' boating on the river from four area offices: (See Appendix 6 for contact addresses).

West Area:

- Cricklade Town Bridge to Benson Lock (office in Oxford).
- Benson Lock to Hurley Lock (office in Reading).

South East Area:

- Hurley Lock to Penton Hook (office in Maidenhead).
- Penton Hook to Teddington (office in Sunbury).

Each district has a team of Inspectors and boatmen who patrol the river in launches and manage the lock keeping staff, of which there are 76 looking after the 45 lock and weir systems on the river.

4.1.1. Trends in Boating on the Non-Tidal Thames

All boats using the non-tidal Thames, including visiting craft, must be registered with the NRA. The registration fee contributes to the cost of the navigation service and varies according to the type and size of the boat.

Having a system of craft registration provides a detailed overview of boating activity on the non-tidal Thames over the

past 50 years. This is supplemented by lock traffic movements which are recorded on a daily basis by the lock keeping staff. Over the past 20 years the number of craft registered on the non-tidal Thames has ranged between 19,000 and 27,000.

*** Total Craft**

In 1976 the total number of craft registered reached its peak at 27,000. Since then there has been a decrease in the numbers of craft registered, with 1994 showing the lowest figure for over 20 years, with a total of 19,400. (This does not include late or visitor registrations.) (See Graph 1.)

*** Powered Craft**

Powered craft currently represent 57% of all registrations, with peaks of up to 14,000 in 1975 & 1976, and again in 1989 & 1990. This figure dropped to 11,000 in 1994.

*** Unpowered Craft**

The number of unpowered craft has dropped from a peak of 13,600 in 1975, to 10,200 in 1983. Since then the figure has remained reasonably stable, with 8,400 unpowered craft registered in 1994. This figure includes a significant number of small craft which are exempt from registration, i.e. Approved Youth Associations and Racing Clubs. This has dropped from almost 4,000 in the late 70s, to less than 3,000 in recent years.

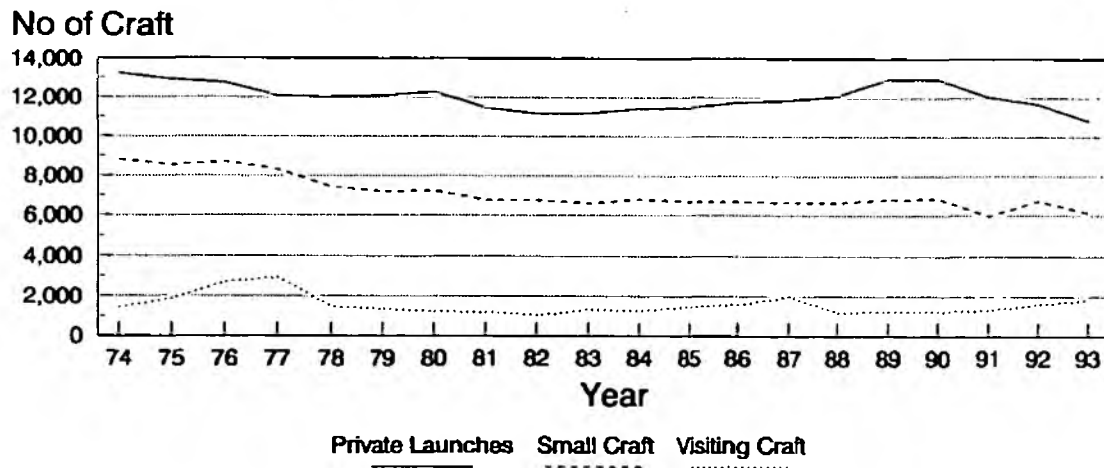
It is estimated that 85% of unpowered craft are canoes, that is approximately 7,000 canoes registered for use on the Thames in 1993.

*** Hire Craft**

In 1994 there were 360 hire craft registered on the non-tidal Thames. This number reached its peak in 1979 when there were over 1000 hire craft registered. There had been a growth in the demand for hire craft during the 70s

Graph 1

**PRIVATE LAUNCH STATISTICS
1974 - 1994**

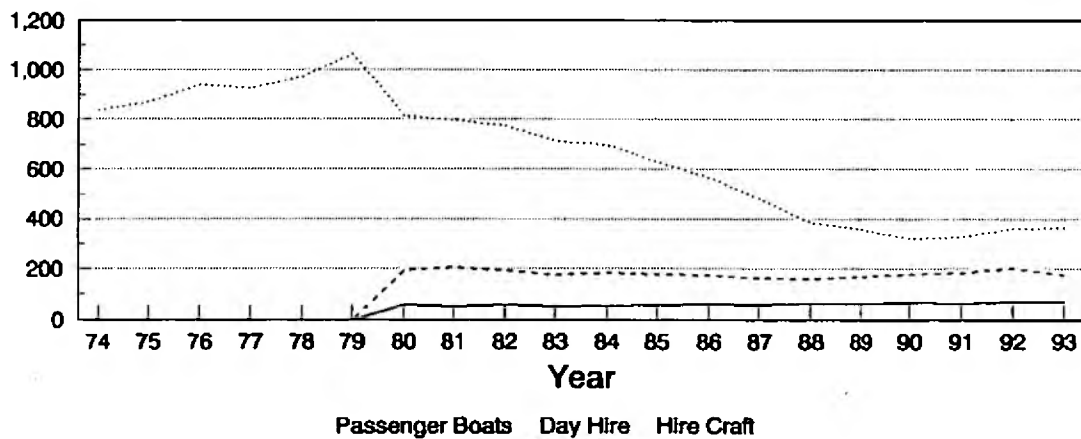


Note: Private Launches includes late registration

Graph 2

HIRE LAUNCH STATISTICS 1974 - 1994

No of Craft



and in response a number of new operators had entered the market, often taking advantage of sponsorship /operator arrangements to capitalise the additional boats. This led to an oversupply of hire craft which was quickly reduced the next season. (See Graph 2.)

The market for hire boats on the Thames was not sustained in the following years. Various factors contributed to the decline of the business including changes in holiday patterns. The availability of low cost package holidays to the Mediterranean, where good weather was guaranteed, left holidays on the Thames looking expensive in comparison. There was also an expansion in other boating holiday locations, both in the UK and in central Europe which led to too many boats chasing too few customers.

For some companies the drop in business and profits meant they were

unable to reinvest in their boats to keep them up to a standard which the customer expected. Subsequently some companies went out of the boating business, often seeking better financial returns from the redevelopment of valuable riverside sites.

Those companies that survived had to review the market and develop a product to suit changing trends, such as the growth in popularity of the short break, and the expectation of high quality boats with modern facilities. The short season (from April to October), with full capacity only achieved for a few weeks, is an added problem, as is susceptibility to the weather. One wet summer leads to a significant decline in bookings for the following season.

In terms of boating activity, hire cruisers make up a significant proportion of the traffic in the season. As they are normally hired for 1 or 2 week periods,

they make use of the river on weekdays when it is otherwise quiet, unlike the majority of private craft whose activity is concentrated at the weekend.

The recent recession has taken its toll on the hire industry and there is little investment or development in terms of new operators or the expansion of existing businesses. It is felt by industry representatives and by those associated with the river that the optimum number of hire craft for the Thames is 400-500. In the last few years (1992-1995) the number of craft has remained at approximately 360. The Thames Hire Cruiser Association represents the industry on the Thames.

The pattern for smaller day hire boats has been consistent, with approximately 200 registered on the Thames in 1994.

** Visiting Craft and Short Term Registration*

Craft which are only using the Thames on a short term basis are able to buy 1 day, 15 day or 31 day registration. The number of these issued in the last ten years has increased, rising from just over 1000 in 1982 to more than 3000 in 1994. This recent increase is due to a combination of factors including the general popularity of canal boating, and a review of the charging scheme which has reduced the cost for visitors to the Thames. There are also more places where visitors can register their boats.

** Passenger Services*

In 1994 there were 62 passenger craft registered on the non-tidal Thames, having risen from a low of 52 in 1983. Most of these are based in the more populated areas downstream of Maidenhead.

** Registration for Competitions*

Special arrangements are available for unpowered craft who are taking part in a competition on the Thames (open event). The numbers of these registrations over the years follows a somewhat irregular pattern. In the 1970's there were 5000-6000 registered per year. During the 1980's this rose to a peak of 8860 (1987), although it dropped to 6195 in 1992. 1994 saw a rise again with just over 7000 craft registered.

** Moorings*

The availability of permanent moorings on the Thames has always been a sensitive issue. In most cases those with a private residence on the river bank have the right to moor one boat for private use on their land. All other permanent moorings require planning permission from the riparian Local Authority.

From a survey of moorings on the non-tidal Thames (Cricklade to Teddington, 1994), the best estimate of the total number of permanent moorings is 9347. Of this total, 5037 (54%) are on the main channel, 3413 (36%) are within marinas, and 897 (10%) are in back waters (see Table 3.0, Graph 3a, and Appendix 3).

The number of moorings increases dramatically downstream of Goring, both in marinas and on the main river channel. The Lower Thames below Staines is significantly busier than further upstream, with an average of 215 moorings per mile of river. Almost 35% of these are within marinas.

A previous count of permanent moorings was carried out in 1976²⁰, when there were a total of 7656 on the non-tidal Thames. Although there have been strict planning controls, especially in the

Upper Thames, there has been a 22% increase in the number of moorings overall, the majority of which are in the Lower Thames. In the Middle Thames, between Goring and Staines, there has been a 13% increase, while in the Upper

Thames there was a 35% increase, from a relatively low base line. Most of these 'new' moorings are within large marina developments in the Lower Thames. (See Table 3.1 & Graph 3b.)

Permanent Moorings on the Non-Tidal Thames (1994)

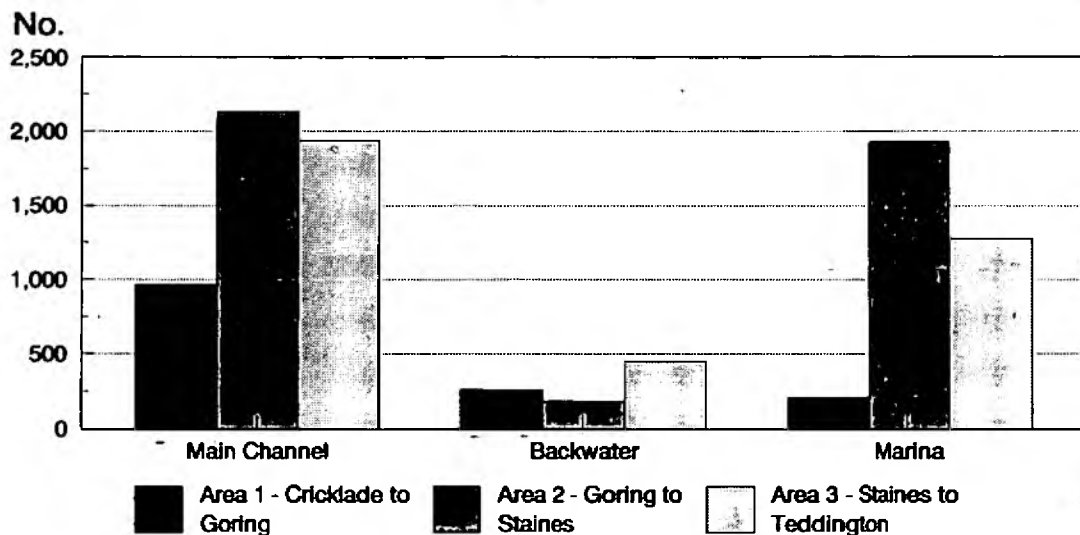


Table 3.0 : Permanent Moorings on the Non-Tidal Thames (1994)

	Main Channel		Backwater		Marina		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
CRICKLADE to OXFORD	331	61	130	24	82	15	543	6
OXFORD to GORING	633	71	132	15	128	14	893	10
GORING to STAINES	2135	55	186	4	1927	41	4248	45
STAINES to TEDD'TON	1938	53	449	12	1276	35	3663	39
TOTAL	5037	56	897	10	3078	34	9347	100

Graph 3b

**Growth in the Number
of Moorings since 1980**

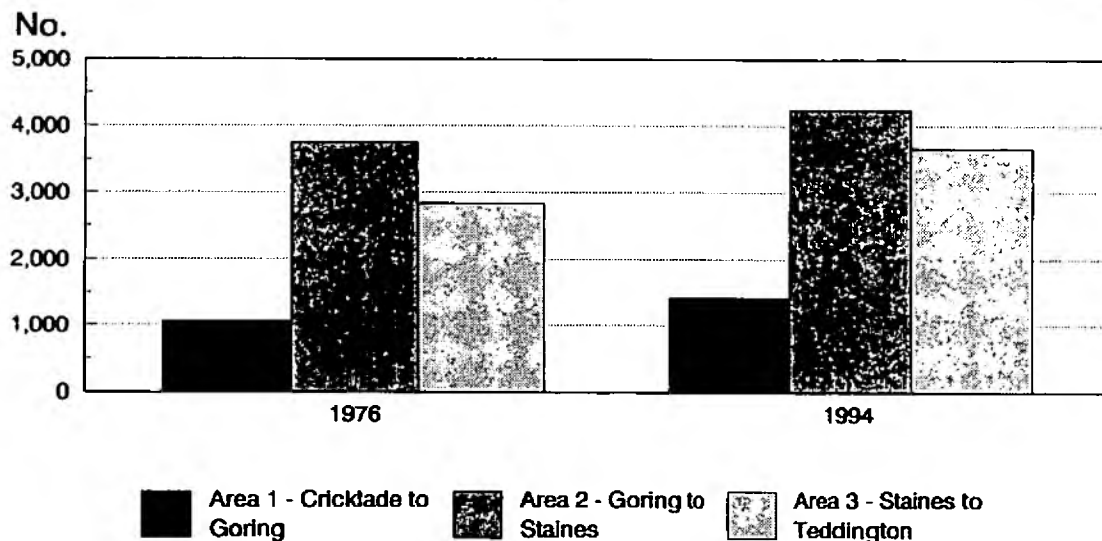


Table 3.1: Permanent Moorings on the Thames.

	Permanent Moorings 1976	Permanent Moorings 1994	% Increase	Average no. moorings per mile (1994)
AREA 1: Source to Goring (81 miles)	1067	1436	35%	18
AREA 2: Goring to Staines (49 miles)	3757	4248	13%	87
AREA 3: Staines to Tedd'ton (17 miles)	2832	3663	23%	215
TOTAL (147 miles)	7656	9347	22%	64

4.1.2. Boat Movements on the Non-Tidal Thames

Craft registration figures give an overall picture of the number of boats based on the Thames and how this has varied over time. More detailed information on the

actual movement of traffic on the river and where and when activity is concentrated, is illustrated by lock traffic figures. Every lock made, i.e 'lockage', and every vessel that goes through the lock is recorded by the lock keeper.

*** Riverwide Activity**

Since 1976 there has been an obvious steady decrease in activity especially at the busier locks in the central reaches between Reading and Staines. The year of peak activity was 1980 when there were more than 1,100,000 vessels through locks and a total of 450,000 lockages. Since then there has been a decrease to a low in 1994 to 726,000 vessels through locks and 364,000 lockages. (See Graphs 4a & 4b).

As well as a decrease in boating activity, these figures demonstrate that fewer boats are going through each lockage, as compared to 15 years ago, partly due to the increase in the size of boats now using the Thames.

*** Seasonal and Geographical Variations**

As expected almost all lock movements are between April and October, with July

and August by far the busiest months on the river.

The geographical pattern of activity has been consistent over the years. The busiest locks, with between 10,000 and 12,000 lockages per year, are Caversham and Whitchurch in the Reading area; Hurley, Temple, and Hambleden in the Henley area; Bray and Boveney in the Windsor area; Chertsey and Shepperton in the Weybridge area. Most of these locks have marinas or large boat yards close by.

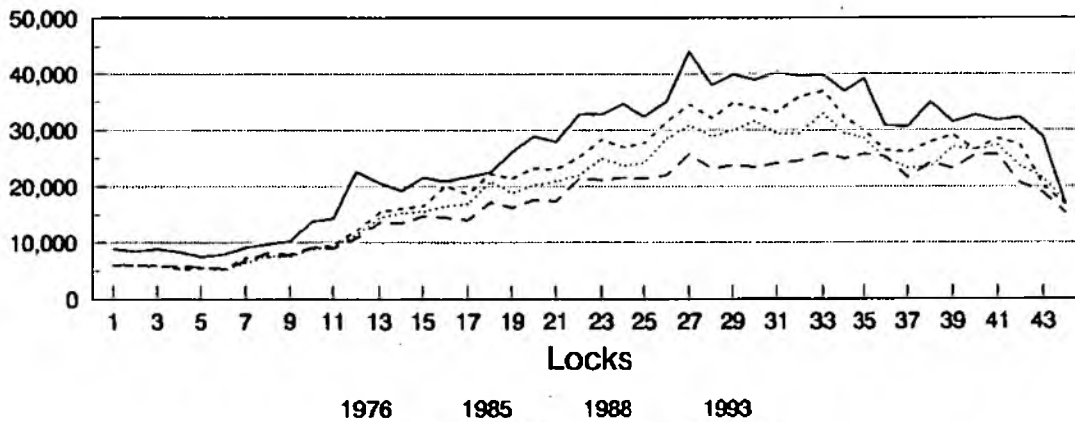
The least busy locks are in the Upper Thames, particularly Rushey, Radcot, Grafton and Buscot in the west Oxfordshire area where lockages in 1993 were just over 4,000 per year, although the popularity of the Thames west of Oxford has grown in recent years. This has led to an increase in lock traffic in the Upper Thames, while it has been decreasing in the Lower Thames.



Graph 4a

Thames Lock Traffic Trends
1976 - 1985 - 1988 - 1993

Total No of Vessels



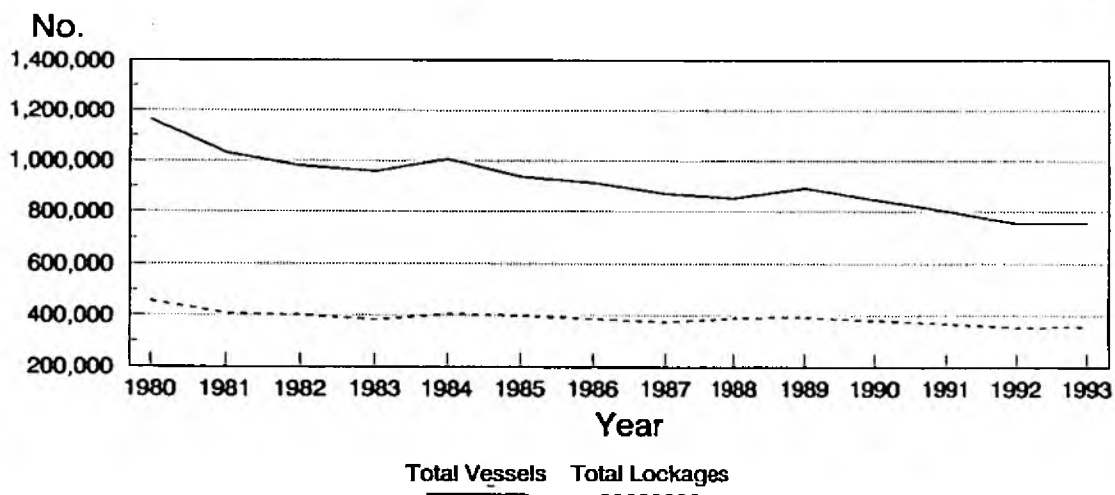
Blakes Lock has been omitted
No.1 Lock = St Johns No.2 Lock = Buscot etc...

One of the reasons for this is the increasing numbers of visiting craft from the Oxford canal.

Water Authority, that if this growth was allowed to continue the river would become so overcrowded that there

Graph 4b

Locks Made & Lock Traffic
1980 - 1993



4.1.3. Factors Affecting Boat Traffic on the Non-Tidal Thames

It is obvious from all the data that boating activity on the Thames has decreased over the last 15 years from a peak in its busiest period in the late 70s and early 80's. There are several reasons for the decline, including economic factors, the decline in the hire trade and to some extent the production and implementation of the River Thames Leisure Policy²⁰ in 1980 by Thames Water Authority and the riparian Boroughs.

*** River Thames Leisure Policy**

During the 70's the popularity of the Thames for recreational boating was growing every year and there was concern among the 'managers' of the river, i.e. Local Authorities and Thames

would be permanent damage to the natural environment. It was decided that there should be a strategy for recreation on the non-tidal Thames to help plan and manage for the future. A Working Party was convened, various research projects were carried out and policy statements prepared. The first (and only) policy document was published in 1980. It focused only on boating, although it had been hoped that other forms of recreation would be covered in subsequent policy documents.

In summary, the River Thames Leisure Policy controlled the growth of boating activity on the non-tidal Thames by recommending planning restrictions on permanent moorings and discouraging the development of further facilities along the Thames. Most of the riparian

boroughs adopted these recommendations into their local plans and in many instances these policies are still applied.

The effect of the Leisure Policy was to halt the growth in boating activity on the Thames as it became difficult to find new permanent moorings for boats, and for commercial operators to expand their businesses. It is intended that this Strategy will replace and extend the 1980 Leisure Policy document, covering the Thames from its source to the Thames Barrier.

** Economic Factors*

The recession has not only affected the hire industry but almost all boating activity on the Thames. Much of the decline in the number of boats registered is due to the recent recession which has brought an end to luxuries such as motor cruisers. The cost of maintaining a boat on the Thames is relatively expensive and many owners have had to sell their boats in the past few years. Others have decided to keep their craft but not use them. As long as a boat is not used for any purpose it does not require registration with the NRA. As the economy improves many of these boats will come into use again.

The recession has also been given as the single most significant factor in the demise of many of the boat based industries on the Thames, primarily boat yards and marinas.

Other factors which have affected boating activity on the Thames include lack of awareness and information. These are discussed in Section 5.

4.2. The Tidal Navigation: Teddington to the Barrier

4.2.1. PLA and NRA Responsibilities

Responsibility for navigation on the tidal Thames is with the Port of London Authority (PLA), who take over from the NRA downstream of Teddington Lock and Weir. The NRA do, however, retain their other responsibilities which include those for recreation and conservation. The NRA are currently working with English Nature to produce a Thames Estuary Management Plan which will form the NRA's Catchment Management Plan for the estuary, which will be published in 1996.

The PLA was established as a Public Trust under the Port of London Act of 1908, for the purpose of 'administering, preserving, and improving the port of London and for other purposes including the conservancy of the Thames'.

4.2.2. Boating on the Tidal Thames

Unlike the non-tidal Thames, the Tideway is still very much a commercial and industrial transport route. London is still the busiest port in the UK, handling 10% of all Britain's trade, so much of the work of the PLA is focused on managing commercial craft. As well as industrial craft, a significant proportion of craft on the tidal Thames provide a leisure service, i.e. pleasure cruisers and cruise liners. In terms of recreational craft the vast majority are based upstream of Hammersmith Bridge.

Although there is a limited amount of recreational boating on the Thames downstream of Hammersmith, priority is certainly given to commercial traffic. The Department of Transport's River Thames Working Group have been examining the transport potential of the Thames for



both commercial and leisure markets. A report into maximising the river as a transport artery was published in December 1994²¹.

** Passenger Services*

Although it provides a leisure service, operating a passenger boat is very much a commercial business. A boat trip on the Thames is integral to many tourist visits to London. The favourite starting point is Westminster Pier, with trips via Tower and Greenwich Piers being the most popular. A total of 56 craft are available for passenger and charter services. Although not all of these use PLA piers, those that do carried a total of 1.6 million passengers in 1993.

Licences to operate a passenger service are issued by the Department of Transport. Those craft using PLA piers also require a PLA licence. As part of their initiative to improve the quality of passenger services on the London Thames, the PLA require specific standards of customer service to be met before they issue a pier licence.

Commuter services on the river have been well documented and they are supported by the PLA and those who manage the river, including The River Thames Working Group, but a service which is financially viable has not yet been found. At present a 'commuter' service is provided by the passenger boats, and another is subsidised as part of the Canary Wharf development. In addition there are private water taxi services.

** Cruise Liners*

The PLA operate 4 moorings for cruise liners at Tower Bridge, and 1 at Greenwich.

The popularity of London as a port of call for liners has increased significantly in recent years. In 1993 18 liners used the moorings, in 1994 this figure rose to 24. The larger ships which are unable to cruise so far upstream dock at Tilbury, where a total of 59 liners moored in 1994. This growth in the popularity of London as a liner destination is forecast to continue, which is not only financially important, but it makes use of the river as a transport route for visitors to London.

** Recreational Boating*

Despite the fact that the London Thames is heavily used as a commercial transport route, it is still a very important recreational resource. Unlike the non-tidal Thames, there is no requirement to register recreational craft on the tideway, therefore it is impossible to estimate with any accuracy the number of boats cruising in the London area. Lock movements at Teddington showed a total of over 15,000 craft passing through the lock in 1993. This number was at its peak in 1989 when more than 19,500 craft passed through the lock. There has always been significantly more small unpowered craft travelling through Teddington than most other Thames locks.

Boat movements through the half-tide lock at Richmond (controlled by the PLA) does not reflect traffic on the river as most craft pass when the tide is in. Many craft never travel through Richmond to the fully tidal Thames as they feel apprehensive and inexperienced in negotiating the Tideway. Most hire cruiser operators do not allow those using their craft to pass through Teddington.

Those cruisers which do venture onto the Tideway often are not sure where they can find visitor mooring, and there is a view that visitors to the Tideway are 'forgotten about'.

** Moorings on the Tideway*

There are approximately 1500 moorings on the Tideway, upstream of the Thames Barrier. The PLA own and manage much of the river bed to the mean high water mark and they licence all structures in the river, including moorings which require a structure in the river. In 1994 there were 800 moorings on the main channel, 540 of which are permanent moorings licensed by the PLA. In addition there are 117 PLA owned moorings leased for private vessels, 56 of which are currently vacant. A further 53 moorings are leased to commercial operators, another 82 remain in PLA use and are available for temporary mooring.

Most moorings on the Tideway are located offshore, without shore access. These are not always convenient and a significant number are vacant. Piers also provide moorings and in some cases these are occupied by residential craft.

Marinas: As well as moorings on the main channel there are 6 marinas above the Thames Barrier which offer a total of 700 moorings. In a survey of commercial operators on the Thames, 62% of those on the Tideway said they had enquiries for moorings in 1992, with 37% saying they had vacancies.

Temporary Mooring: One of the most common complaints from those who cruise on the Tideway is the shortage of temporary mooring. Even where it does exist, it seems that those who may need to use it do not know about it. There is also a perception that it is prohibitively

expensive, especially in marinas.

Unknown to many boaters, the PLA do allow overnight mooring on their piers, if it is arranged in advance.

Even with the availability of PLA piers, there is still a need for additional, accessible temporary mooring, as well as better promotion of what is currently available on piers and in marinas.

Piers: There are a total of 23 piers on the Tideway (above the Barrier), 10 of which are owned by the PLA, who issue licences to craft who wish to use their piers on a regular basis, many of which are passenger craft. The busiest piers are those which service popular tourist areas, i.e. Westminster, Charing Cross, Tower and Greenwich. Least popular are on the south bank of the river and are only used in the summer season, i.e. Kew, Richmond, Putney, Festival and Lambeth.



Several of the PLA piers do need replacing, but additional income is required to cover the cost. The PLA would like to combine pier reconstruction with commercial development but have not yet been granted planning permission for a mixed commercial scheme.

4.3. Who Boats on the Thames?

When preparing a Recreation Strategy it is important to talk to existing users to find out their usage patterns, their likes and dislikes and their views on future developments. To this end a survey was carried out on the non-tidal Thames during a six week period in the summer of 1993. Over 300 'boaters' were interviewed at 17 different points on the Thames between Lechlade and Teddington. The primary target of the survey was cruisers, although those in other boats were interviewed when they were available. This section summarises the results, and the conclusions have been used to help formulate future plans for the river. (See Appendix 4 for questionnaire and full tabulated results).

4.3.1. Key Points from Survey

- Cruising on the Thames is dominated by those in middle and older age. There are relatively few craft with children under 16, and most parties consist of couples. Boaters also tend to be in the higher social classes and live in the Thames Valley.
- For over 50%, the cruise on the Thames is their main holiday. The average daily cruising time is 4-5 hours and the most popular mooring sites are either in a remote part of the river or next to a pub.
- The boaters contribute significantly to

the local economy with 83% stopping to shop and the average spend per boat per day being £48. Those in hire craft tend to spend more than those in their own boats.

- The key feature that attracts people to boating on the Thames is the peace and tranquillity; the number of sites to see; and the beauty of the river itself. There are few complaints, and these are focused on the cost of mooring fees and the behaviour of other users.
- Their experience of the river could be improved by the provision of better information, especially details of tourist attractions and local information for hirers who are not familiar with the areas around the Thames. There was also a call for improvements in facilities such as showers, toilets and litter collection. As with the survey of canoe clubs which use the Thames, there were complaints about access to the river for small craft, i.e. slipways and launching sites.
- A significant number of those in hire cruisers are 'regulars' in that they have hired a boat on the Thames before, and 86% say they would hire again.



4.3.2. Summary

The overriding views from this survey was a general satisfaction with the non-tidal Thames for those in cruisers. Any problems were related to a lack of basic facilities such as toilets and showers, and the difficulty in finding local information on the Thames and its environment. Both of these issues have been raised by other river users.

Although the survey did not include boaters in the tidal Thames, respondents who had cruised onto the Tideway had perceived that there was a lack of

facilities for visiting craft, or at least a lack of information about their location. Most craft going onto the Tideway were in transit, rather than going to enjoy the river in London.

It is important to highlight the amount that those on boats spend in the shops, pubs and restaurants along the river. They make a significant contribution to local economies.

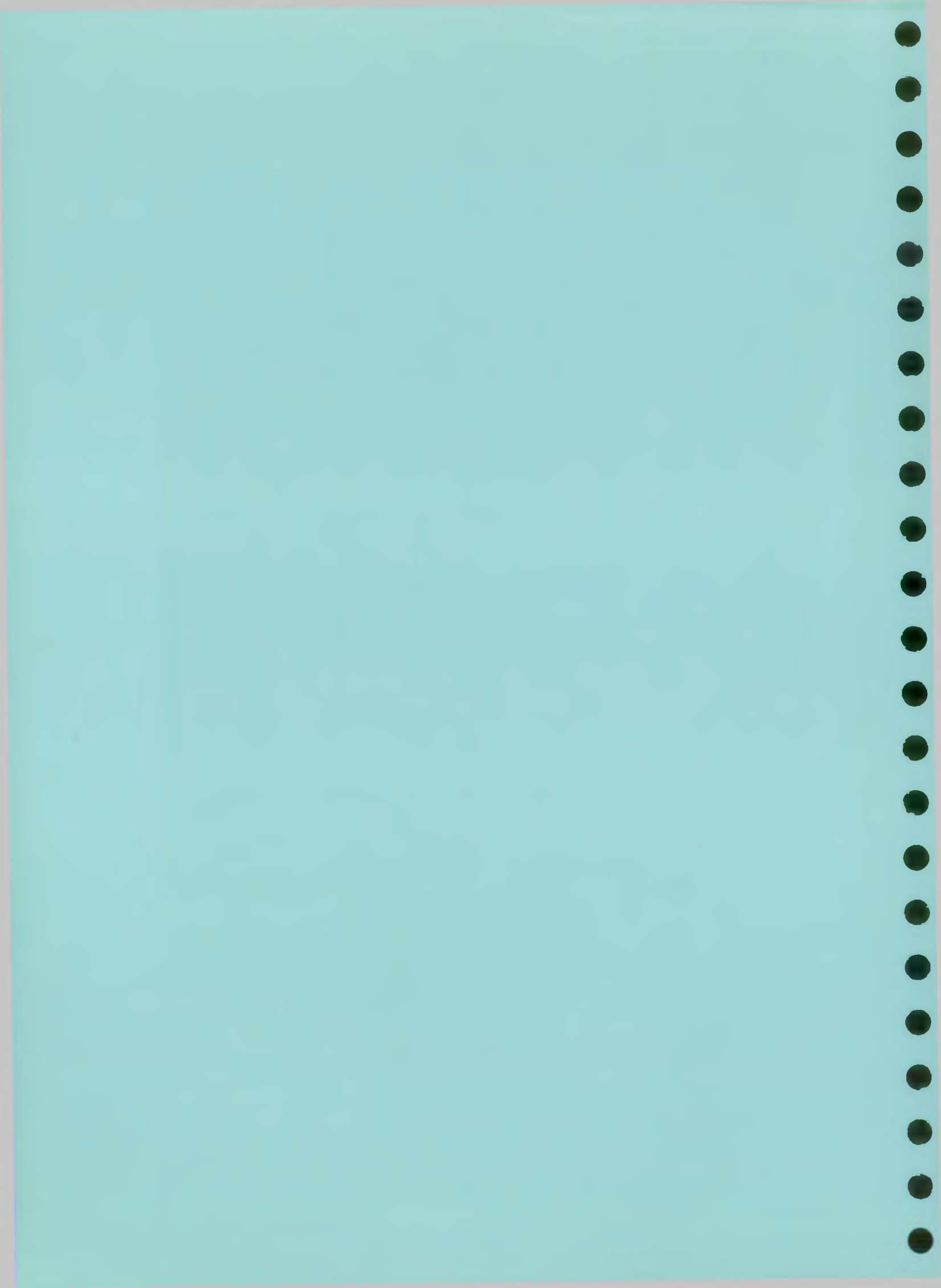
The key messages arising from this survey will be reflected in the policies, recommendations and actions in Section 10.



S E C T I O N 5

COMMERICAL
LEISURE ON
THE THAMES





COMMERCIAL LEISURE ON THE THAMES

Today the non-tidal Thames is almost exclusively used as a leisure resource, providing enjoyment to thousands of locals and tourists who walk along it, fish in it, cruise, canoe, sail and row on it.

Although the use of the river as a commercial transport route has all but disappeared, except in the lower reaches of the tidal Thames, there is still an important commercial industry on the non-tidal river which provides the infrastructure necessary to keep the river alive. Most of the commercial operators are dependent on the leisure user, providing facilities and services such as marinas, boatyards, hire cruise bases, passenger boats, even pubs and hotels on the river bank, all of which are integral to the success of leisure on the Thames.

5.1. Recent History

In recent years the commercial operators on the Thames have been subject to increasing pressures. The recession and the subsequent decline in boat traffic has adversely affected business. The hire cruise companies in particular have experienced a decline in the number of customers.

During the late 1980's the pressure on Thameside businesses came from another source - the demand for housing developments along the river. Struggling boatyards were tempted by lucrative offers for their land and consequently numerous facilities, including service points for fuel and craft maintenance, were lost to private housing developments.

Local Authorities are now realising that

the services these businesses provide are vital to the infrastructure of the river. Consequently planning restrictions are being imposed on the use of riverside land. Although not always popular, these planning controls are trying to sustain traditional services along the Thames.

In preparing a Recreation Strategy for the Thames, it is important to ensure that the providers of these important services are encouraged to maintain their businesses. Finance is a key constraint and achieving improvements will require negotiation between Local Authorities, the NRA and the operators.

5.2. Consulting Commercial Operators

As part of the consultation process in preparing the Recreation Strategy, commercial leisure operators on the Thames were sent a questionnaire asking about the facilities and services they provide, and what they believed were the key issues on the Thames. A total of 89 questionnaires were circulated, with 51 being completed and returned, a 57% response rate. (See Appendix 5 for questionnaire and full tabulated results.)

5.2.1. Working on the Thames

There is a diverse range of companies supplying services on and along the Thames. These range from mooring facilities, to boat building and repair. The geographic distribution of these services varies as the Thames flows from quiet rural areas, to densely populated urban towns (illustrated in Table 4). The largest concentration of commercial operators is in the Lower Thames, between Staines and Teddington, with 37% of the total. This is not surprising as the area is densely populated and the river banks

are accessible throughout most of this stretch. Only 9% of companies are found upstream of Goring and all but a few of these are downstream of Oxford.

The tidal Thames is home to 28% of the commercial leisure operators on the river, with a concentration of these upstream of Putney. Further downstream the river remains a commercial transport route and the amount of leisure traffic drops significantly below Hammersmith Bridge.

offered by a quarter of operators, all of which are based on the non-tidal Thames.

- The economic climate has had a serious detrimental impact on commercial operators. Strict planning controls are also a problem, particularly in the more rural areas of the river.
- There can be conflict between recreational and commercial users, especially on the tidal Thames.

Table 4: Location of Water-Based Commercial Leisure Operators on the Thames

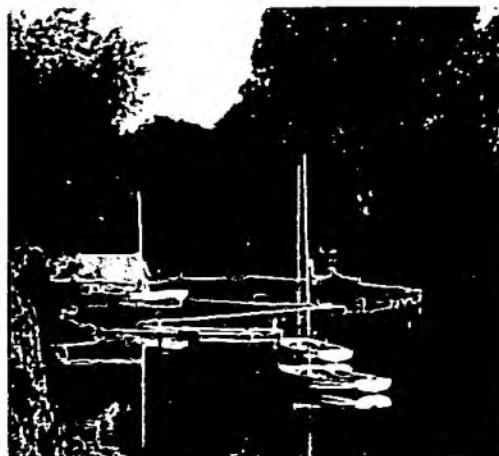
AREA	Total No. of Companies	Total % of Companies	Respondents to Quest. %
Source to Goring	8	9	12
Goring to Staines	23	26	33
Staines to Teddington	33	37	24
Teddington to Barrier	25	28	31

5.2.2. Key Points from Survey

- Providing moorings is the core activity of most commercial operators on the river. Although almost half said there was a demand for additional moorings, over a third of operators had empty berths in 1993. One comment summarised the moorings issue, 'there are insufficient moorings on the Thames at reasonable rates'.
- Boat building and repairs, waste disposal and fuel provision are the key services on the Thames. The new restrictions on petrol supply are causing serious problems for operators and leading to a shortage in some areas, particularly in the Upper Thames.
- In 1994 there were 360 hire cruisers, plus 158 day hire craft. These were

Overcrowding, excessive wash and lack of cooperation are the main problems.

- As with all outdoor activities, the weather can cause significant problems for many of the commercial businesses, especially the day hire and passenger boats operations.



-
- There is a strong feeling that the 'authorities', both local and national government, are not interested in the river. High rents and rates are causing financial difficulties, as is current legislation.
 - Increases in the cost of NRA craft registration and other navigation charges were mentioned by a diverse range of commercial operators, not only with regards to their own boats but in that boating on the Thames has now become too expensive for many people.
 - Lock closures and repairs were mentioned by several operators who feel the extended closures seriously undermine their business. Irregular water levels were also mentioned.
 - The general lack of facilities for customers along the river and at lock sites causes problems for customers in

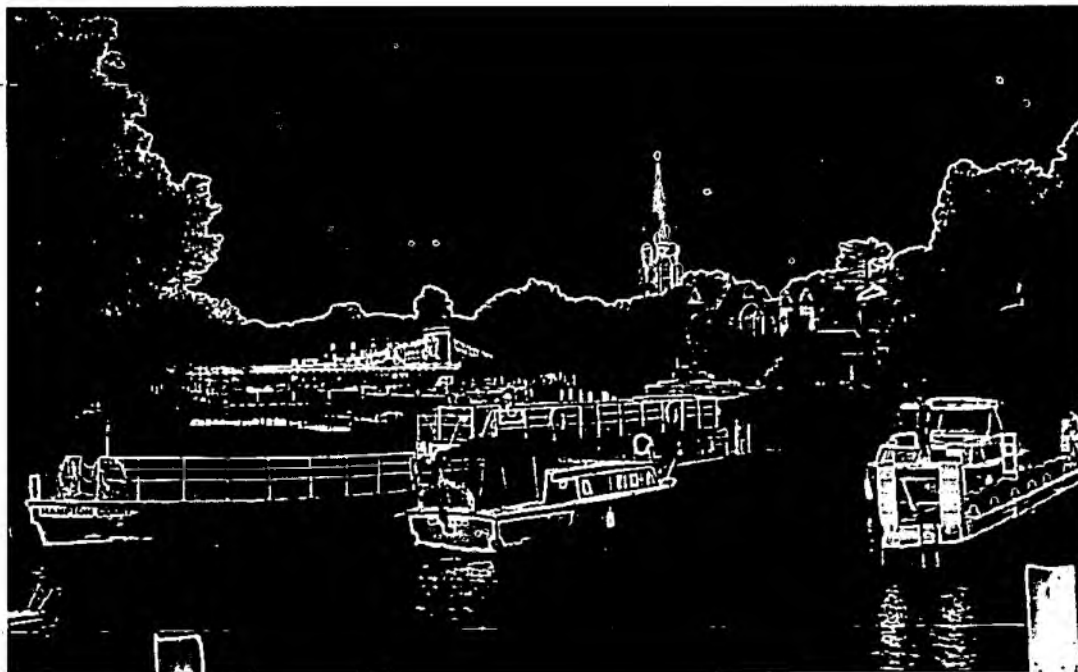
day hire craft, and for smaller craft in general.

- Several operators on the Tideway mentioned the lack of piers and more general facilities for visiting craft.

5.3. Encouraging Cooperation

Those who operate their businesses on and along the Thames often feel that they are not included in decision making on the management of the river. They provide an infrastructure which is vital to the success of all leisure activities, and they are a very important part of the boating tradition on the Thames.

Although the policies within this strategy may not fully satisfy all the needs of the commercial operators, it is hoped that a level of communication and cooperation will be achieved which involves all river users, including those for whom the Thames provides a livelihood.



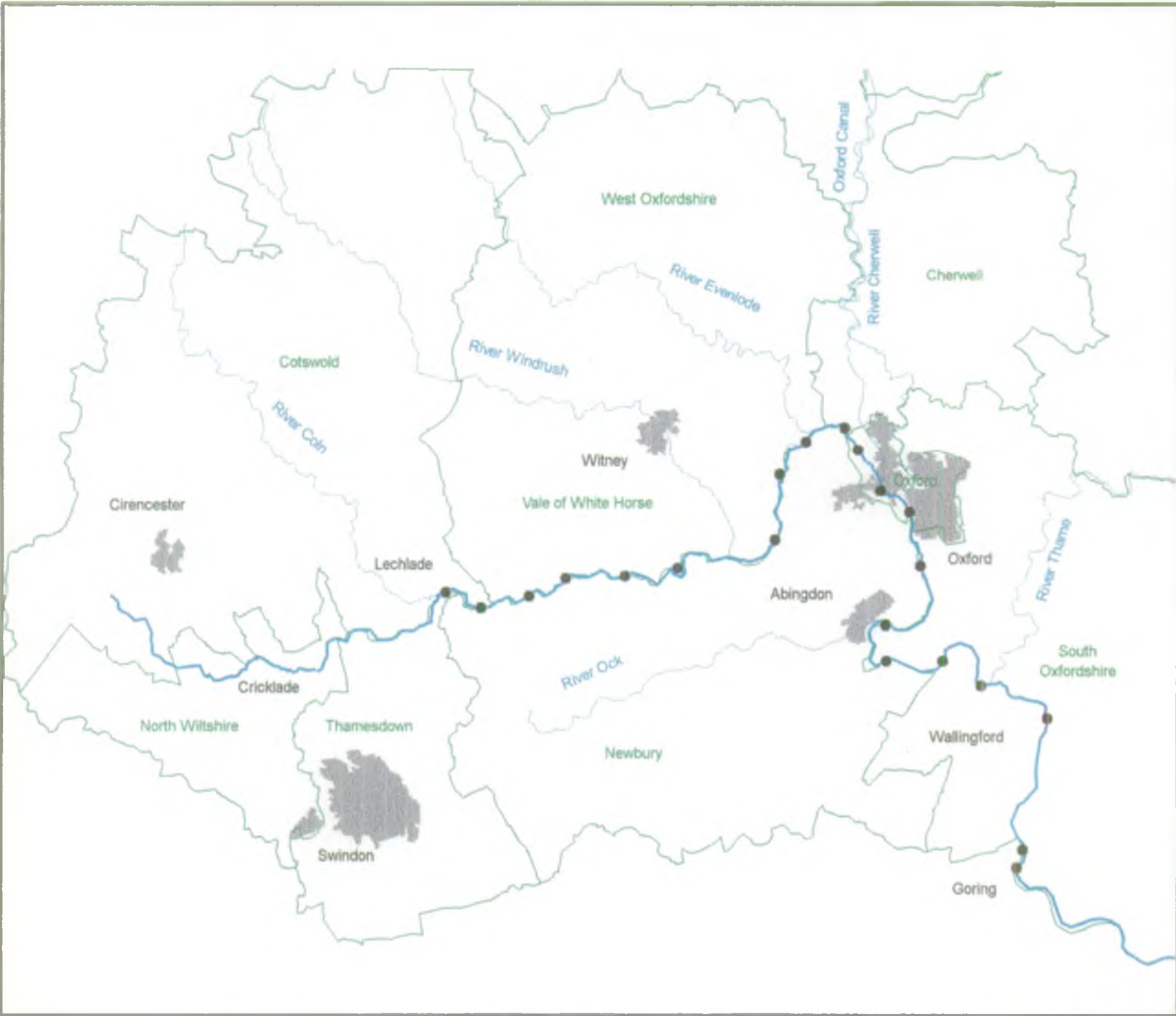
S E C T I O N 6






REVIEWING
THE THAMES





River Thames Recreation Strategy: Upper Thames - Source to Goring



-  Riparian Local Authority & Thames Region Boundary
-  Urban Areas
-  River Thames
-  Other Main Channel
-  Lock





REVIEWING THE THAMES

Before recommending policies and actions for the Thames it is important to understand and appreciate its physical nature, and the planning conditions which affect it. The next 4 sections describe the physical nature of the Thames and its valley, and summarises the planning policies and management plans which the riparian councils have for the Thames. For the purposes of this Strategy the river has been divided into 4 areas: Upper, Middle, Lower and Tidal Thames.

6.1. Area 1: The Upper Thames - Source to Goring

This area covers 81 miles, a very long stretch of river, so for ease of reference it will be described in 3 sections: Source to Lechlade; Lechlade to Oxford; Oxford to Goring.

6.2. The Source to Lechlade (23 miles)

6.2.1. *The Source*

The official source of the River Thames is known as Thames Head, and is situated close to the village of Kemble in Gloucestershire. It is marked by a Stone and for several miles downstream it is dry in all but severe flood conditions.

As a visitor attraction, the Source is very low key. Some people visit via the nearby Thames Head pub, where the landlord issues route maps to the Source on request. The launching of the Thames Path will increase awareness of the area, resulting in more visitors. This will provide an opportunity to mark the Source more significantly, in a way which compliments the surrounding environment.

Also running close to the Thames in this area are the remains of the Thames and Severn Canal; which was opened in 1789 to link the Thames navigation with the Stroudwater Canal, and on to the river Severn. The canal ran parallel to the river until it entered the Thames at Inglesham, near Lechlade.

Of significance for the future is the proposal by the Cotswold Canals Trust to reopen the Canal, both for navigation and as a public amenity. Some work has been done but the project needs both policy and financial commitment from the managing authorities. Much of the canal towpath remains intact and is popular for walking. There will be significant recreational impact if/when the canal is reopened.

6.2.2. *Cotswold Water Park*

Between the Source and the first major settlement of Cricklade, the Thames is a small stream lost among the vast expanses of the Cotswold Water Park. This forms one of the largest recreational water spaces in the south of England, covering 22 square miles, with more than 120 lakes. The after-use of 60% of these has not yet been decided. To date 11



lakes have been designated as the Cotswold Water Park SSSI, and over 60 lakes are included in English Nature's 'Conservation Zone' due to their ornithological importance. A Nature Conservation Strategy has been written for the Water Park which recommends a zoning policy for the management of the site.

The Water Park is managed by the Cotswold Water Park Joint Committee, who represent, among others, the surrounding Local Authorities. They are responsible for public amenities within the Water Park, including Neigh Bridge and Keynes Country Parks.

All forms of on-water recreation are found in the Water Park, which is the main focus for water sports and countryside recreation in the area. It has also become a haven for naturalists, particularly bird watchers. These activities are growing in popularity and are being encouraged in the Water Park. In the past there have been discussions on linking the lakes within the Park, and with the river, to create an environment like the Norfolk Broads. However, the hydrological aspects of such a scheme need careful consideration.

There are plans to increase the recreational use of the Water Park, the most significant proposal being the Lakewoods holiday village development. Although this development does not cross the river but remains on the north bank, it will ultimately affect the Thames and access to it. Work on this project has not yet begun.

Another project which is already under way is the Watermark holiday village, based on one of the lakes. Among several other proposals within the Water Park is the development of a hotel,

conference and leisure centre, on what is called the Gateway site. A more sports orientated proposal is for a regatta course of internationally recognised dimensions for both rowing and canoeing.

With so many large expanses of water, the Water Park has a smothering effect on the Thames, which is not easily accessible in the area. For the communities of Ashton Keynes and Summerford Keynes the Thames is just a village stream and most visitors to the Water Park do not realise the Thames flows through it.

6.2.3. Cricklade

Cricklade is the first town on the Thames and its Town Bridge is the Head of Navigation. Although there is a public right of navigation downstream of Cricklade, the river is still narrow and is suitable only for canoes and dinghies. In the past there have been moves to improve the navigation between Lechlade and Cricklade by building 3 new locks. The scheme was opposed, primarily in the interests of nature conservation.

The area around Cricklade remains agricultural land in private ownership. To the north west of the town is North Meadow, an SSSI and National Nature Reserve. The meadow contains many rare plants, the most significant being the Snake's Head Fritillary. North Meadow is not a public open space, although there is access via public rights of way.

Between Cricklade and Lechlade the Thames becomes more mature as it flows through flood plains which are often underwater in winter. It passes the village of Castle Eaton and the first Thameside pub, the Red Lion. Further

downstream is Kempford, a village with very poor access to the river, as most of the riparian land is in private ownership.

The next significant feature is the entry point of the old Thames and Severn Canal at the Roundhouse, Inglesham. This is the normal head of navigation for powered boats on the Thames. The river Coln joins the Thames close to the Roundhouse.

6.2.4. Lechlade

A few hundred yards downstream of Inglesham is Lechlade, the first major town on the Thames and it is marked as such by a significant amount of waterfront activity.

As the upstream limit for most powered craft, Lechlade has the first boatyard on the Thames, Riverside Lechlade. This provides permanent mooring facilities in a marina, and the hire of day boats, which is very popular with the numerous visitors to Lechlade. Access to the river bank is very good, primarily focused in a public park, known as Riverside Park, managed by Thamesdown Borough Council. On busy summer days hundreds of people use the park as a playground.

Lechlade is a very popular destination for boaters and there are informal visitor moorings in several places along the bank. These are soon to be added to as the NRA are providing more formal 24-hour moorings upstream of Halfpenny Bridge.

6.3. Recreational Use of the Thames: Source to Lechlade

6.3.1. Informal Recreation

The most popular use of the riverside in this area is for informal countryside recreation - walking, picnicking and just being in the countryside. The Thames

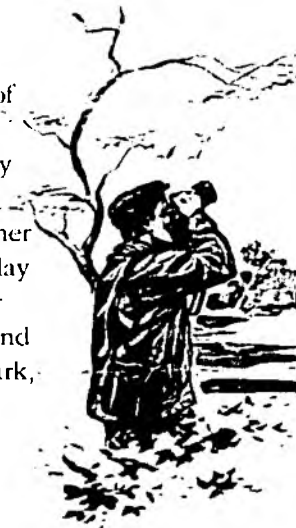
Path provides a focus for walkers, both the dedicated long distance walkers who appreciate the remote and rural nature of the Path in this area, and the locals who use the walks around the Thames on a regular basis. North Meadow near Cricklade provides a focus, especially in May when the fritillaries are in bloom.

For the majority who prefer shorter walks and want to be close to facilities, Lechlade has become the honeypot for visitors to the Thames in this area. It is the only site in the area where both visual and physical access to the river is good. The key site in Lechlade is Riverside Park (formerly known as Inglesham Access Area), a large area of open space, leased by the owners, Oxford University, via Wiltshire County Council to Thamesdown Borough Council. On sunny weekends in summer it becomes very busy. A pay and display car parking system was introduced for the first time in 1992. Between April and September 30,000 cars used the car park, with over half of these being at the weekend.

The designation of the Great Western Community Forest in an area around Swindon could have some impact on the Thames as it is proposed to increase the average *minimum* tree cover from 2% to 25% in the Upper Thames Forest. It should boost informal recreation as with it will come better access, managed in a way which is sensitive to the environment.

6.3.2. Boating

As there is no right of navigation on the Thames above Cricklade, the use of boats is almost non-existent. Canoes can use the river when it is in full stream but only with the permission of the riparian



landowner. Even where navigation rights begin at Cricklade, boating activity is limited to small craft. Access points onto the river are few and far between, with Cricklade having the only slipway which, to the uninformed, is difficult to find and parking is inadequate.

6.3.4. Angling

The relatively boat free-waters above Lechlade are popular with anglers, although it only takes place where the riparian land owners have let their fishing rights.

As the river is remote from roads and there are few bridging points, anglers often have a long walk to the river. Improving access would not only help anglers but also encourage other river users.

6.3.5. Recreational Sites and Opportunities: Source to Lechlade

LAKEWOODS: In 1991 planning permission was granted for a Lakewoods holiday village within the Cotswold Water Park.

Opportunity: to ensure that the holiday park development enhances the Thames visually and physically, rather than ignores it.

WATER PARK LINK: As yet there has been no development of a proposal to create a link between the water spaces in the Cotswold Water Park.

Opportunity: If this development should happen there may be an opportunity to enhance the Thames as a recreational resource, rather than losing it among the other water spaces.

THE THAMES PATH: The Countryside Commission is coordinating the creation of the Thames National Trail which will run along the river from the Source to the Thames Barrier. There is still much

work to be done in the Upper Thames to complete the route which will be officially opened in 1996.

Opportunity: to develop circular routes linked to the Thames Path, with information and facilities for walkers, focused on riverside towns and villages; to create a focus at the Source which will be the beginning or the end of the walk for those completing the Trail; to link the Thames Path to the towpath of the Thames and Severn Canal, and to the Ridgeway National Trail via the River Ray Parkway.

GREAT WESTERN FOREST: 5-10% will lie close to the Thames.

Opportunity: to feature the Thames in the forest, enhance it as a recreational resource and increase access to it.

THAMES AND SEVERN CANAL: A plan to reopen the canal as a navigation linking the rivers Thames and Severn.

Opportunity: to develop the recreational use of the towing path, which is a public right of way, linking it to the Thames Path at Thames Head. When the navigation reopens there will be opportunities for moorings and other facilities for boaters and canal users in general.

6.3.6. Summary

In general the Thames above Lechlade is not heavily used for recreation, and has become known among walking enthusiasts as a remote rural area where you can get away from people and the bustle of the riverside honeypots. In preparing policies for recreation in this area the balance between existing use, potential use and the natural environment must be maintained as the remoteness and peaceful nature of the environment are an attraction. Any

development of activity should be sensitive to the danger of changing the characteristic " 'feel' of the area.

6.4. Lechlade to Oxford (Osney) (30 miles)

6.4.1. Buscot

As the Thames leaves the bustle of Lechlade it flows through St John's lock, the first or last lock depending on your perspective. It is a popular destination for those who take the short walk from Halfpenny Bridge in Lechlade and has the added attraction of being home to the statue of Old Father Thames. Close to the lock is the Trout pub, which offers moorings and dry docking facilities.

A major landowner in this area is the National Trust and as part of their Buscot Estate they provide a small car park and picnic area close to the river on the south bank, although access along the river is principally via the Thames Path on the north bank.

Buscot lock is located close to Buscot Village, which has a second National Trust car park. Relatively good access makes it a well visited site in summer, with use being made of the right of access which exists across the weir to the opposite bank. The popularity of the site does, however, cause problems for some of the local residents who do not appreciate the intrusion of visitors. This is making it difficult for the National Trust to install new toilets for visitors to the village.

A future development site close to Buscot is the redundant Thames Water Treatment Works located upstream of Buscot Lock. Various uses have been discussed including residential, but

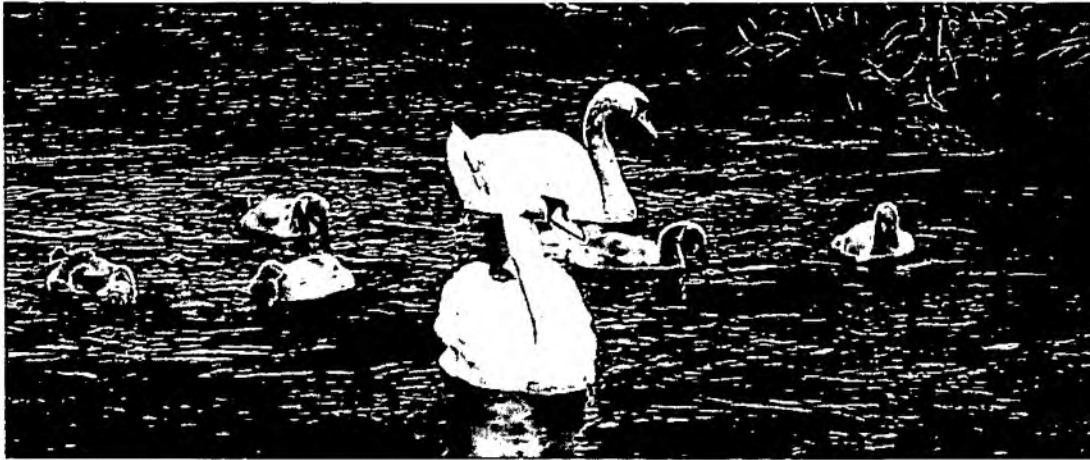
decisions have not yet been made.

The National Trust's land ownership continues along the south bank, and includes the island of Eaton Hastings. Formerly it was the site of the Anchor pub which burned down in the 1970's and has never been replaced. A public footbridge joins the banks at this point. Moorings in the backwater of the island are leased to a small boat club.

6.4.2. Kelmscott

The village of Kelmscott, although not directly on the banks of the river, is close to it. It was home to William Morris and his house is open to the public. There are the remains of a sign on the bank encouraging boats to moor and visit the local pub, the Plough, but in general Kelmscott does not make much use of its Thames frontage.

In the long stretch between Buscot and Grafton locks, the river flows through this flat, rural, agricultural area of Oxfordshire without much disturbance. Grafton lock itself is very remote and the Lock Meadows are designated an SSSI. Any activity and development is concentrated at the bridging points and Radcot Bridge, which spans over an island on the Thames, is a local honeypot. Morlands Brewery own The Swan pub located close to the bridge on the north bank of the bridge. The brewery also own and manage much of the land immediately around the bridge. It is used for various forms of recreation including permanent and temporary moorings, parking for both cars and touring caravans, camping, angling (including facilities for disabled), and day hire dinghies. The island has been under scrutiny in recent years due to the enlargement of winter storage areas on the river bank.



The next bridging point is Tadpole Bridge and here again it is the site of a pub, the Trout. As with the Swan, the landlord encourages recreational activity, this time angling and camping. Between Radcot and Tadpole Bridges are two remote locks, Radcot and Rushey. Although the land close to the river is unpopulated there is a long established foot-link across the river called Old Mans Bridge. This forms an important link in the Thames Path.

Probably the remotest lock on the Thames is Shifford, although the newly opened Thames Path footbridge will increase access to the lock area. The location, and the conservation orientated management style of a local farmer make Shifford Lock an ideal 'wilderness' area. Just upstream is an English Nature designated SSSI and National Nature Reserve, known as Chimney Meadows.

6.4.3. Newbridge

Between Shifford lock and the next inhabited area at Newbridge, the Thames flows across flat flood plains with very little interruption. The Great Brook, a man-made channel, flows into the river from the village of Shifford, higher in the valley. A key Thames tributary, the

Windrush, meets the Thames at Newbridge, where two popular pubs, The Rose Revived and The Maybush are sited on either side of the bank. Both provide public access points to the river bank and permanent moorings for a limited number of boats. In the past this was the site of a Thames ferry.

6.4.4. Northmoor

The river downstream of Newbridge is without a road bridge until Eynsham. The only permanent river crossing is the Harts Weir footbridge. Subsequently the valley in between remains remote agricultural land, with the village of Appleton sited above the flood plain. A wooded area close to the river, known as Appleton Lower Common, is designated as an SSSI. There is another lock at Northmoor, although Northmoor village is several miles from the Thames and access from the village to it is poor.

Downstream of Northmoor is the well known caravan park development at Bablock Hythe. It begins at the Ferry pub, recently refurbished but not always open as its location is remote. The old ferry point still remains and on some summer days the pub operates a ferry for its customers. The NRA control a

number of free 24 hour moorings just upstream of the ferry.

The caravan park is a linear development along the river, with associated permanent mooring sites along the river bank. It was developed in the 1960's and dominates the Thames in the area.

6.4.5. Pinkhill

The NRA have in recent years been carrying out a programme of tree planting and the construction of conservation pools in this area of the Thames, to encourage the natural habitat and associated wildlife. This has been taken a stage further in Pinkhill Meadow where a wetland area has been created to provide wildlife habitats, particularly for wetland birds.

Pinkhill Meadow is situated close to Farmoor Reservoir and was jointly funded by Thames Water Utilities Ltd. It has developed as one of the best wetland habitats in the area and as it has been monitored since its inception, it is a valuable source of information. At present enthusiasts can buy a key which gives access to a bird hide. There is also good access around the perimeter of reserve, with information boards giving details about the project.

6.4.6. Eynsham

The village of Eynsham and its historic toll bridge is the next centre of population. Eynsham was once a busy port on the Thames, with a channel leading off the river up to Eynsham Wharf. Although the wharf cut is not usable in its current condition, there are proposals for the development of permanent moorings close to the old wharf. Pinkhill and Eynsham locks are both close to Eynsham village.

Oxford Cruisers, an important hire boat base, is located just upstream of Eynsham Bridge. It is the most westerly hire boat base on the Thames, and the last diesel station before Lechlade. The banks around the boat base are filled with moorings and the area is generally busy.

In the few miles between Eynsham and Oxford, the Thames is bordered on the south bank by Wytham Woods, an SSSI owned by Oxford University who control access. Other SSSI's in this area are Cassington Meadow, Pixey and Yarnton Meads. The River Evenlode enters the Thames just upstream of Kings lock, which is the last manually operated lock going downstream. The Oxford Canal joins the Thames via the lock backwater from the Dukes Cut navigation channel, providing an important link from the Thames to the canal system.

The Wolvercote Pit, an old gravel working now owned by the NRA, lies just to the north of the Thames and is used as a depository for dredgings from the river. To protect and enhance it for wildlife a conservation management plan has been produced for the area.

6.4.7. Godstow

Once the Thames reaches Godstow it becomes much more accessible and the banks are a very popular visitor destination, especially the Trout pub at Godstow Bridge. The pub owns the now inaccessible Peacock Island which lies in the centre of the stream. On the south bank Godstow lock is overlooked by the remains of Godstow Nunnery.

Port Meadow, a large area of common land designated as an SSSI, runs along the north bank of the Thames to the

centre of Oxford, while Binsey Mead runs along the south bank. Together they form an excellent area of accessible open space around the Thames in Oxford. Oxford City Council provide car parks at each end of Port Meadow, which are heavily used by those wishing to enjoy the river environment. Until recently the City Council operated a bathing station at Wolvercote, which was one of the few official swimming spots left on the Thames. In the summer they provided lifeguards but due to the expense involved this has been stopped.

6.4.8. West Oxford

The Oxford end of Port Meadow is known as the Medley area and it is home to Bossoms Boatyard, a long-established service on the Thames. Just opposite in a side channel is the Medley Boat Station, with its temporary residential moorings now operated by the City Council. A series of footbridges connect the Binsey bank with Port Meadow, providing an important link in a popular circular walk.

As the Thames continues quietly through Oxford it passes behind the city, under the notoriously low Osney Bridge. The stretch of bank just upstream of Osney lock provides mooring (free for 24 hours) for many of the cruisers which visit Oxford. A cut from the Osney reach gives a second connection with the Oxford Canal.

6.5. Recreational Use of the Thames: Lechlade to Oxford

6.5.1. Informal Recreation

The use of the Thames bank for informal recreation continues downstream of Lechlade, with walking being the main activity. In the very remote areas

between Radcot and Northmoor, where local populations are sited away from the river, access is very poor and only keen walkers venture very far.

Access is concentrated around the bridging points, especially Radcot, Tadpole and Newbridge where the added attraction of pubs draws visitors to stroll along the adjacent river bank. Even in these areas only a limited number of people who use the Thames bank wander very far.

Access onto lock islands and across weirs has opened up some popular circular routes along and around the river. There is scope to develop these circular routes incorporating local villages and providing facilities away from the river bank.

Closer to Oxford, which is the only major centre of population on the Thames in this area, the use of the bank intensifies dramatically. The common land of Port Meadow, and Binsey Mead are very popular for walking, horse riding, picnicking, flying kites, and generally having outdoor fun.

6.5.2. Angling

The Thames between Lechlade and Oxford provides some of the most popular fishing areas of the Thames, not least because boating activity is less dominant above Oxford. Most of the fishing rights are leased to clubs, who sell day tickets to casual anglers. Although access is poor the anglers have a detailed knowledge of the area and have established agreements with landowners.

For many years access to 20 Thames weirs for fishing has been available on permit from the NRA and its

predecessors. Above Oxford permits are available on Buscot, Grafton, Radcot, Rushey, Shifford, and Eynsham Weirs.

6.5.3. Boating

Cruisers: The Thames above Oxford is renowned for being quiet with relatively little boat traffic, confirmed by the lock movement figures for the locks. One of the main reasons for this drop in boat traffic is the low span of Osney bridge (7'6") which is impassable to many larger craft. In recent years there has been an increase in the popularity of narrow boats, and many more have been seen on the upper reaches of the Thames and the Oxford Canals.

There are several sites of permanent moorings in this area, making a total of approximately 540 above Oxford. The key mooring sites are Radcot Bridge, Bablock Hythe, Eynsham, and Godstow. The Medley Boat Station and Osney Marina provide an additional 190 permanent moorings. Facilities for boaters are few and far between, as expected in a rural area. Fuel supplies are available at Riverside Lechlade and Eynsham. St. Johns, Rushey and Eynsham locks have water and sanitary stations. Although all locks have mens' toilets available on request, there are no fully 'public' facilities.

It is important to mention the residential boats which are moored at Medley Boat Station, close to Port Meadow. There are few residential moorings on the non-tidal Thames and this is the most westerly residential site. There has been much controversy surrounding the site in terms of planning permission and it has recently been taken over by Oxford City Council. There are also a number of residential boats on the canals in and around Oxford.

Hire Craft: Oxford Cruisers, who are based in Eynsham, is the only cruiser hire base upstream of Oxford and is an important commercial site on the Thames.

Canoeing: The most westerly canoe club on the Thames is located at Tadpole Bridge. Although canoes are popular on the quieter stretches of river above Oxford, there are relatively few access points where they can be easily launched, or where car parking is available.

Sailing: The most westerly sailing club on the Thames is based along Binsey Mead at Medley. There is very little other sailing on the Upper Thames.

Rowing: The Thames in Oxford is synonymous with rowing. The core of rowing activity takes place on a very limited stretch of water between Folly Bridge and Iffley Lock, although rowers also use the stretch between Godstow and Osney. The University rowers dominate but there is a strong tradition of school and local rowing clubs in Oxford. Upstream of Godstow rowing is very limited although Cokethorpe School have their boat house close to Newbridge.

Scouting: Several of the lock islands (Eynsham, Kings and Godstow) are used by local Scouts for camping and general outdoor activities. There are little or no facilities provided for them or for campers in general, although some of them are advertised as campsites. The NRA are soon to develop better facilities for campers, beginning with a scheme to improve facilities at Rushey Lock.



6.5.4. Recreational Sites and Opportunities: Lechlade to Oxford

BUSCOT: A riverside village on a National Trust estate which is a popular local destination for anglers, walkers and visitors to the river.

Opportunity: To develop better visitor access and facilities in conjunction with the redevelopment of the redundant Thames Water Utilities Ltd site. The impact on local residents must be considered.

THE THAMES PATH: The path in this area is 90% complete, although there is still a locally controversial bridge to be constructed at Bloomers Hole, close to Buscot. A new bridge at Shifford Lock was completed in August 1994.

Opportunity: to create and promote local access routes to the Thames Path from local villages.

PINKHILL MEADOW: Thames Water Utilities Ltd and NRA wetland site.

Opportunity: to sensitively develop the educational and recreational potential of the site, with links to Farmoor Reservoir. There is the common dilemma of how to encourage access without interfering with the natural habitat.

EYNSHAM WHARF: A redundant wharf with a now heavily silted channel leading to the river.

Opportunity: to develop permanent moorings and riverside facilities, although this must consider the value of the wharf stream as a wildlife habitat.

CAMPING: The use of NRA lock islands for camping has been available for some time, but facilities are poor and until recently they have not been promoted. The NRA have just produced a leaflet detailing places to camp along the Thames. With the development of the

Thames Path there is a need for overnight facilities, especially in the upper reaches where villages are often far away from the river.

Opportunity: to create camping facilities and amenities for visitors at suitable sites including NRA locks.

6.5.5. Summary

Downstream of Lechlade the Thames matures and becomes more recognisable as a major river. Its key function in terms of recreation is as a feature of natural beauty for the relatively few walkers and boaters to appreciate. Its remoteness, even from local villages, leave it undisturbed for much of this stretch. The only development is around the bridging points and even that is low key.

It is not until it reaches the outskirts of Oxford that the Thames begins to become more important as an active recreational resource for the population of a major city.

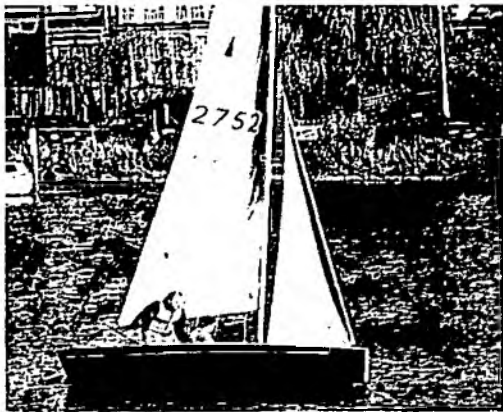
The key issues with regards to recreation in this part of the Upper Thames are: access; public amenities and facilities; fuel supplies; information; conflict with conservation; conflict with existing users.

6.6. Oxford to Goring (28 miles)

6.6.1. Oxford

Oxford is the first city on the Thames and with it come several bridging points and access routes to and along the river. The Thames flows behind rather through the centre of Oxford and because of this it is often overlooked as a recreational resource. It is only where the Thames integrates with the University at Christ Church Meadows that its profile is raised.

Folly Bridge is the main focus for public



boating activity in the city, with passenger services provided by Salters, and the opportunity to hire punts and skiffs. The confluence of the River Cherwell also provides added interest and in the summer months the area is a hive of activity. Another tradition of the Oxford Thames is rowing and the stretch between Folly Bridge and Iffley lock is home water to over 3000 rowers.

Although the Thames is well known in Oxford by those who use it, its location away from the busy city centre, which has so much to offer the tourist, detracts somewhat from the river. For some the fact that the Thames is a forgotten or perhaps unneeded asset in terms of tourism, is a positive feature ensuring that there are quiet 'remote' areas in the city. For many others the Thames is an unknown quantity and access to it is not always obvious.

6.6.2. *The Isis Reach*

The reach between Oxford and Iffley is commonly known as the Isis. The banks are dominated by the boat-houses, slipways and landing stages of the college rowing clubs. It is no surprise that this is one of the busiest reaches on the river, not just with rowers but anglers, canoeists and in the summer

months cruisers, skiffs and punts. With so many boats on the river there is bound to be conflict with other users. To help reduce the conflict Oxford University now operate a compulsory coxswain training programme which has been successful.

6.6.3. *Iffley to Sandford*

The towpath from Donnington Bridge to Iffley is a well trodden route and the Isis pub is a much visited watering hole. The waters are busy all year round with rowers, and the banks with anglers and walkers. Although the residential areas of Oxford are not far away, there is a sense of 'countryside' close to the river, especially in Iffley Meadows, which are a designated SSSI.

Iffley lock and its weirs has pedestrian access and forms part of an important route to the village of Iffley. The lock has boat rollers, which are very well used by the rowers of Oxford.

6.6.4. *Sandford*

As the Thames leaves the city the first village it flows past is Sandford where there is another lock, adjacent to the Kings Arms pub. On the south bank, set back from the river is the village of Kennington. There is access to the river and lock from Kennington with a small car park, which is well known to anglers and canoeists but is not obvious to the uninitiated.

As soon as it leaves the Oxford conurbation, the Thames very quickly enters the rural environment again. It flows virtually unnoticed behind the villages of Nuneham Courtney and Radley.

Between Sandford and Abingdon there is little development along the river,

with the exception of Radley College boathouses. Although physically not as remote as the Thames above Oxford, in some ways it is just as inaccessible.

6.6.5. Abingdon

Abingdon Lock is sited just upstream of the town of Abingdon, one of the traditional Thameside towns where the river takes a front rather than back seat. Abingdon Bridge is a focus for access to the river, both physically and visually, with car parks, footpaths, parkland and amenity areas. Abingdon lock is a pleasant walk from the town centre and has become one of the most visited locks on the Thames.

Just upstream of the lock is Swift Ditch, the site of the first pound lock on the Thames, built on the Thames in 1620. It is still visible as a lock and can be seen from the footpath.

The importance of the Thames to sustaining and developing Abingdon as a tourist destination is recognised and services available on the river include passenger trips to Oxford, boat services, chandlery, and a hire cruise base.

Visiting craft are encouraged to stop in Abingdon, where they visit the town and make good use of The Anchor pub at St. Helens Wharf.

Just beyond the Wharf is the entrance of the former Wilts and Berks Canal system. It consisted of two canals, the Wilts & Berks, and the North Wilts, with a total length of 67 miles. The Wilts & Berks Canal Amenity Group has been formed to protect, conserve and improve the route of the canal system for the benefit of the community and environment, with the ultimate goal of restoring a continuous navigable waterway linking the Kennet & Avon Canal to the Thames

at Abingdon, and the Thames & Severn Canal at Cricklade.

The focus on river activities continues downstream, and includes Abingdon Marina which is the most recent large development on the Upper Thames. Created in a redundant gravel pit, the marina is part of a residential scheme. As yet it has not reached its full potential, primarily due to the recent recession. There are plans for an extension, but this is unlikely to happen until the existing facilities are fully utilised. As part of the development the marina includes a little known public slipway.

6.6.6. Culham

From Abingdon to Wallingford the Thames landscape continues as flat, rural, mostly agricultural land, with the only villages on the river located at the bridging points. Most of the centres of population are set back in the valley.

Culham is the first bridging point downstream of Abingdon. Culham lock has one of the largest lock islands on the Thames, owned by a local farmer. The series of weirs in the extensive backwaters are known as Sutton Pools, some of which are popular with local people for canoeing. Although there is no access onto the lock island via the lock, there is a route over a footbridge which gives access to the extensive network of paths around the island and weirs, and on to the village of Sutton Courtenay.

Between Culham and the next lock at Clifton Hampden the Thames valley is dominated by Didcot Power station which seems to loom around every bend in the river. Appleford village is set back from the Thames, which is quite remote from the road network and access is not obvious.

6.6.7. Clifton Hampden

The lock and bridge at Clifton Hampden are the next focus of population and activity on the Thames, including The Barley Mow pub, a popular riverside pub, a caravan park, permanent moorings and slipway, all of which are privately owned. Here again the lock island is very large and owned by a local farmer. The backwater is navigable to The Plough pub in the village of Long Wittenham.

Downstream of Clifton Hampden the river landscape changes slightly, with the riverside residential dwellings of Burcot village along the north bank bringing a succession of private permanent moorings. The south bank continues as farmland.

6.6.8. Days Lock

The village of Dorchester is set back from the river although it is well linked to Days lock by footpaths. An important landscape feature is Wittenham Clumps which are managed by a Trust who encourage public access. A series of footpaths and access across the NRA owned lock islands provide very good, popular, public access to the Thames and across to the village of Little Wittenham.

The river continues through a rural but less remote landscape to the town of Wallingford. Bridging points become more frequent, with a subsequent increase in access and activity levels. Many of the private riverside residences which are more common as the Thames travels downstream, have their own private moorings. The Shillingford Bridge Hotel is a popular riverside site, with both visitor and base mooring rights on the river bank.

6.6.9. Benson

Before reaching Wallingford the Thames flows behind the village of Benson and through Benson lock. Just before the lock is Benson Boats, a busy hire cruiser station, boatyard and chandlery. Although close to a main road route, the Thames is not very visible in this area and access is not always obvious, except via the boatyard.

6.6.10. Wallingford

A busy market town, Wallingford has good access to the Thames. In 1993 the very busy Wallingford bridge was supplemented by a new bypass bridge further downstream. This has lowered the volume of traffic going across the old bridge and through the town centre.

Wallingford has a large hire cruiser base, boatyard, slipway and a limited number of temporary moorings for visitors to the town. The main area of public open space is Riverside Park which has a seasonal caravan park and campsite, open air swimming pool, picnic area and car park. This town attracts large crowds in summer, although there are no passenger services available.

The Thames from Wallingford to Cleeve is the longest lock-free stretch on the river. On leaving the town the landscape quickly becomes rural again. Close to the village of Cholsey, BBONT (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Naturalist Trust) own a riverside meadow which is managed as a nature reserve. Close by is an old ferry point which has become one of the few launching points on this part of the river.

Although the Thames is still very rural as it flows through South Oxfordshire, it is much less remote than it is upstream of

Oxford. The villages of North and South Stoke, and Moulsoford are close to the Thames and have reasonable local access to it, with an old ferry point at South Stoke now an inadequate yet busy slipway. There are also the well known riverside pubs/restaurants, The Beetle and Wedge at Moulsoford and Ye Olde Leatherne Bottel at Cleeve.

6.6.11. Goring

Cleeve lock is on the upstream edge of Goring village, although bankside access to it is not easy. In contrast Goring lock is located just by Goring bridge and is very popular with visitors. The attractiveness of the village is added to by the dramatic landscape of the Goring Gap making Goring, and its sister village Streatley, one of the most popular honeypot sites on the Upper Thames.

The Ridgeway and the Thames Path National Trails cross the Thames at Goring, continuing along both banks to just downstream of Wallingford. These National Trails and the Streatley Youth Hostel make the area popular with long distance walkers, as well as informal visitors. 'Lock watching' is one of the most popular Sunday afternoon activities in Goring. Although car parking close to the river is limited, there is a car park in the centre of the village.

The National Trust have land holdings close to the Thames in Streatley. The hill side views of the river from Lardon Chase and the Hollies are some of the most dramatic and popular in the Thames Valley.

6.7. Recreational Use of the Thames: Oxford to Goring

6.7.1. Informal Recreation

As the most densely populated area of the Upper Thames, the river in Oxford is the busiest stretch for recreation.

Walking, watching, and generally enjoying the riverbank are very popular all year round, particularly with tourists in summer.

Outside the city, walking remains very popular, especially in the more accessible stretches around Abingdon, Wallingford and Goring. The Thames Path is 95% complete in this area and, together with the Ridgeway Path, is proving to be popular both with long distance and casual walkers.

Access to the river is not always easy, especially between Sandford and Abingdon, and again between Clifton Hampden and Days lock. Like the Thames above Oxford, remoteness is one of the reasons for poor access, but as the river banks become more populated with private homes, access to the public is lost. The other problem is lack of knowledge of the access that does exist. In areas where the environment is sensitive low levels of access may be appropriate, but many other areas could sustain better access than exists at present.

A key honeypot site is Days lock, where access is via Little Wittenham on the south bank and Dorchester on the north bank. The popularity of Wittenham Clumps adds to the attraction of the river. Other popular sites include Christ Church Meadow, Oxford; Abingdon lock; Riverside Park, Wallingford; and Goring lock.



6.7.2. Angling

Most of the rural banks of the Thames in Oxfordshire are popular with anglers. Fishing rights have been leased by landowners to angling clubs. The 40 clubs who form the Oxford and District Angling Association control all the fishing in the Oxford area, although the heavy use of the Iffley reach by rowers makes angling virtually impossible. The remoter areas downstream of Oxford are more popular. Anglers would like better access to these remoter areas but they realise that better access will bring more people and increase the potential for conflict. Sites which are used as mooring sites for cruisers are out of bounds to anglers, but these are mostly confined to the towns of Abingdon, Wallingford, and Goring.

6.7.3. Boating

Cruisers: Downstream of Oxford the river becomes much busier with cruising traffic. There are several major sites of permanent moorings, including Abingdon. Other major sites of multiple permanent moorings on the main channel are located in Abingdon, Clifton Hampden, Shillingford, Wallingford and Goring. In total there are 619 permanent moorings between Oxford (Iffley Lock) and Goring. Downstream from Oxford the number of private residences on the river increases significantly, and many of these have private moorings on their Thames frontage.

Cruising activity on the river in general becomes busier as it flows downstream. Lock traffic figures (1993) demonstrate this with 6000 craft movements at Godstow Lock, increasing to over 9000 at Goring lock. Iffley lock is busier than either Osney or Sandford due to the movement of local traffic in the Isis reach.

Issues raised by boaters in this area include the lack of good overnight mooring, such as is found at Goring. The conflict with rowers in Oxford is an accepted but ongoing problem, as are conflicts with anglers.

Hire Craft: There are several hire craft operators based in the area. Key focal points for the hire industry are Abingdon, Benson and Wallingford. The Upper Thames is popular for hire craft as parts of it are rural and remote, yet there are the riverside towns, and Oxford, providing facilities. The hirers contribute to river traffic in the holiday season and as many of them are first-time boaters, their inexperience can cause conflict.

Canoeing: Oxford is home to a water sports training centre based on the Thames - The Riverside Centre at Donnington Bridge. Funded jointly by the Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council, it provides training for various water sports, primarily canoeing. Children are the key target for the various courses that are run but adults are welcome. The centre is located on the very busy Iffley reach so there are inevitable conflicts with the rowing fraternity (see Appendix 7).

There are other canoe clubs who paddle on the Thames, many of them using the weir pools at Sutton Courtney for whitewater training. In addition to the clubs there are numerous individual canoeists who use this area of the river, putting their craft on the water at the few well-known access points around bridges and close to towns. There is a call from canoeists to improve portage at locks and create better access routes and facilities.

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Sailing: There are only a few sailing clubs in this area, again located near the centres of population - Oxford, Abingdon, Goring. Lack of understanding of their sport by other users, particularly hire craft, cause most problems for sailors.

Rowing: Of all the water sports on the river rowing dominates in Oxford where there are said to be 3000 rowers, all using the same water space. Although the majority of these are University rowers, there are other clubs and schools using the Oxford Thames. The rollers at Iffley lock are frequently used by crews using downstream waters for training.

There are rowing clubs at Radley College, Abingdon and Wallingford although the use of the river is much less intensive in these stretches. All have their own boat-houses and accesses to the river. The key issue for rowers is conflict with other users. This can extend to the bankside as coaches cycling along the bank come into conflict with walkers and anglers.

6.7.4. Recreational Sites and Opportunities: Oxford to Goring

OXFORD CITY: A proposal for the development of riverside land behind Oxford Ice Rink includes opening access to the river and the building of a riverside restaurant.

Opportunity: to regenerate a disused area of the Thames, increasing visual and physical access to the river.

ABINGDON MARINA: Waterfront housing and marina development.

Opportunity: to increase and promote public access to specific parts of the marina, eg slipway and public moorings.

RADLEY GRAVEL PITS: These lie very close to the Thames upstream of

Abingdon.

Opportunity: to plan for recreational after-use of the pits where appropriate, creating a resource for water recreation in the area. The effect would be to move some of the sports which occur on the Thames onto the gravel pits.

NAGS HEAD, ABINGDON: A pub on an island close to Abingdon Bridge which closed several years ago and has not been reopened. The site is also used by Salters Steamers as their pick up point in Abingdon.

Opportunity: to improve the site and develop better visitor facilities.

WILTS & BERKS CANAL RESTORATION: An Amenity Group has been set up to promote the restoration of this canal system.

Opportunity: although the timescale is long, the restoration of the canal would provide a valuable countryside resource and ultimately an important circular navigation route.

SOUTH WEST OXFORDSHIRE

RESERVOIR PROPOSAL: This project is now on hold for 5 years, but if it is ever completed it will have enormous potential for recreation.

Opportunity: to provide a local and regional base for rowing, sailing, angling and canoeing, as well as a countryside resource for informal recreation. This would help ease congestion on the river.

6.7.5. Summary

Oxford marks a point of change on the Thames. It is the first large population on the river as it flows downstream and as it is such an attractive city its population is dramatically increased by tourists. Although not viewed as being central to Oxford's appeal, the Thames is a popular, if underestimated natural feature.

The Iffley reach is famous as one of the busiest stretches of the river, with almost all the activity being rowing. Managing the water in this area is an ongoing issue which will never be resolved to everyone's satisfaction, but there is certainly room for improvements to ease congestion.

From Oxford downstream the river gradually becomes busier with cruising craft, which enjoy the rural but less remote landscape. Bankside activity is concentrated at popular honeypot sites, particularly in ancient towns of Abingdon and Wallingford, who use the river as part of their appeal to both locals and visitors.

There is scope for developing walking networks to and from the Thames Path, linked to public transport and existing car parking facilities, and improving access routes, together with developing information for both local residents and visitors.

6.8. Source to Goring: Planning Policies and Strategies for Leisure on the Thames

There are 3 County Councils and 6 District Councils who have the responsibility for land use planning policy around the Upper Thames.

Counties

Gloucestershire County Council:
County Structure Plan (Second Review October 1992)

Wiltshire County Council:
North East Wiltshire Structure Plan 1993

Oxfordshire County Council:
County Structure Plan 1986-2001

Districts

Cotswold District Council:
Local Plan (Deposit 1992)

North Wiltshire District Council:
Local Plan 1993

Thamesdown Borough Council:
Local Plan (Deposit 1994)

West Oxfordshire District Council:
Local Plan (Deposit 1993)

Vale of White Horse District Council:
Local Plan (Consultation Draft 1993)

Cherwell District Council:
Local Plan (Deposit 1993)

South Oxfordshire District Council:
Local Plan (Deposit 1993)

Oxford City Council:
Local Plan Review (Deposit 1993)

6.8.1. Overall Effect of Existing Planning Policies in the Upper Thames

All of the Local Authorities in the Upper Thames, with the exception of Oxford City Council, have responsibility for undeveloped rural areas of the Thames Valley. Without exception the planning policies for the rural Thames reflect the wish of the councils to retain the river valley in its current state, that is as a unique area of undeveloped countryside.

Protection, conservation, preservation of the visual amenity and a presumption against any development which will increase congestion form the core of most of the river based policies.

Boating: Many still quote from the 'Report of the Working Party on River



Thames Leisure Policy 1980²⁰ which advised that new permanent base moorings should not normally be permitted. There is now a desire to move base moorings off the main channel to backwaters. Any increase in the navigability of the Thames above Lechlade is not favoured.

Informal Recreation: Most of the Local Authorities recognise the value of the Thames as a resource for countryside recreation, but not many policies actively encourage its development for recreation. There is support for the route of the Thames Path and although some Authorities recognise the problems of poor access, they are unwilling to encourage development, except in areas where there is some form of established use.

The policies for the City of Oxford are less restrictive, as would be expected for an area of the Thames which is already developed and has significant existing use. The City Council policies encourage the use of the river for recreation, acknowledging its value as open space in an urban area.

The policies for other urban areas such as Abingdon and Wallingford are similarly less restrictive than equivalent rural area policies, but they do encourage the maintenance of the character of the river and therefore discourage large-scale development on or along the river bank.

6.8.2. Leisure Policies

The Thames is the border for almost all the Local Authorities in the Upper Thames. Oxford City Council has responsibilities for both banks of the river in the city, and part of South Oxfordshire's district crosses the river between Wallingford and Moulsoford. The

peripheral location of the river often leads to it being forgotten, and it is certainly underestimated as a leisure resource. None of the Local Authorities has leisure policies for the Thames and the only contact between river users and the Leisure Officers is where river based clubs lease land from the council. There is little encouragement of the use of the river for water based sports, except for the Local Authority funded Riverside Centre in Oxford, where resources are primarily invested in training young people.

The numerous clubs in the urban areas manage themselves with little contact or input from their Local Authority. This may be how many of the clubs wish to operate, but it is important for Leisure Officers to recognise the significance of the Thames as a recreational resource for outdoor activities such as rowing, canoeing, angling, sailing, and walking. The investment in facilities to help participants make the most of the Thames may then become a more important priority.

6.8.3. Key Issues for the Future

The Increasing Popularity of Countryside Recreation and The Thames Path: Over the last few years the demand for access to the countryside for leisure has increased dramatically, especially in areas close to large populations. For the 10 million people who live in the catchment of the River Thames it is not only a source of water but an important area of open space. Although there is existing use and a perception among some that there is little capacity for increasing this use, in reality much of the Upper Thames is under exposed and therefore under utilised as a resource for countryside recreation. The issue which needs to be resolved is how to

encourage the positive use the area as a recreational resource without causing unacceptable change to the landscape, in other words creating recreational use which is sustainable.

The official opening of the Thames National Trail will undoubtedly increase awareness of the river and even if the numbers completing the Trail are few, there will be an increase in the number of short-distance walkers. From the various studies that have been carried out it is obvious that most of the current use of the Thames Path and riverside walks in general is by local people who visit the Thames on a regular basis. The profile of the Thames Path will increase awareness and Local Authorities will need to respond by reviewing and managing access routes, car parks, signage, toilets and other public facilities.

The Thames and Severn Canal: Although it is at best a medium term project, if and when the canal is reopened it will increase the amount of traffic navigating on the Upper Thames. The need for temporary moorings, fuel supplies, information and facilities for boaters will increase and this will require planning by both the Navigation Authority and Local Authorities.

Demand for Moorings: The demand for moorings on the Upper Thames has always been a sensitive issue. Relative to the lower reaches of the Thames there are few moorings in this area and subsequently there is always a demand by those boat owners who want to moor their boat in a remote area, or close to where they live. It is generally accepted that new permanent moorings on the main channel will not be allowed because of their impact on the flat, rural landscape. If there are to be new moorings on the Upper Thames they



must be located off the main channel, be unobtrusive and not significantly affect sensitive wildlife habitats.

Congestion in Oxford Waters: As already stated the Iffley reach in Oxford is the busiest stretch of water on the Thames. Rowing dominates, and as well as the obvious conflicts with other river users, there is tension among rowers, all of whom want to use the same water space. Added to this is the fact that the Universities are introducing numerous inexperienced novice rowers every year. Oxford University rowers have tried to alleviate some of the conflict by setting up a coxswain training scheme, others would like to see some more radical moves to accommodate what they feel to be the centre of rowing activity in the UK. These ideas include: opening up backwaters around Oxford specifically for rowing; using the South West Oxfordshire Reservoir if and when it is built; developing redundant gravel workings in the Oxford area for rowing. The latter seems the most likely option, but finding a solution will require cooperation and imaginative thinking by the Local Authorities, the NRA and the rowers to find a solution.

Polices, recommendations and action plans which relate to these sites and issues are included within Section 10.

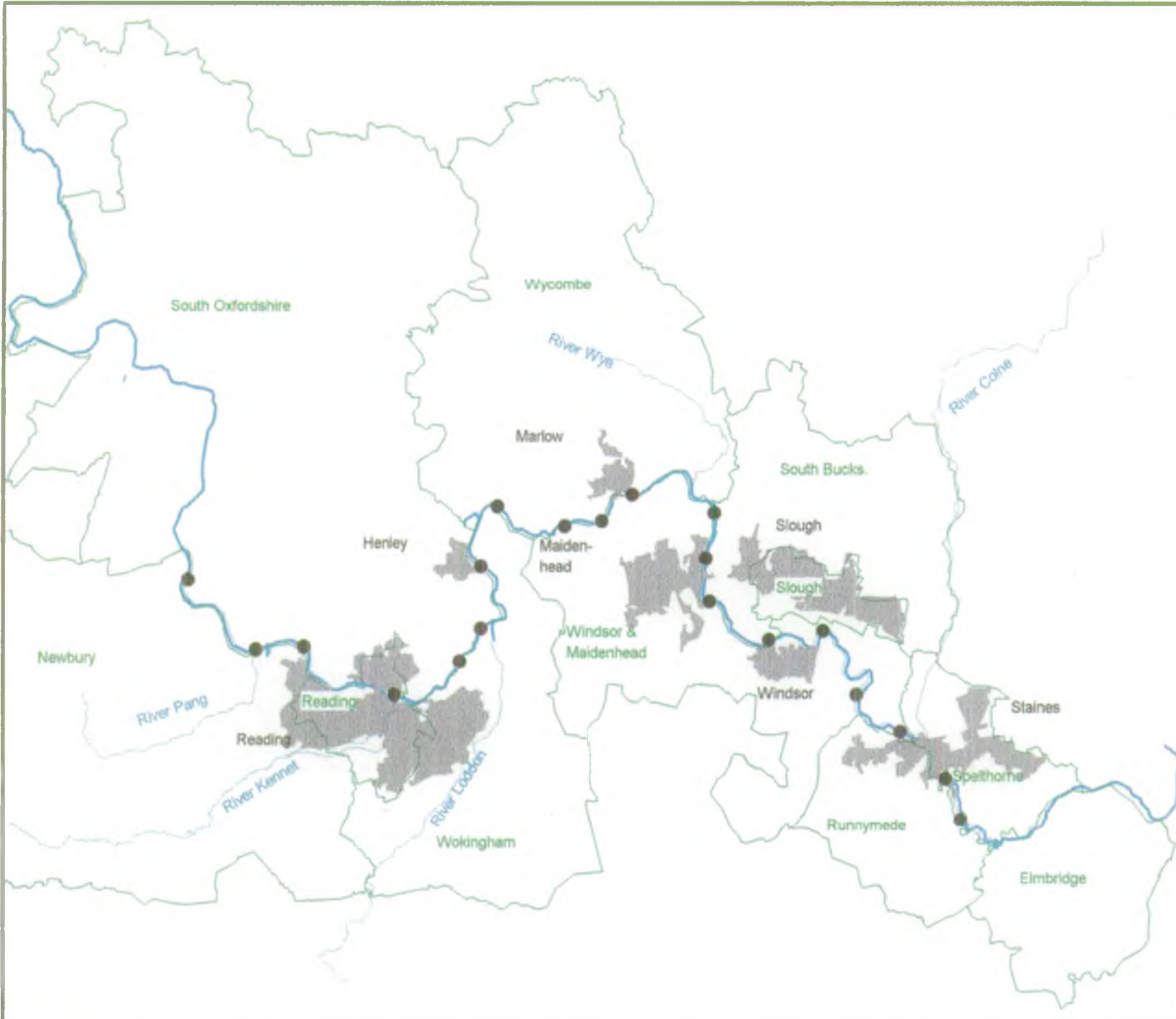
S E C T I O N 7






REVIEWING
THE
THAMES





River Thames Recreation Strategy: Middle Thames - Goring to Staines



-  Riparian Local Authority & Thames Region Boundary
-  Urban Areas
-  River Thames
-  Other Main Channel
-  Lock

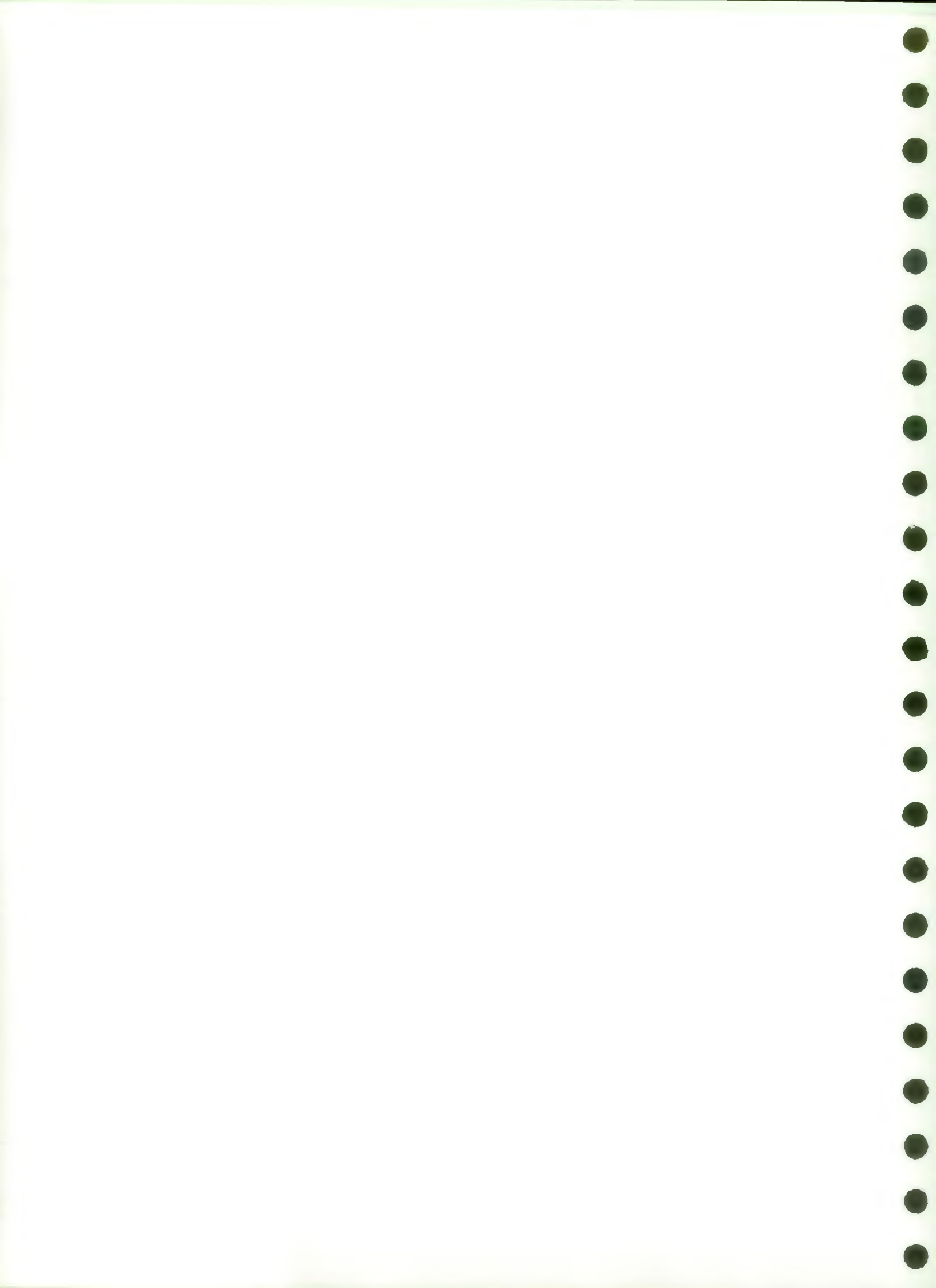


NRA

National Rivers Authority
Thames Region

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REVIEWING THE THAMES

7.1. AREA 2: THE MIDDLE THAMES - GORING TO STAINES

For this Strategy the Middle Thames is designated as the area between Goring lock and Staines Bridge, a distance of 49 miles.

7.1.1. *The Goring Gap*

As the Thames flows downstream from Goring it continues through the Goring Gap, with the Chiltern Hills on the north bank and the North Berkshire Downs on the south bank. Here the river forms the southern boundary of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and it is renowned as one of the prettiest parts of the Thames Valley.

The landscape is rural, but not remote. The villages of Lower Basildon and Gatehampton have residences close to the river, therefore much of the south bank is inaccessible to the public. This is compensated by good access on the north bank, particularly around Goring which is now a very popular riverside destination.

Before reaching Pangbourne the Thames flows below the hanging Hartslock Wood, a designated SSSI, which forms a dramatic backdrop to the river. A key feature on the south bank is the Child Beale Wildlife Trust, a popular visitor attraction where the river is an additional feature. Boat trips are available and there is a passenger service bringing visitors from Reading. For those cruising on the Thames who wish to visit the park, moorings are available. Any future development of the Wildlife Park could involve further integration with the river.

7.1.2. *Pangbourne and Whitchurch*

The village of Pangbourne is on the outskirts of the Reading conurbation. The river is easily visible from the busy road and the Great Western Railway, both of which run along it. The Swan Pub, sited close to the Whitchurch weir is a popular river stop, particularly with cruisers who make use of its visitor moorings.

Physical access to the river in Pangbourne is good. The local college has a boathouse and Berkshire County Council provide a water sports centre - the County Centre, which teaches canoeing and sailing on the Thames (see Appendix 7). Pangbourne Meadows, an area of riverside open space, is owned by the National Trust and managed by the Parish Council. It is popular for mooring, walking, picnicking and enjoying the river, all encouraged by the availability of car parking at the Riverside Centre.

Pangbourne is linked across the river to the village of Whitchurch by a toll bridge, one of only two remaining on the Thames (Swinford Bridge at Eynsham being the other). Access to the Whitchurch waterside is difficult as much of the bank has private residences. There is no pedestrian access to Whitchurch lock, although close to it is a disused public wharf.



7.1.3. Mapledurham

The Thames valley becomes rural again downstream of Pangbourne with agricultural land on both banks. The Hardwick estate runs to the river on the north bank making it inaccessible to the public until it reaches the Mapledurham Estate, where limited access is now available. In recent years the Mapledurham Estate has diversified from being solely agricultural to encouraging leisure use. Facilities include access to Mapledurham House, church and grounds; a restored water mill; and cottages on the estate which are available for holiday lets. Passenger services run between Reading and Mapledurham, but as visitor moorings are not available on the river bank, there is no direct access to the estate for cruisers. Further downstream riverside land on the estate is let as amenity plots with moorings. Local Sea Scouts also have a base on the site.

Mapledurham lock is the destination for a popular walk from the village of Purley. Over the years the lock keeper has developed facilities for the numerous visitors by opening a shop, and an exhibition area. Although the lock and weir are very close to the Mapledurham estate, there is no access across the river.

The Mapledurham Estate landholdings include land on the south of the river which backs onto Purley. One of the meadows in this area is well trodden by walkers, fishermen and local children. It is low grade land, having suffered from vandalism, and requires work to improve it for recreational use.

7.1.4. Reading

Purley is the beginning of the Reading suburbs. The railway line runs close to

the river and to some extent isolates it from the local population. There are access routes across the tracks to the river, but the isolation has left the river bank undeveloped for much of the route to Reading. Scours Lane, an area traditionally associated with commercial boating, is one of the few access routes onto the river. It is the site of the former Reading Marine Services and is currently awaiting redevelopment. The existing slipway is still well used by local people.

The public path along the Thames continues on the south bank to Reading. In some places Reading Borough Council have attempted to encourage visitors by providing picnic tables, but access routes are not very well known except by local people. Closer to Reading the riverside is much more visible and accessible. Known as the Promenade, the area just upstream of Caversham Bridge is a popular riverside park which has a large car park, public slipway, toilets and visitor services. It is also home to Reading Rowing Club and is a pick-up point for a passenger boat service.

Despite the fact that the Thames flows to the north of Reading town centre, there is good physical and visual access to the river. There are several public parks, pubs, and footpaths along both banks, with car parking close by. Caversham weir is accessible to the public and forms a popular river crossing. The recent Tesco's development has resulted in improvements to the riverside walk and additional visitor moorings.

There are, however, areas of the Thames in Reading which have poor visual impact and need significant upgrading. View Island is one of these. Owned by Reading Borough Council and leased for moorings, the island has become an

eyesore and potentially unsafe. There is certainly potential for recreation and Reading Borough Council have plans for development of the site, possibly as a hotel.

Another development site on the Thames is known as Deans Farm. There have been planning applications for gravel extraction but access to the area was felt to be a problem. Planning permission has been given for housing and development has just begun.

Further downstream is the site of Berkshire County Council's proposed third river crossing in Reading, for which planning permission has not yet been resolved.

7.1.5. The Kennet

The River Kennet joins the Thames in Reading and forms an important waterway through the town. Its impact on the Thames has increased since the reopening of the Kennet and Avon Canal, providing a navigation through to Bath. The stretch of river from the Thames to High Bridge in Reading, including Blakes lock, is controlled by the NRA. Beyond that the Kennet and Avon Canal is controlled by British Waterways.

7.1.6. Earley

The river in Earley and Sonning is used by rowing and canoeing clubs based in a stretch known as the Dreadnought reach. A recent commercial development on land adjacent to the Thames in this area included provision for a nature reserve, country park, youth hostel and water resources centre. The nature reserve and country park have been approved, and the business development is currently under construction. Although

Wokingham District Council support in principle the building of a water resources centre, they are considering its function, operation and management. Current access to the river is good but as yet not well promoted.

7.1.7. Sonning

The pretty riverside village of Sonning and the lock nearby, is a popular honeypot site. Visitor moorings are available at the riverside pubs and where the NRA own the towpath. Dinghies and canoes can be launched from the parish wharf downstream of the bridge. The lock is busy with both river and foot traffic in summer.



7.1.8. *Shiplake and Wargrave*

Between Sonning and Shiplake lock the river is both rural and remote, with no bridging points or access routes. Much of the land on the north bank is owned by Shiplake College. Public access to and along the river is via Shiplake lock and a public footpath linking the towpath with Shiplake Parish Church.

The St Patrick's and Borough Marsh Streams leave the Thames upstream of Shiplake, flowing into the River Loddon. They flow back to the Thames when the Loddon joins it at Wargrave. Both streams are popular with canoeists and anglers. Another back channel, navigable by small boats, is the Hennerton Backwater.

A long-established, summer season campsite for permanent lease holders is provided by the NRA on Shiplake Lock island. Although this is good recreational use of the site, access is limited to the 18 lease holders. In the past there have been plans to formalise the 'camping' and improve the visual amenity of the site by building small cabins, but these plans have not yet been taken forward.

The villages of Lower Shiplake and Wargrave lie on either side of the river, both with residential development along the river bank making access impossible. There is a public slipway at Wargrave but parking is poor and it is relatively unknown.

Negotiations for a footbridge upstream of Lower Shiplake and Wargrave are currently taking place between Wokingham District Council and other interested parties (British Rail, NRA, Countryside Commission). The scheme will provide a pedestrian link between the two settlements, allowing access to

the Thames National Trail from both sides of the river.

The reach to Henley flows through semi-rural landscape, with the well established boatyards of Bushnells and Wyatts, together with the Henley Sailing Club providing a hub for the busy boating activities of this area.

7.1.9. *Henley*

Probably the best known of all the towns on the Thames, Henley is a hive of activity both on the water and along the banks. The river is very much at the centre of Henley's popularity as a visitor destination, helped by its accessibility from both banks. Marsh lock with its wooden towpath horse bridges is a popular walk from Mill Meadows, a large park along the river managed by Henley Town Council. Facilities here include car parks, toilets, refreshments, hire boats and passenger services.

Henley is synonymous with rowing and the world famous Henley Regatta which packs the town with visitors. The Regatta owns substantial areas of land on both sides of the river and when not in use for regattas, music festivals or rallies, it is available for public recreation.

In Henley the river is used throughout the year by the three rowing clubs based in the town, including Leander, the worlds premier club where the current Olympic champions train. Activity on the river is markedly increased in the summer season and includes passenger and hire services provided by Hobbs and Hoopers. There are plenty of visitor moorings, although the public slipway has poor access and no parking. Hobbs offer a better slipway with parking at their Wargrave road site.

7.1.10. *Hambleton*

The famous rowing course runs from Henley Bridge to Temple Island, which is close to the village of Remenham, just before the river reaches Hambleton lock. With public access across Hambleton weir it is a very popular site for walkers, as well as those who come to watch the white water canoeing which takes place in the weir pool. Although car parking is not available close to the river, Wycombe District Council provide a car park a few hundred yards away. Hambleton Marina is sited close to the weir and is a focus for cruising activity.

Hambleton lock has been renowned over the years as a bottle neck for river traffic on busy days. The recent rebuilding of the lock because of its poor structural condition should ease congestion.

7.1.11. *Hurley*

Between Hambleton and Marlow the Thames passes a number of small villages on both banks. The first of these is Aston with its defunct ferry point which has become a well used slipway. The next is Mednemham, with another ferry point turned slipway, but a less well used one. The most significant village in terms of river activity is Hurley with its accessible lock islands which are popular for angling, walking, picnicking, camping, and river watching. Freebodies, the boat builders, are located close to the lock.

Part of Hurley's appeal is due to an enterprising local farmer who has developed 'Hurley Farms', a riverside campsite, caravan park and amenity area which draws visitors from a wide area. One of the problems of the Hurley Farm development is the way in which

temporary 'leisure plots' have become permanent and in some cases are now residential properties on an otherwise rural area of river.

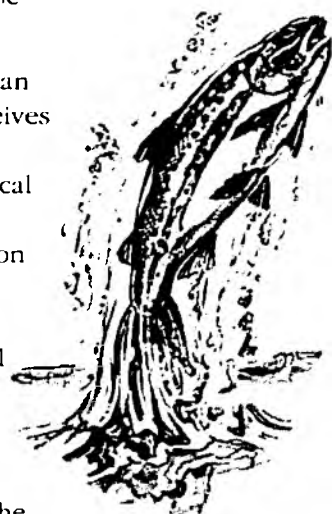
The location of the lock close by is an added attraction and the village receives thousands of visitors every summer, which is not always popular with local people. The lock is the first on the Thames to have a warden working on the site in summer, looking after the campsite which has a mixture of permanent seasonal plots and casual camping. Improvements to the site include access for the disabled and landscaping.

Between Hurley and Temple locks the activity continues with Harleyford Manor, a large marina and caravan park on the north bank, and Temple Moorings, a linear marina on the south bank. There has been an application to further develop Harleyford Manor by building a golf course on the site. The new, and very significant, Temple Footbridge crosses the Thames just downstream and is the only river crossing between Henley and Marlow.

7.1.12. *Marlow*

Just before the Thames flows through the town of Marlow it passes Bisham Abbey National Sports Centre. Owned by the Sports Council and operated as a national centre of excellence, it offers access to water sports on the river such as canoeing and sailing.

Marlow itself is in many ways comparable to Henley in that it is a small, attractive town with good visual and physical access to the Thames, which it uses to good effect. The key public riverside area is Higginson Park, managed by Wycombe District Council.





As well as providing excellent access to the river the park is the site of the Court Garden Complex, a leisure and conference centre. This provides good customer facilities such as car parking, cafes, toilets and showers, and a reception where information is available. Despite the fact that there is a fee, the overnight river bank moorings are popular, as good facilities are available on site. A current issue is the loss of overnight moorings just upstream of the Park due to the poor condition of the bank. The cruising fraternity are lobbying against the loss of what was a popular mooring facility.

Higginson Park also provides rowing boats for hire and Salters operate a passenger service. In addition it is home to the Marlow Regatta, held annually in June.

Wycombe District Council provide another public open space just downstream of the town. It is used as a sports field and for informal recreation.

Marlow Bridge is a well known local landmark and from it there are very good views of the weir. Although

Marlow lock is not immediately obvious, it does attract visitors on foot, despite the fact that there is no through route on from the lock.

Just downstream of the lock the river bank is home to the Longridge Scout Boating Centre. The 10 acre site, including Sherrifs Island, is owned by the Scout and Guide Movement and managed by a local branch of the county Scout Movement. Water based activities include canoeing, sailing, motor boating and dragon boat racing, while on the shore there are facilities for camping, a climbing wall, assault course, rifle range, and playing fields. The majority of users are scouts and guides from all over the UK and Europe, although there is some use by local groups (see Appendix 7).

7.1.13. Spade Oak

As the Thames leaves Marlow it flows below Winter Hill and Quarry Woods, a wooded area owned by the Woodlands Trust and situated close to the village of Cookham Dean. Much of the land is owned by the National Trust. Views of the river from the hill side are excellent but access is limited as there are several private riverside properties.

An important recreational area on the north bank is known as Spade Oak Meadow. Owned by Buckinghamshire County Council and leased to a farmer for grazing, the meadow is popular for informal recreation, despite the fact that a railway track forms its northern boundary. A public car park is set back from the river close to The Spade Oak pub.

Spade Oak is also the site of an old ferry point now owned by Folly Boats of Henley. It is used by residents on the opposite bank as their main access route is across the river.

Several gravel workings close to the river in the Spade Oak area are designated for recreational after-use. Currently there are nature walks around some of the pits which have become havens for wildlife. More active recreation in the form of water skiing takes place on Westhorpe Farm pit. The after-use of the remaining gravel pits has not yet been decided but it is hoped by water sports enthusiasts that there will be provision for them. Wycombe District Council are intending to carry out a study to assess the best possible use. Ultimately some of the workings could become a base for water sports in the Marlow area.

7.1.14. Bourne End

The village of Bourne End has residential properties lining the banks of the river, consequently there is little public access available on the north bank. The situation has been improved by the opening of a footbridge across the river to Cock Marsh. This 132 acres of land, close to the village of Cookham and owned by the National Trust, is well used by the public for informal recreation. Part of the land has been designated as an SSSI.

The area is home to two active sailing clubs, Upper Thames at Bourne End and Cookham, whose base adjoins the parish visitor moorings at Cookham. There are several commercial boat based industries but the demise of the hire craft businesses at Andrews Boatyard and Bourne End Marina leave the area without a cruiser hire service. Skiffs and small motor boats are available for hire at Cookham Bridge.

7.1.15. Cookham

Cookham village has good public access to the Thames and is a popular stop for

cruisers in summer. It is a very pretty village and Cookham lock is a favourite spot for many people. The lock itself is not visible from the village and its location across Odney Common, together with poor signage make it difficult for pedestrians to find. Its remoteness is added to by the diversion of the Thames Path away from the river at this point, bypassing the lock. It is only since 1991 that the lock has become accessible to pedestrians.

Sashes Island (Cookham lock island) is one of the largest on the river. The weir stream between it and Hedsor is one of the few stretches of the Thames without a public right of navigation.

7.1.16. Cliveden

The backdrop to Cookham lock is the internationally known Cliveden Estate, now managed by the National Trust. Beech woods line the river bank of the estate all the way to Taplow. Access to the river is via the estate, although Cliveden House has been leased as a hotel.

7.1.17. Maidenhead and Taplow

Downstream of Cookham lock the Thames Path rejoins the river on the south bank and continues to Maidenhead where it passes through Boulter's lock. This is one of the most visible locks on the Thames and very popular for 'river watching'. Ray Mill Island, adjacent to the lock, is in part owned by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, who manage it as a public park, with cafe and toilets.

Maidenhead does not compare with Henley, Marlow or Windsor as a tourist attraction, although the riverside is popular as a local destination. Taplow is situated on the north bank which is built



up with residential and office developments. The formerly grand Skindles Hotel has gone into decline and adds little to the river scene. Although the river banks may not be ideal for recreation, the water is busy with rowers, punters and cruisers.

Between Maidenhead and Windsor the south bank has been developed primarily as residential properties and hotels. The village of Bray has many private homes, most of which have their own moorings. Although there is a slipway, access and parking are poor. Bray Lock is a popular local walk although there is no access onto the lock island. This area in general is perceived as being 'exclusive' with its top grade hotels, restaurants and large residential properties.

7.1.18. Dorney

Much of the north bank, known as the Dorney Reach, is designated as an Area of Attractive Landscape and as it is within Green Belt it has remained undeveloped, except for the M4 bridge and the small village of Boveney. The Thames Path runs along the north bank to Eton. Most of the open land and islands in the river are owned by Eton College. They have recently been given planning permission to extract gravel in this area and subsequently convert the workings to a 2000 metre rowing course. The timescale of the project is long term, probably at least 10 years, as the first stage is gravel extraction. Although it will be a national facility in terms of competition, its impact on Thames rowing will be relatively localised as rowers from, for example, Oxford will not be prepared to travel except for competitions. Part of the planning conditions include landscaping to

provide access for informal recreation. All in all, when complete, it will be a major Thameside facility.

The other major scheme proposed for this area is the Maidenhead Flood Relief Scheme, for which the Secretary of State for the Environment has indicated his approval. It is anticipated that construction of this 11.8 km channel between Maidenhead and Windsor will begin in Spring 1996.

Unusually for the Thames there are 3 marinas in one relatively short reach i.e. Bray, Windsor and the Race Course Marina, all of which contribute significantly to the river traffic in the area. This activity is added to by the Willows Caravan Park which is located on the river bank close to Windsor. Many of these have become residential and there is the possibility that they may become more permanent.

Before reaching the busy waters of Windsor the river passes through Boveney lock and weir, which has rollers well used by local rowers. Although remote from the village of Dorney and surrounded by Eton College land, the lock is accessible on foot and attracts those walking on Dorney Common.



7.1.19. *Windsor and Eton*

Downstream of the lock the riverside is in agricultural use, leased by Eton College to local farmers. The Cuckoo Weir Stream leaves the river flowing under a well used towpath foot bridge known as Longbridge or the Chinese Bridge. The stream re-enters the river close to Windsor.

The busy Clewer Mill Stream enters the Thames on the south bank and is a base for passenger vessels operating in Windsor. This marks the beginning of the busy Windsor river bank, which is a honeypot for visitors who stray from Windsor Castle, the main attraction of the town.

The river in Windsor is well developed, both with on-water and bankside activities. French Brothers and Salters have passenger services, others offer craft for hire. The arches of Windsor Bridge are home to several clubs including Old Windsor Lifeguards and a swimming club. Most of the river bank and the three islands in the river are owned by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, with good public access along what is known as the Promenade.

Windsor is a very popular place for visiting craft to moor, and Windsor Wharf is used by both passenger craft and visiting cruisers. The £4 mooring fee (per 24 hours), with few facilities provided, is felt to be expensive and does not compare well to other sites. Those on cruisers often complain about moorings fees.

The north bank, known as the Brocas, is also used for overnight mooring and here again there is a fee. These meadows are owned by Eton College

who manage it as open space which the public enjoy. The now pedestrianised Windsor Bridge joins Windsor with Eton, becoming a popular vantage point for 'river watching'. There is certainly plenty to watch: rowers from Eton College and the Excelsior club; passenger ferries; cruisers; rowing boats; and numerous people enjoying the funfair on the Windsor bank.

Downstream of Windsor, Eton College continue their land holdings on the north bank, and include one of the lock islands of Romney Lock. The lock itself is a popular stop for walkers and there is access across the lock onto the island. On the south bank the land holdings of the Crown Estates begin with Home Park which runs close to the lock. This is the only area of Crown Estate land close to the river which is open to the public for both walking and overnight mooring. Once the towpath reaches Victoria Bridge, Home Park becomes private and inaccessible.

7.1.20. *Datchet*

The village of Datchet lies close to the river on the north bank and offers access points to the river in an otherwise currently inaccessible area of Crown land. Overnight mooring is available on a public wharf, and there is a somewhat defunct slipway, with poor access and car parking. A hire cruise company operate from the Datchet bank on land leased from the Crown Estates. Other stretches of bank in this area are leased by the Civil Service Angling Club. Stopping on the Windsor bank on certain stretches of Crown land is not permitted. New public access to the river bank between Datchet and Albert Bridge will be created by the Thames Path.



7.1.21. Old Windsor

The building of Old Windsor lock created one of the largest lock islands on the Thames. Known as Ham island, its main tenant is a sewage works, although there are several residential properties. There is public access, but it is not promoted and the island is not used for recreation, except angling.

Old Windsor lock lies at the downstream end of Ham island and is a very popular local walking destination. Sea Cadets have a base on the nearby Lion Island. The weir stream is one of the canoe slalom sites provided by the NRA and is very well used by canoeists. Downstream of the lock is a small marina known as Saxon Moorings.

The village of Old Windsor lies on the south bank with access on the towpath all along the bank. Wraybury on the opposite bank has virtually no river access as much of the bank has private residential properties. Informal access for walkers is available through the Ankerwyke Estate, an area of woodlands of special archaeological and ecological interest, owned by Berkshire County Council. There is potential to increase

and manage this public access, which is currently being considered.

Runnymede Meadows, owned by the National Trust, is a popular destination south of the river, with good access to the river banks, car parking and overnight mooring. The Meadows incorporate the Magna Carta and Kennedy Memorials, and are overlooked by the Airforces Memorial located on the top of Coopers Hill. Of special ecological interest is Langham Pond, designated as an SSSI.

Close to the Meadows is Runnymede Pleasure Ground, a very busy riverside park owned and managed by Runnymede Borough Council. Facilities include a children's paddling pool, play equipment, cafe, and car parks. The NRA provide popular free 24-hour moorings just downstream of the Pleasure Grounds.

The north bank continues to be less accessible with private residences, gravel workings and reservoirs along the bank until the river reaches the site of the City Stone. This marks the former jurisdiction of the City of London over the Thames. The site of the stone is now within a

children's play area in the Lammas Park on the edge of Staines. The Stone itself has been moved by Spelthorne District Council.

Before passing under the M25 bridge, the river flows through Bell Weir, which has a very small lock island. The main feature of the area is the popular Runnymede Hotel.

7.2. RECREATIONAL USE OF THE THAMES: GORING TO STAINES

7.2.1. *Informal Recreation*

As the Thames flows downstream the river becomes wider, its valley becomes more populated and consequently its use for recreation increases.

Riverside walking continues to be very popular and as towns and villages along the river are more frequent, access and bridging points are also more frequent. This facilitates circular walks to and along the Thames.

The Thames Path is much closer to full implementation along its prescribed route than in the Upper Thames. The number and frequency of facilities close to the Path increases as it reaches busier areas of the river, but it is still possible to get away from the hustle and bustle. The main change as the river flows downstream is that these quiet areas are less remote.

The key honeypot sites where people gather are in or close to the towns and villages of Pangbourne, Reading, Sonning, Henley, Marlow, Maidenhead and Windsor. Locks such as Hambleden and Hurley are also very popular. Most of these towns have public facilities relatively close to the river, but they are not always well signed. This leads to complaints about the lack of toilets and

parking. River watching, picnicking, strolling, and just relaxing with family and friends are the main activities.

7.2.2. *Angling*

Angling maintains its popularity throughout the Middle Thames, but as activity on the water increases it becomes more difficult and the conflict between anglers and boaters escalates. The river is busiest close to towns and villages, with boats moored and the banks used by walkers and picnickers. Anglers prefer the remoter areas, where mooring is not allowed and there is less bank side use. As the river flows downstream finding these remote areas becomes more difficult.

As is common throughout the river, most of the fishing rights in the Middle Thames are owned by clubs. A few notable exceptions are on some council-owned lands.

7.2.3. *Boating*

The number of craft using the Middle Thames increases in tandem with the riverside population. Boat traffic in this area is much greater than on any of the other stretches. This is reflected by the lock traffic statistics which shows Caversham lock (Reading) to be the busiest on the river (in 1993 it had over 11,000 lock movements). It is closely followed by Hurley, Temple and Marsh locks, all of which have a high density of mooring, or marinas close by.

Both recreational boating and the more competitive water sports are concentrated in the major towns. Although there is the perception of conflict, significant problems are invariably limited to times of peak use, ie summer Sundays, bank holidays and when there are events on the river.

Cruisers: In line with the population the number of permanent moorings increases dramatically in the Middle Thames, with a total of 4248 (see Appendix 3b). Cruising activity dominates the river close to the marinas, and in the reach between Bray and Boveney lock, where there are 3 marinas, bottlenecks occur at peak times. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that most people use the river at the same time.

Although the majority of private cruisers registered on the Thames do not belong to a club, there is a significant minority who do. Of the 41 boat clubs on the river, 8 are based in the Middle Thames. Among other things they organise rallies where cruisers travel together to a pre-arranged destination. Cookham lock is a popular site for these rallies.

There are many more facilities for boaters in the Middle Thames than further upstream. The marinas and boatyards provide fuel, water and sanitation services. Some of the lock sites also provide services. There are numerous riverside pubs and most of the towns and villages have good access from the river. The most common complaints concern overnight mooring, both the lack of availability and the fees charged at some locations where there are few if any services provided.

Hire Craft: There are a total of 13 hire operators in the Middle Thames, invariably located in the main towns including Reading, Wargrave, Henley, Cookham, Maidenhead, Windsor and Datchet. Hire cruisers contribute to the lock traffic in the summer season, primarily the 6 weeks of school holidays. Small day hire boats have traditionally

been available at the honeypot sites in the major towns such as Reading, Henley, Marlow and Windsor. They are often the only way for the general public to experience the river from a small craft. There are obvious concerns about safety, especially in busy areas of the river, but it is important to retain this service as it provides a valuable access route to the Thames for many people.

Canoeing: There are 7 canoe clubs based on the Middle Thames, again almost all are located around the towns where access to the water is better. They tend to have their own club/boathouses and use local waters for regular training. This does cause problems where the local water is also the home base for other clubs, for example in Reading where canoe clubs share water with rowing clubs.

When canoeists want to use other stretches of the Thames, they need an access point which has car parking. This is not always easy to find, particularly for those wishing to use weirs for white water canoeing. Popular weirs in the Middle Thames are Hambleden and Old Windsor, where the NRA have provided access for slalom canoeing.

The Middle Thames has 2 water sports centres where novices can learn to canoe, among other things. One of these is the County Centre at Pangbourne provided by Berkshire County Council, the other is the Longridge Scout Boating Centre near Marlow, provided by the Scout Association (Appendix 7).

Sailing: Sailing is more popular on the Thames as it becomes wider. Almost all Thames sailing is club based and there are 9 sailing clubs in the Middle Thames, although other clubs provide facilities for

sailing. A key area for sailing activity is the Bourne End - Cookham stretch. Competition sailing is almost always limited to the club timetable, which other local river users should be aware of, thus reducing conflict and congestion. Problems for sailors include the silting of the river edges and trees along the bank which affect the wind.

Rowing: The Middle Thames is home to several rowing clubs, most being located close to the main towns. Henley is probably the place that first comes to mind when discussing rowing in the area. The world famous Regatta is a focus of activity but the Henley waters are busy all year round with locally based clubs. Several other towns have rowing events, including Marlow, Reading, Maidenhead and Egham. When well organised these can enliven the river without causing distress to other river users.

Several schools, colleges and universities have rowing boathouses on the river, the most famous being Eton College which owns substantial amounts of their local river bank, including three boathouses. Eton also plan to construct a 2000 metre rowing course close to the Thames which will be a significant local and national facility for rowing.

Skiff and Punting: The Wraysbury Skiff and Punting club, located close to the Runnymede Pleasure Ground, is one of the few clubs on the river which concentrates on skiff and punting.

7.2.4. Tourism

The river becomes more important as a tourist destination in the Middle Thames, with towns like Henley, Marlow and Windsor attracting many visitors in summer. A recent survey²² showed that

32% of visitors to Henley and Wallingford felt that the river was the most important attraction. As a result of the tourist interest, visitor services are increased, especially in Henley where there are several passenger services, day hire craft and riverside pubs, cafes and restaurants.

Encouraging tourism presents a dilemma for Local Authorities who are concerned about the effect of large numbers of people on the natural environment and the local population. The attractiveness of the Thames Valley is dependent on the combination of pretty rural towns and villages, and the rural riverside. On busy summer Sundays both of these features can be affected by too many cars and people. Yet these tourists make a very valuable contribution to the local economy. One way to resolve this dilemma is to encourage visitor management through information and education.

7.2.5. Recreational Sites and Opportunities

THE THAMES PATH: The riverside is generally much more accessible and better known in the Middle Thames, and the Thames Path is almost complete with only a small section of the new route not yet designated. The creation of the Bourne End footbridge in 1993 provided a major link in the route, as did Temple footbridge in 1989. There are still stretches of the Path to be agreed with the Crown Estate in Windsor.



Opportunity: to promote the Path as a long distance route, as well as improving the network of local routes linking to the river. This will include the extension of visitor facilities to key locations where they do not already exist, eg toilets, camp sites.

CHILD BEALE WILDLIFE PARK: Visitor attraction located on the Thames between Goring and Pangbourne.
Opportunities: to further integrate the Park with the river and continue to develop river related activities.

THE COUNTY CENTRE: Water sports centre provided by Berkshire County Councils Youth and Community Service.
Opportunity: to develop the facilities, including the provision of accommodation, which would help to make the centre more financially viable.

THE PANG VALLEY COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT: The River Pang enters the Thames in Pangbourne and although the Pang is not a public navigation, the Pang Valley is an important countryside resource, parts of which are designated as an SSSI.
Opportunity: to create a pathway along the Pang linking the Thames to the Kennet, and developing educational access to an important conservation area.

MAPLEDURHAM: A busy area on the Thames which features the Mapledurham Estate as a well established visitor destination.
Opportunity: to improve the visitor experience and make the most of this area of the Thames by integrating the estate, the river and the lock.

SCOURS LANE: Formerly the site of Reading Marine Services.
Opportunity: to ensure that any future development of the site maintains public

access to the river and restores facilities for the boating public, including the slipway.

READING RIVERSIDE PARKS: The Promenade, Caversham Court, Christchurch and Hills Meadows are all busy formal riverside parks owned and managed by Reading Borough Council.
Opportunity: to maintain and promote these parks, which are an important part of the local recreation infrastructure. This includes promoting the use of the river for passenger trips and small boat hire.

VIEW ISLAND: Derelict island owned by Reading Borough Council.
Opportunity: to rehabilitate the site, improving the base mooring facilities, and developing public access.

DEANS FARM: Downstream of Reading this derelict farm is now being developed for housing.
Opportunity: to improve the visual quality of the river in this area, increasing riverside access where possible.

THAMES VALLEY PARK: Commercial development in Earley, downstream of Reading.
Opportunity: to create a water resources centre, including an educational and interpretative facility.

SHIPLAKE LOCK: NRA lock island leased to seasonal campers.
Opportunity: to improve the appearance and accessibility of the site to the general public, including the provision of more open, public camping.

MILL MEADOWS, HENLEY: A busy riverside park, soon to be the home of the River and Rowing Museum, which is due to be constructed by the end of 1995.

Opportunity: to maintain this valuable riverside park and integrate the new museum as an information centre for both locals and tourists.

HURLEY: The village and lock have become a honeypot for visitors to the river.

Opportunity: to develop the full recreational potential of the lock island through a comprehensive management plan which also considers the surrounding area.

HIGGINSON PARK, MARLOW: A busy riverside park managed by Wycombe District Council.

Opportunity: to maintain the existing facilities and where possible improve the services available, especially for those wishing to moor overnight.

LONGRIDGE SCOUT BOATING CENTRE: Water sports centre owned by the Scout Association and leased to the County Scout Association.

Opportunity: to maintain and enhance this excellent teaching facility, opening access to a wider market where capacity exists.

SPADE OAK: Riverside meadow owned by Buckinghamshire County Council.

Opportunity: to maintain, enhance and promote the area as a public open space, integrating it with the Little Marlow gravel pits and the local pub.

COCK MARSH: 132 acres of riverside land owned by the National Trust and located across the river from the village of Bourne End.

Opportunity: to safeguard and promote this area as a riverside public open space.

ANDREWS BOAT YARD: Derelict boat yard located on the Bourne End river bank.

Opportunity: to safeguard the site so that an important recreational asset on river is not permanently lost.

COOKHAM LOCK: NRA owned lock islands, said to be one of the prettiest locks on the Thames.

Opportunity: To ensure that the site fulfils its recreational potential through the development of a site and visitor management plan.

CLIVEDEN ESTATE: A popular visitor destination owned by the National Trust.

Opportunity: To increase the integration of the site with the river, promoting access both to and from the river bank.

RAY MILL ISLAND, MAIDENHEAD: Public park close to Boulter's lock, owned and managed by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

Opportunity: To maintain and enhance the area as an important part of the public open space.

ETON ROWING COURSE: A proposed 2000 metre rowing course close to the river Thames.

Opportunity: To provide an alternative water space for rowing which will help alleviate congestion on the local Thames and improve training opportunities for clubs from further afield. The inclusion of landscaped areas around the course will provide a valuable public amenity.

MAIDENHEAD FLOOD RELIEF SCHEME: An NRA project which will create 11.8 km of channel between Maidenhead and Windsor.

Opportunity: to create public access for informal recreation and boating in unpowered craft. There will also be significant conservation developments as part of the scheme.

THE PARKS IN WINDSOR: Windsor Castle and its Royal residents have

ensured that Windsor is one of the main tourist towns in the country.

Opportunity: To maintain the network of public parks along the river in Windsor, integrating them, and the river, with the other attractions in the town. To improve the facilities for mooring, giving better value for money.

RUNNYMEDE: A pleasure ground along the river just upstream of Staines which is a very busy riverside park.

Opportunity: to maintain and promote existing facilities and develop links between Runnymede and the Ankerwyke Estate on the Berkshire bank, where the full potential of the site has not been realised.

7.2.6. Summary

Between Goring and Staines the Thames gradually makes the transition from a rural river valley dominated by agricultural land, to becoming a busy focal point in riverside towns, with relatively small areas of countryside between them.

Increases in the population, and in the number of roads and bridges, has led to increased access to the Thames as it flows downstream. Towns such as Reading, Henley, Marlow and Windsor focus on the Thames as a recreational resource and have good visual and physical access to it. This is not the case in the villages where access can be limited by more numerous riverside residential properties.

One of the most significant changes in the urban riverside scene has been the decline in river based industries. In recent years many companies have sold their riverside properties, most of which have subsequently become private residences or offices. This has resulted in

the loss of facilities which were part of the essential riverside infrastructure.

River traffic is at its peak in the Middle Thames. With over 30 marinas and boat-yards, it is home to many craft, who often cruise close to their base. The busiest locks on the Thames are Caversham, Hurley, Hambleden, Boveney and Bray, all close to marinas in the Middle Thames.

7.3. GORING TO STAINES: PLANNING POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR LEISURE ON THE THAMES

There are 3 County Councils and 8 District Councils who have the responsibility for planning policy on the Middle Thames. They are listed below, with their relevant planning document.

Counties

Oxfordshire County Council:

County Structure Plan 1986-2001

Berkshire County Council:

County Structure Plan (Deposit 1992)

Countryside Recreation Local Plan 1985

Buckinghamshire County Council:

County Structure Plan (Deposit 1994)

Districts

South Oxfordshire District Council:

Local Plan (Deposit 1993)

Newbury District Council:

Local Plan (Adopted 1993)

Reading Borough Council:

Borough Plan (Deposit 1992)

Wokingham District Council:

Loddon Area Local Plan 1990

Wycombe District Council:

Local Plan (Deposit 1992)



South Bucks District Council:
 Local Plan 1989 (under review)
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead:
 Local Plan 1993
Runnymede Borough Council:
 Local Plan 1993
Spelthorne Borough Council:
 Local Plan 1990

7.3.1. Overall Effect of Existing Planning Policies in the Middle Thames

The attitude of Local Authorities to the Thames in this area varies depending on the nature of the landscape. Some areas have been given special designations such as the Goring Gap and the Chilterns which are Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and between Pangbourne and Purley is designated as Strategic Gap. Several other riverside areas are within Green Belt and Areas of Attractive Landscape.

Local Authorities which include rural areas of the Thames tend to be more restrictive as they wish to preserve the rural nature of the river and do not want to encourage anything which would increase river traffic. Most of the riverside planning policies are based on the 1980 Report of the Working Party on River Thames Leisure Policy²⁰.

All Local Authorities support the Thames Path and will safeguard its route within any new developments. The authorities with more proactive policies are those which include riverside areas where there is scope for redevelopment, or where it is believed that existing use would be improved by further development. These more relaxed policies apply to the major towns such as Reading and Maidenhead.

As is the case all along the Thames there

are few Local Authorities in the Middle Thames which have responsibilities for both banks. The only Authorities which cross the river in this area are Reading Borough Council and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. For all the others the Thames forms the borough border.

There appears to be increased emphasis on the river by Local Authorities in this area and some have specific committees or policies for the river:

- Reading Borough Council has a Waterways Forum, made up of a variety of interest groups, which discusses waterway issues and helped to prepare the Reading Waterways Plan.
- Windsor and Maidenhead Borough Council has a Committee of Riverside Parishes which meets to discuss Thames issues.

Boating: The general policy in the Middle Thames is similar to the Upper Thames, i.e. a presumption against increasing the number of permanent moorings on the Thames. Rather than protection of the quiet, rural landscape, the main reason behind this policy is to stop any increase in activity levels on the river.

Within the Local Authorities there is little knowledge of activity levels on the Thames, or the nature of that activity. They depend on the NRA for advice on navigational issues but there is no formal system for getting that information.

With regards to small boats some of the Authorities realise that there is a lack of facilities, i.e. slipways, access routes and car parks, but they have not actively sought to remedy this.



Informal Recreation: All of the Authorities recognise the landscape value of the Thames valley and have policies intended to conserve and enhance it. A few are more proactive, promoting the use of the Thames banks for informal countryside recreation. As expected there are many riverside parks and public open spaces in this heavily populated area of the Thames, but these are not always promoted, nor do they always have public amenities. They are the obvious honeypots, but as the Thames flows downstream, access in general improves and activities such as walking and picnicking are well established among local people in most areas.

7.3.2. Leisure Policies

The higher profile which is given to the Middle Thames by some Local Authorities is reflected in their Leisure Departments through reference to the river within Leisure and Tourism Strategies. There awareness and concern for the Thames is reflected in a number of projects:

- South Oxfordshire District Council organised a Tourism Symposium in 1993 from which they hope to develop a Tourism Action Plan. They are aware how important the Thames is as an asset, especially in Wallingford and Henley.
- Reading Borough Council have a Leisure and Arts Strategy (1992) which highlights the Thames as a recreational resource which needs to be managed and promoted.
- Wycombe District Council have a Tourism Strategy (1992) which encourages services on the Thames, including hire boats and passenger services.

- The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead coordinate a Tourism Forum consisting of local operators, some of whose business is on or related to the river.

Water sports on the Middle Thames tend to be left to their own devices, as is the case throughout the river. The only contact between Local Authorities and clubs is with those who lease council land or apply for grant aid. Otherwise the Leisure Department often does not know they exist. There is certainly scope for Sports Development Officers to work more closely with Thames based clubs. In terms of provision for novices there is only one council owned and managed water sports facility in the Middle Thames, i.e. the County Centre in Berkshire (provided by Berkshire County Council), and with public sector spending cuts the future of this is not secure. The other training centre is operated by the Scout Association at Longridge, near Marlow. It is not open to the general public.

7.3.3. Key Issues for the Future

The Increasing Popularity of Countryside Recreation and the Thames Path: As the Thames flows towards London the population increases and the demand for the shrinking amount of open space increases. In the future the Thames Valley will come under increasing pressure, both the designated public parks and the more rural areas. The Thames Path will open access routes, and policies for agricultural land such as set-aside and countryside stewardship will encourage farmers to allow informal recreation on their land.

Increasing the numbers of people along the banks of the Thames does not

appeal to everyone and there is always the danger that the environment is damaged. The key to optimising the Thames Valley as a recreational asset is visitor management which protects the more vulnerable areas and plans for the relatively few very busy days.

In terms of facilities a coordinated review is needed to identify gaps in provision, highlighting what is required, how they can be provided, and where they will be best placed.

Demand For Moorings: In a more populated area the demand for permanent moorings is always greater. There are many more moorings in the Middle Thames than in the Upper Thames, both those which are privately owned and those in marinas and boat yards. Since the advice given in the River Thames Leisure Policy (1980), there have been very few new main channel moorings, despite the fact that there has been demand for them. The main reason was the wish not to increase congestion on the river. Even though traffic on the river has decreased in the last 15 years there is still a negative feeling about permanent moorings, as it is perceived that they have a negative impact on the landscape. Although some of the marinas in the area are not at capacity, Local Authorities receive numerous planning applications for permanent moorings. Policies in this Recreation Strategy will advise on both permanent and overnight moorings.

Eton Rowing Lake: This project has already been described earlier in this section, however it is worth mentioning again as it will have a major impact on the area, as both a local and a national rowing facility. It should help ease congestion and conflict on the Boveney

and Windsor reaches of the Thames, as well as improving the landscape, and providing better access and facilities in the area. It is important that its potential as a public facility is maximised, rather than being exclusive to Eton College or the rowing fraternity.

Congestion at locks: As there are so many boats based in this area of the Thames it is not surprising that the locks become congested at peak times. There are several different reactions to this congestion. Some boaters recognise that cruising at peak times (summer weekends and bank holidays) means queues at locks and accept this as part of boating on the Thames. Others believe that long queues are unacceptable and should be alleviated through traffic control or lock enlargements. All agree that waiting at locks should be safe and comfortable, achieved through the provision of good layby facilities.

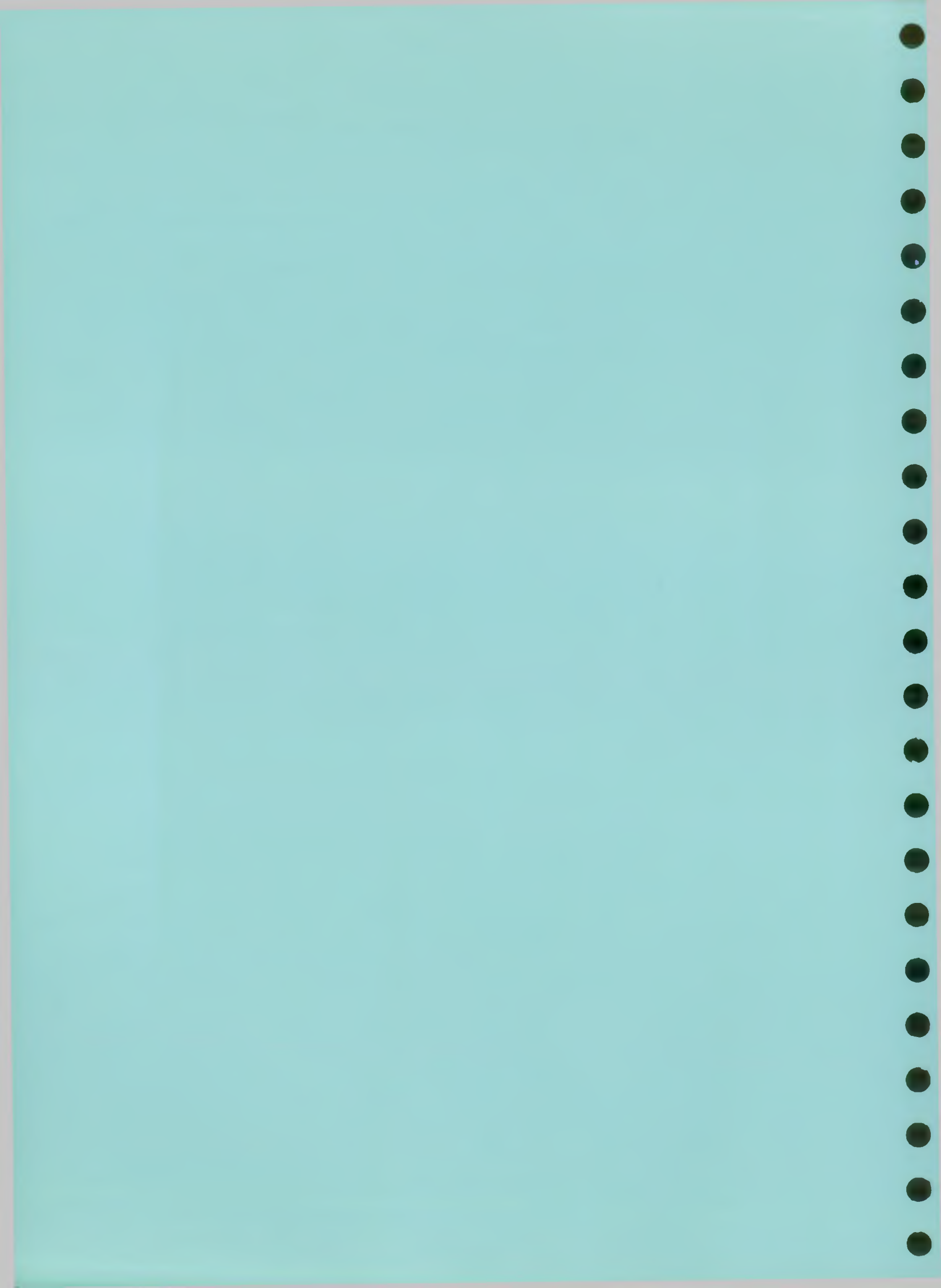
Policies, recommendations and action plans which relate to these sites and issues are included within Section 10.



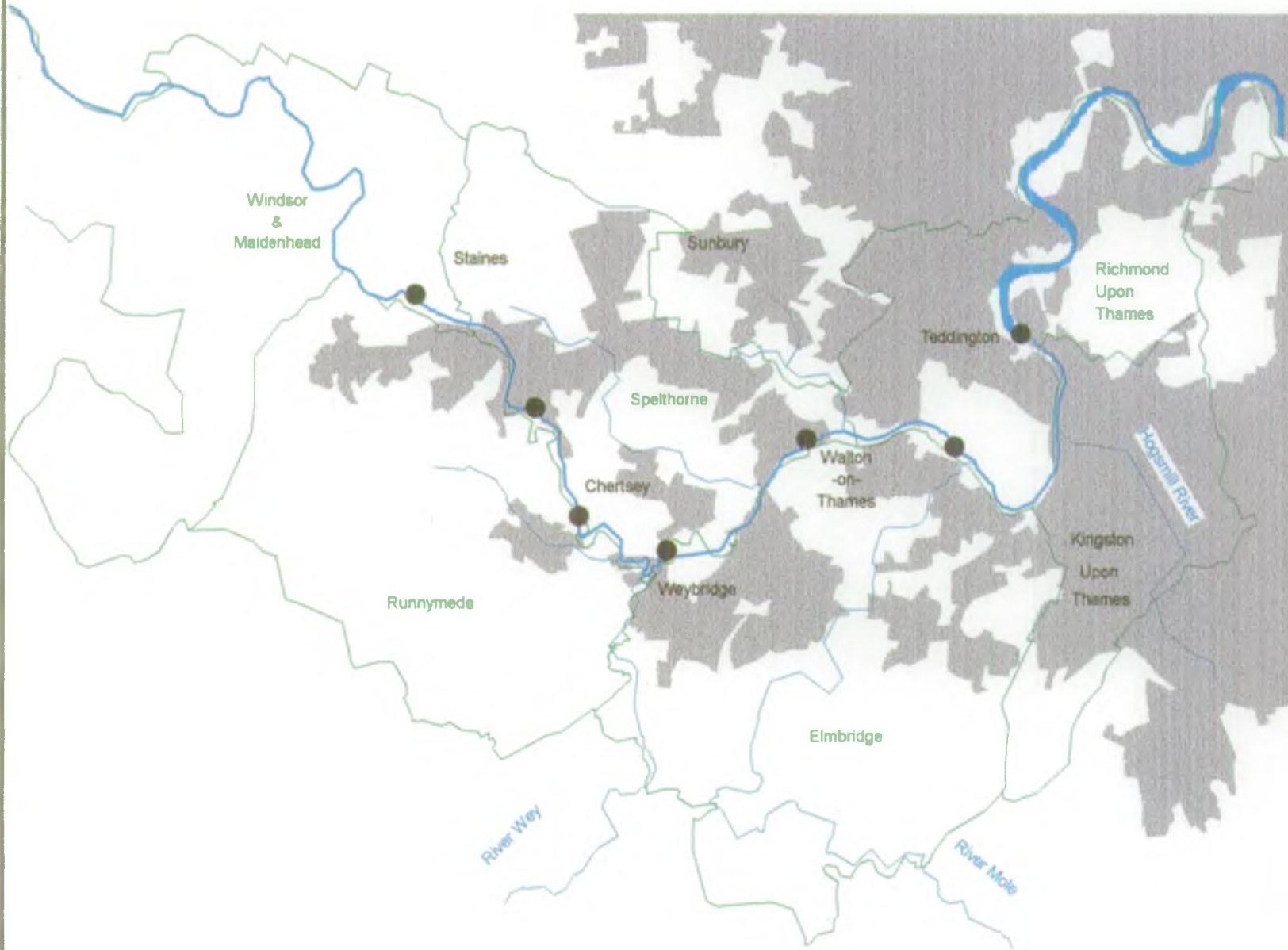
S E C T I O N 8






REVIEWING
THE
THAMES



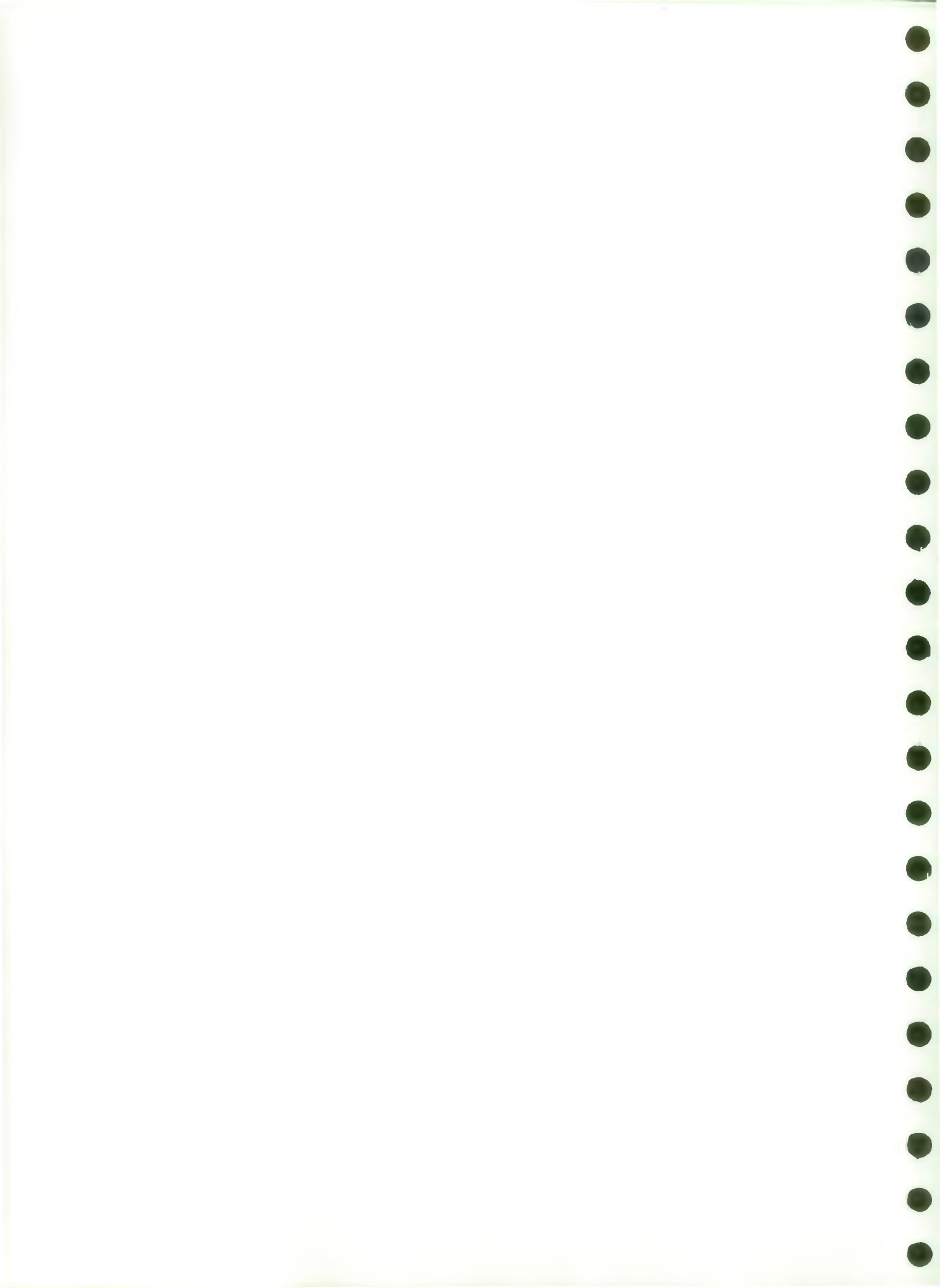


River Thames Recreation
Strategy:
Lower Thames - Staines
to Teddington



-  Riparian Local Authority
-  Urban Areas
-  River Thames
-  Other Main Channel
-  Lock







REVIEWING THE THAMES

8.1. Area 3: The Lower Thames - Staines to Teddington

Downstream of Staines the Thames becomes more noticeably urbanised as the population of the hinterland increases and the change from agricultural to urban landscape is complete. This section describes the main features of the remaining 17 miles of non-tidal Thames from Staines to Teddington.

8.1.1. Staines

Just downstream of Bell Weir (near Staines) the Thames passes beneath Runnymede Bridge which carries both the M25 and the A30. From here it moves into a predominantly urban environment, which continues until beyond Gravesend. The town of Staines spans the river to meet Egham, with both banks being home to a significant level of bankside and boating activity.

The centre of Staines has to some extent turned its back on the Thames with many of the bankside buildings facing away from the river. As expected in a busy riverside town there is a tradition of boat-based industry on the river in Staines, although some of these have been in decline in recent years.

Recreational boating is also popular, with rowing and sailing available at local clubs. Although there is a slipway close to Staines bridge it is not well known or used.

To add to the river based activity many of the residential properties along the banks have their own private moorings.

The NRA own the towpath (north bank) between Staines Railway Bridge and Penton Hook, a distance of almost 2

miles. It also owns a stretch along the south bank between Staines Road and the railway bridge. Although much of the route on the north bank has residential development with associated moorings, there is one significant river-side open space known as Silvery Sands which is used by local people for informal recreation.

8.1.2. Trusses Island

Surrey County Council owned several areas of land along the Thames which they designated as open space under their 'Windows on the Thames' policy. Over the years several of these 'windows' have become the responsibility of Runnymede Borough Council Trusses Island. Although a relatively small area, it is a very significant open space along an otherwise privately owned river bank. In 1991 it was refurbished and it now has a public slipway, with car and trailer parking, facilities for disabled fishing, information boards, and picnic areas. To promote the use of the slipway a signage system was implemented throughout the Staines area. Its success has yet to be seen.

8.1.3. Penton Hook

Residential development continues along both banks, with the Thames Path following the north bank to the village of Laleham. Penton Hook with its lock, the gravel workings and associated development on the Surrey bank has a major impact on the river landscape.

The gravel workings have created a succession of lakes close to the river, one of which has been developed into the largest marina on the Thames -

Penton Hook Marina (643 berths). The bank of land between the gravel pits and the river has several holiday chalets. Access to these and the river bank is only by agreement with the gravel company. The area was one of Surrey County Council's Windows on the Thames, although its potential as a public recreational resource has not yet been realised.

Penton Hook island was created by the building of the lock. Owned by the NRA, it has been left to develop naturally and is now a popular destination for local walkers. There is access to the island across the lock from the north bank, and although there have been calls for access across the weir to and from the south bank, this has not been agreed.

8.1.4. *Laleham*

The village of Laleham has not exploited its riverside position, as much of the bank is inaccessible due to residential development. There are a few commercial operators offering permanent moorings and boatyard services. It is not until the Thames passes the village and reaches Laleham Park that access to and from it improves. Owned and managed by Spelthorne Borough Council, Laleham Park is well developed in terms of customer services, ie parking, toilets, play area, campsite and refreshments. The park is a popular 'countryside' destination for visitors from further afield, as well as being very well used by local people. Free access to the river bank makes the area popular for angling. The other main water sport is rowing, with the Burway Rowing club having their base in the park.

8.1.5. *Chertsey*

The main riverside access route to Laleham Park is in fact via the towpath which takes motor vehicles. It runs from Chertsey Bridge through the Park to Laleham village. Chertsey lock is located close to this road and although the lock island is very small with no possibilities for public access, 'lock watching' is a popular attraction for visitors to Laleham Park.

Much of the river bank around Chertsey is used for recreation. A small island at the mouth of the Abbey river is used by a camping club. Spelthorne Borough Council continues its ownership of the north bank downstream of the bridge with a well-used open space known as Dumsey Meadow. Similarly Runnymede Borough Council manage the open space on the south bank known as Chertsey Meads. Formerly one of Surrey County Council's 'windows', it includes a wetland area known as Dockett Eddy.

8.1.6. *Weybridge and Shepperton Lock*

Once past Chertsey Meads the banks of the river soon become busy again with a return to residential development. Shepperton lock is at the centre of a very active stretch of river which includes several rowing, sailing and cruising clubs. It is also one of the most popular sites on the Thames for canoeing. The River Wey Navigation joins the Thames in this area, adding to the level of activity. Local commercial operators include Nauticalia who run a ferry which is now integral to the Thames Path.

Shepperton Lock is one of the few locks which offers services to the many people

who visit the site. Spelthorne Borough Council provide a car park and toilets close to the river, while at the lock there is a very popular tea shop.

Public access to the lock island is limited to those visiting the tea shop. The other users of the island include the Metropolitan River Police who have a station on the site, Weybridge Mariners who have a clubhouse and moorings, and Shepperton Slalom Canoe Club who have a clubhouse and access to the weir. Beyond the main weir is a second island which has residential development with the main access route across the lock and weir.

The town of Weybridge does not have any real focus on the Thames. The town centre is set back from both the Thames and the Wey, and although there are walks around the rivers, they do not form a core part of the town.

8.1.7. Desborough Island

The digging of a flood relief channel created Desborough Island, just downstream of Shepperton lock. There is access onto the island but rather than recreation its primary use is as the site of a water treatment works. Surrey County Council own an area of open space called Ferris Meadow which is used as playing fields and open space. The main activity is angling from the NRA owned towpath.

8.1.8. Shepperton

The village of Shepperton lies on the north bank opposite Desborough Island. Its traditional town square comes close to the river, with a riverside lawn owned by Spelthorne Borough Council. Further downstream is Thames Meadow, another public open space well used by locals.

Downstream the river bank becomes more and more urban with dense riverside residential development. Gravel workings lie beyond the river bank, one of which has become Shepperton Marina. Another important mooring site in this area is Walton Marina, located on land leased from the NRA.

8.1.9. Walton on Thames

The town of Walton lies on the south bank, with Cowie Sale, its main area of riverside open space, sited close to Walton Bridge. This is one of a number of riverside parks owned by Elmbridge Borough Council. It has a good slipway with a car park which is very busy at weekends. The towpath continues on the south bank, through Walton, giving access to the bank despite the dense residential development.

Water based activity in Walton includes boat hire, skiffing, angling, rowing and a passenger service. Dudley Park, another Council owned site is home to two rowing clubs, as well as being the site of the Elmbridge Leisure Centre which lies close to the river, but does not make use of its riverside location, one reason being its close proximity to an NRA depot, and to the Sunbury weir systems.

8.1.10. Sunbury

Residential development continues along the north bank to Sunbury, another small town with low key access to the Thames. Sunbury lock is not accessible from the north bank although it can be reached from the towpath on the south bank. The NRA own the towpath upstream of the lock, where they lease land for parking to a local yacht club.

Close to the Sunbury bank is River Mead Island, some of which is owned by Spelthorne Borough Council who have a



swimming pool and open space on the site. Other plots are owned by the NRA. Spelthorne Borough Council also own Grand Union island downstream from Sunbury, much of which is sublet as riverside plots with associated moorings. There is no access to the general public.

8.1.11. Hampton

The village of Hampton lies on the north bank and has good visual and physical access to the river, including Garricks Lawn and Villa, and a little used slipway made dangerous by the busy road running close to the river. The road separates the river bank from Bushy Park, one of London's popular Royal Parks.

Although not on the same scale as Bushy Park, the south bank has an important riverside open space called Hurst Park, with both car park and slipway available to the public. The park is due to be extended to a total of 27 acres by the redevelopment of adjacent land for residential property. There has been user conflict recently when swan feeding by local people led to the establishment of a large flock of birds, making fishing from the park difficult.

8.1.12. Platts Eyot

Dominating both banks of the Thames between Sunbury and Hampton are reservoirs known on the north bank as Hampton Waterworks, and on the south as Molesey Reservoirs. In the river are several large islands which have been developed for residential or commercial uses. One of the largest of these is Platts Eyot, also known as Port Hampton, when it was an important ship building yard. In the 1950's when most ship building relocated to other sites which could accommodate larger vessels, Port Hampton went into decline.

Much of the island is now used as industrial and commercial units for non river based activities, including the Metropolitan Police who have a station on the site. It also has permanent moorings around its banks which are reached by a footbridge to the north bank. The west end of the island remains undeveloped and has become a haven for wildlife.

Platts Eyot is only one of several islands in this area which have been developed. The others include Garricks Ait and Taggs Island, both busy with residential properties. Not only are there numerous houseboats around the banks of Taggs Island, the centre has been dug out to form a small marina which accommodates residential craft. This private island has bridge access to the north bank.

Just beyond Taggs Island is Ash Island, owned and used as a base for hire cruisers by TS Allen. Access is across Molesey weir, by agreement with NRA. This is one of several commercial boatyard operators in this busy part of the Thames.

8.1.13. East Molesey

Molesey lock is sited just upstream of Hampton Court Bridge. With Hampton Court Palace one of the most popular attractions in the country, the surrounding area is a honeypot for visitors. The lock is part of the scene and is very popular with 'river watchers'. The NRA own the foreshore between the lock and the bridge. Currently this is leased to an operator who hires out small boats in summer.

The Palace and its parks dominate the area although the Thames is an important part of the landscape.

Passenger services operate to and from the Palace, and there are popular walks along both banks of the river. Molesey lock is well located for those who want to watch the boat traffic. The flower show now being held in the Palace grounds in July has added to river traffic.

The town of East Molesey lies on the south bank opposite Hampton Court Palace. The riverside is accessible with Cigarette Island providing an area of open space beside Hampton Court Bridge. British Rail have land holdings behind the park for which there are plans for redevelopment, hopefully with improvements to public access.

As well as the banks which are popular for informal recreation, the river itself continues to be active with rowing, canoeing, cruising and punting.

8.1.14. *Thames Ditton*

The south bank of the river quickly becomes developed again as it reaches the town of Thames Ditton. The Ditton riverside is a dense mixture of residential and commercial buildings, which extends to Thames Ditton Island. The latest residential development includes the rebuilding of the Ditton Skiff and Punting Club boathouse, which will significantly improve the opportunity for locals to participate.

The concentration of activity around Thames Ditton Island and its connecting bridge is mostly due to a number of commercial operators sited on the river bank. Although there is a public slipway it is one that is not easily accessible.

Between Thames Ditton and the town of Kingston, the south bank of the Thames is known as Seething Wells. The area is best known for the series of waterworks

which are to be redeveloped, a project which could have a significant effect on access to the Thames in this area. At present recreational use of the site is limited to a marina owned by Thames Water Utilities Ltd., the Thames Sailing Club (the oldest one on the Thames) and a pub. Elmbridge Borough Council have designated this area of the riverside as Strategic Urban Open Land, therefore any development proposals will need to meet these requirements. At present there are no proposals for the filter beds which lie close to the riverside.

Hampton Court Park continues on the north bank to Kingston Bridge and although the park is separated from the river by a wall, it creates a rural landscape for the river. Part of the scene in this area are several sites for residential moorings, including those operated by the NRA at Hampton Court.

Good access to the south bank continues with a long stretch of bank known as the Queens Promenade running along the Kingston river front from Ravens Ait almost to the town centre. A ferry operates from the promenade between the banks taking walkers and picnickers across the river.

8.1.15. *Ravens Ait*

This is the only fully staffed water sports centre in the area, offering novice training in sailing, canoeing and motor boating. It was formerly a national boating training centre for the Sea Cadet Corp, subsequently bought by the Inner London Education Authority and then by the London Borough of Kingston. In recent years it has been managed for Kingston by a contractor. At present it is for sale but there are conditions to

ensure that it will remain in leisure use (see Appendix 7).

To help make it a more viable facility, Ravens Ait has developed facilities for conferences and functions. Although its island status is good for the various water sports, the fact that the only access to the island is by ferry is a problem, especially for the conference market.

8.1.16. Kingston

Before reaching Kingston town centre there is an important riverside site known as Charterhouse Quay which is to be redeveloped as a mixed residential and retail complex. The plans incorporate an important link in riverside access but the project has been delayed due to the recession. The town centre close to Kingston Bridge has been redeveloped in recent years and incorporates good riverside access with retail and leisure venues.

There is a strong history of commercial boating activity in this area, with Kingston wharf available for passenger services travelling from London, Hampton Court and other riverside destinations. Of particular interest is Turks Boat Yard, a long established boat-based business which, like many others, has suffered in the recession. Planning permission has been granted for mixed uses including restaurants, craft workshops and a museum.

Development potential continues downstream of Kingston town centre with the major project being the redevelopment of the site of Kingston Power Station, owned by Powergen. The demolition of the buildings and rehabilitation of the site began in Spring 1994, although there has been no planning application as yet.

Once past the power station site, riverside open space returns with Canbury Gardens. Owned and managed by the Royal Borough of Kingston, this park is popular with locals for informal recreation and is home to several water sports clubs.

Water sports are very popular in this wide section of river which is home to rowing, sailing, canoeing and cruising clubs, including the Lensbury Club. Add to this the passenger services and commercial operators and it is obviously a busy section of river.

8.1.17. Teddington

Just upstream of Teddington are important sites for river recreation - the former BP employees club at Trowlock, together with the Royal Canoe Club, and the Lensbury Club, owned by Shell. River activities include sailing, rowing, canoeing, and motor cruising, although the Lensbury Club has diversified and is now a popular conference and function centre.

To those who are familiar with the Thames, Teddington is a significant name as it is the highest point to which medium tides flow and is the boundary between the NRA and Port of London Authority navigation responsibilities.

Teddington lock site has in fact 3 locks - a barge lock, a cruiser lock, and a lock for small boats. The lock islands are all owned by the NRA and although there is good public access, there are no public facilities available. The river bank around the lock is busy with several riverside pubs and Toughs boatyard. This is another long established family boat business on the Thames which has suffered in the recession. There have been numerous applications for the

redevelopment of Toughts site, but the Local Authority are concerned about losing a valuable service on the river, and one that is an integral part of the river scene in the area.

The Teddington footbridge is an important river crossing joining public open space on the south bank with the village of Teddington on the north bank.

A major development opportunity close to Teddington lock is the former site of British Aerospace. This site has been granted planning permission, in an appeal, for redevelopment primarily for private residences. The Royal Borough of Kingston has designated the site for mixed industrial, business, residential and leisure use. It is hoped that a key area of open space will not be lost to the public because of the development.

8.2. Recreational Use of the Thames: Staines to Teddington

8.2.1. Informal Recreation

As the hinterland of the Thames becomes more densely populated, the use of the Thames as a park increases, despite the fact that much of the river

bank is in fact developed. It is probably because there is little open space along the river, relative to the upper reaches, that policies were created to safeguard what remained, such as Surrey County Councils 'Windows on the Thames' policy (1971).

There are some well known and extremely popular parks and open spaces, almost all owned and managed by the district or county Councils. The Lammas and Laleham Park have facilities and services for the public and they are the focus of Spelthorne's 'Surreys Riverside Resort' campaign. Not only are these popular with the local population, they have traditionally attracted day trippers from London and further afield. The most popular of the other riverside parks in the area are Cowie Sale, Hurst Park, and Canbury Gardens. Access along the river via the towpath and Thames Path is good and river walking is very popular. Boat and river watching continue to attract crowds particularly at the locks. Shepperton is certainly one of the most popular.

The main problem for the informal user is, as before, access. Unlike the Upper



Thames where access is difficult because the riverside is remote, in the Lower Thames the river is not remote but has private residential property along the bank. In the areas where there is open space, the access routes are not always obvious.

8.2.2. Angling

The most significant influence on angling in this area is that it is free! The NRA own the river bed from Staines to Teddington and their policy is to allow free fishing, as long as there is access to the bank. Consequently there are fewer angling clubs based on this part of the Thames.

There are some areas where land owners have banned fishing, primarily due to the conflict with other users. Examples include parts of Hurst Park and the Queens Promenade in Kingston. Relative to the Upper Thames this area is not as popular for angling, primarily because the waters are much busier.

8.2.3. Boating

This relatively short stretch of river, is home to 20% of all the clubs on the river. Its population, tradition in boating and relatively good access encourages motor cruising, sailing, canoeing, rowing, skiff and punting.

Cruising: This area has more private moorings per mile of river bank than any of the other areas. It is also home to the largest marina on the river, Penton Hook, one of 18 marinas and base mooring sites. In addition there are a further 24 commercial operators including boat yards, passenger and hire services. Compared to the rest of the river, the Lower Thames has more commercial activity, with a larger number of moorings and bigger marinas.

The large number of moorings and the density of marinas is reflected in lock traffic figures. Chertsey and Shepperton locks are among the busiest on the river with over 25,000 craft movements in 1993. Relatively few craft travel downstream as reflected in the low numbers (just over 15000) passing through Teddington lock.

There are 14 cruising clubs based in the Lower Thames (34% of total) which are an important part of the river activity. As well as these clubs there are numerous boaters who have their own private moorings, cruise on a casual basis and do not belong to a club. The casual use of the river by small boats is encouraged by the provision of public slipways at several points in the river. As is the case upstream these are not always in good condition, and often access and parking are a problem.

Hire Craft: There are 4 operators offering cruisers for hire in this area. Most hirers cruise upstream rather than cruising through Teddington onto the tidal river. Small craft are available for hire at several of the key honeypot sites.

Canoeing: Approximately 27% of all canoeing clubs on the Thames are based between Staines and Teddington. As well as being popular with local clubs some of the accesses on the river are used by clubs and casual users who travel from other areas. Shepperton weir is a particular honeypot for canoeing, both white water and slalom. The local club have priority of access from the lock island but there are opportunities for other clubs to negotiate use of this access.

Sailing: As the river becomes wider sailing becomes more popular. Almost 40% of all the sailing clubs based on the

Thames are in this area, including the Thames Sailing club (the oldest on the river). Most of the clubs are well established and have reasonable club house facilities. Their main problems are the increasing amount of tree growth along the river bank which affects the wind, and the silting of river edges.

Rowing: Relative to the other Areas of the Thames rowing is less popular between Staines and Teddington, with only 13% of all clubs located in this area. Staines itself has 2 clubs, and there are several in the Kingston area, but in general rowing is less concentrated than in other areas.

8.2.4. Recreational Sites and Opportunities: Staines to Teddington

TRUSSES ISLAND: Riverside open space managed by Runnymede Borough Council.

Opportunity: To promote the use of this purpose built amenity area among the potential market groups, and monitor its success.

LALEHAM PARK: Large riverside park owned by Surrey County Council and leased to Spellthorne Borough Council.

Opportunity: To maintain and enhance this important recreational resource, managing visitors at peak times, to ensure the resource is not degraded.

SHEPPERTON LOCK: Busy lock site, both on the water and along the bank.

Opportunity: To minimise potential conflicts on the water by improving layby facilities, and encouraging discussion and cooperation between users. To develop the recreational use of the lock island through the production of a comprehensive site management plan.

COWIE SALE: Riverside park owned and

managed by Elmbridge Borough Council.

Opportunity: To enhance the facilities within the park and promote it as a river access point.

HURST PARK: Riverside park owned by Surrey County Council and leased to Elmbridge Borough Council.

Opportunity: To optimise the use of the park, resolving user conflict through a visitor management system which includes a physical zoning policy.

RAVENS AIT: Island based water sports centre.

Opportunity: to safeguard the island for recreational use, ensuring access is available to the public.

KINGSTON WATERFRONT: A popular riverside honeypot which includes Queens Promenade, riverside pubs, passenger services and Canbury Gardens.

Opportunity: To ensure the water front is enhanced and promoted as an important part of Kingston's recreation and tourist facilities.

TROWLOCK ISLAND AND THE

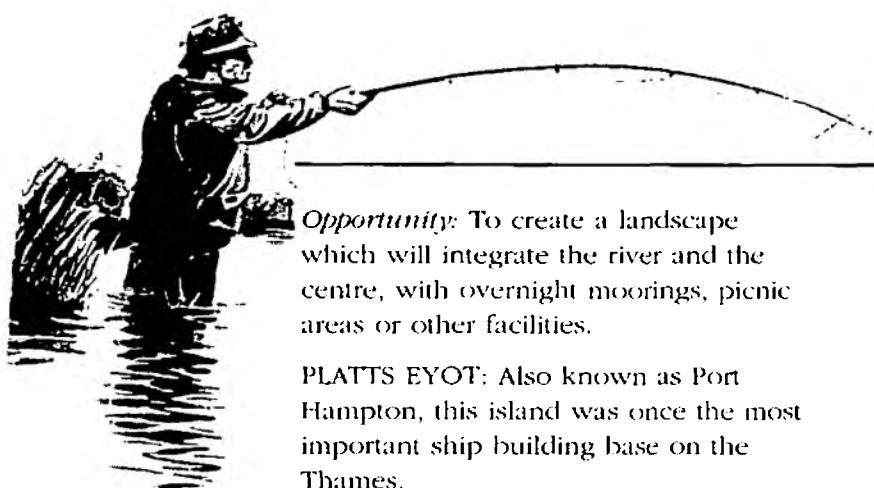
LENSBURY CLUB: The facilities on these sites have their roots as sports facilities for the Royal Canoe Club and Shell.

Opportunity: To continue managing these sites as multi-activity centres where potential conflicts are resolved through cooperation. Promote the facilities to the local community.

PENTON HOOK: Riverside site which includes gravel workings (now being used as a marina) and a lock island.

Opportunity: To realise the recreation potential of the site for informal activities, by joining the north and south banks with an access route across the weir.

ELMBRIDGE LEISURE CENTRE: Leisure centre sited in a park adjacent to the river.



Opportunity: To create a landscape which will integrate the river and the centre, with overnight moorings, picnic areas or other facilities.

PLATTS EYOT: Also known as Port Hampton, this island was once the most important ship building base on the Thames.

Opportunity: To investigate the possibility of some form of leisure related use, with controlled public access, integrating with the educational aspects of wildlife conservation.

CIGARETTE ISLAND: A spur of land divided by the entrance of the River Mole to the Thames, owned by Elmbridge Borough Council.

Opportunity: To increase the recreational use of the site by building a bridge crossing the Mole. Land behind the island is owned by British Rail and there is potential to include public access to the river in any future development proposals.

THAMES DITTON: River bank and island busy with private development, both residential and commercial.

Opportunity: To enhance the visual amenity and create better physical access to the riverside, particularly public access to the slipway.

SEETHING WELLS: Disused Thames Water filter beds are situated across the boundary between two Local Authorities - Elmbridge and Kingston.

Opportunity: To ensure that redevelopment opens both visual and physical access to the river.

CHARTERHOUSE QUAYS: A mixed retail, residential and leisure development.

Opportunity: To ensure that the development integrates with the river,

creating both visual and physical access to it.

VICARAGE ROAD, KINGSTON: Riverside site with development potential, which includes Turks Boat Yard.

Opportunity: To ensure that important services, which are crucial to the infrastructure of the river, are safeguarded, and that the area is enhanced as a visitor destination with comprehensive passenger services and facilities for day boat hire.

KINGSTON POWER STATION: Owned by Powergen, the area has been designated in the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) for mixed residential and leisure developments (hotel, restaurants, possibly marina).

Opportunity: To ensure that development integrates with and enhances the river landscape, and provides public access.

BRITISH AEROSPACE SITE: Housing development site.

Opportunity: To ensure that the development maintains existing riverside parks and develops further public access to and along the river.

TOUGHS BOAT YARD, TEDDINGTON: Long established boatyard on the Thames which will possibly be redeveloped.

Opportunity: To safeguard valuable riverside services important to the infrastructure of the river. Ensure that any future development integrates with the river and includes public access.

8.2.5. Summary

The most significant difference between this area and upstream is that overall access to the Thames is much better, consequently the concentration of activities in specific honeypots is less

noticeable. Activities tend to be spread more evenly throughout the river.

Where there are still honeypots of activity, these tend to be within the parks, at accessible locks and in town centres with a focus on the river. The fact that most of the relatively few open spaces on the Thames in this area are owned and managed by the Local Authorities is crucial to public access.

Another significant difference is the NRA ownership of the towpath on the north bank between Staines and Penton Hook, and their ownership of the river bed between Staines and Teddington. The latter means that downstream of Staines angling is free.

The river landscape in this area is in complete contrast to the upper reaches above Oxford. Between Goring and Staines there is a gradual change from a rural to an urban landscape but by the time it reaches Staines the river is flowing through an urbanised valley. Despite the fact that the lower reaches are surrounded by areas of dense population, the river itself still retains a sense of the countryside and a feeling of space. It is this that people come to enjoy and want to maintain in the future. There are several important development sites along the river, particularly in Kingston and Richmond. It is vital that when redeveloped these maximise the use of the river.

8.3. Staines to Teddington: Planning Policies and Strategies for Leisure on the Thames

There is 1 County Council and 5 District Councils who have responsibility for planning policy on the Thames in this area. They are listed as follows, with their plan which is relevant to the Thames:

Counties

Surrey County Council:

Replacement Structure Plan 1992

Districts

Runnymede Borough Council:

Local Plan 1993

Spelthorne Borough Council:

Local Plan 1990

Elmbridge Borough Council:

Local Plan 1992

London Borough of Richmond

upon Thames:

Unitary Development Plan (deposit draft)
1994

Royal Borough of Kingston

upon Thames:

Unitary Development Plan (Deposit)
1992

8.3.1. Overall Effect of Existing Planning Policies on the Lower Thames

Despite the fact that the Thames Valley from Staines to Teddington is predominantly urban, the river itself is valued as a very important area of open space. The Local Plans and Unitary Development Plans of the riparian Boroughs pay significant attention to the Thames, some have even given it its own chapter. In most the Thames and its banks is designated as either an Area of Special Landscape Character; Area of Landscape Importance or Metropolitan Open Land.

All five of the boroughs refer to the 1980 River Thames Leisure Policy²⁰, although several of them recognise that life on the river has changed since then. The theme of all of them is the protection of a unique asset and its enhancement as a public amenity.



*River Thames Landscape Strategy (1994)*²⁴: This is an important new initiative to develop a strategy for the landscape of the river from Hampton to Kew. The main funders of the project were the Countryside Commission, the Royal Fine Arts Commission, and English Heritage. Key national and local agencies, including the NRA, were involved in the consultation process and the Strategy was submitted to the riparian Boroughs of Elmbridge, Richmond and Kingston, all of whom have adopted it as supplementary planning guidance for the Thames.

Launched in June 1994 the Landscape Strategy takes a detailed look at the landscape of the Thames, in what is one of its most historic stretches. The objective was to develop a detailed strategy on a reach by reach basis for the rehabilitation of the Thames. Plans were developed to recreate the best of the old Thames, while integrating with new landscapes for the future. The strategy recognises the importance of the river as a recreational resource and makes recommendations which will enhance its recreational value. These will be reflected in the policies within this strategy (see Section 9).

The Landscape Strategy has been very well received by the Local Authorities and agencies concerned, so much so that a jointly funded Landscape Officer has been appointed to implement the detailed recommendations of the Strategy.

Local Thames Forums: Both the Royal Borough of Kingston and the London Borough of Richmond have set up small committees to focus on the Thames. In Richmond it is called the Richmond River Forum and consists of local authority representatives and external organisations. Planning briefs and applications are discussed, as are local management issues. In Kingston relevant Officers have a regular meeting with the National Rivers Authority to discuss issues of mutual interest on the Thames.

Boating: Overall policies are against any development which increases congestion on the river. The development of new permanent moorings is discouraged, although in some authorities applications tend to be assessed on their own merit. In the past this area has been home to many commercial activities associated with boating, but in recent years these have been in decline. Although the policies for the Thames presume against new developments on the river banks, they do seek to retain and encourage existing businesses which make a contribution to the river scene.

Informal Recreation: Throughout all of these districts the Thames is recognised as an important part of the network of public amenities, and access to it is encouraged. The London Borough of Richmond has 34 km of river bank on both sides of the Thames, with public access to 27 km. The Thames Path is obviously an important part of this

access and it is supported by the Local Authorities. Importantly there is support for Thames walks which are not part of the official Thames Path, and these are also encouraged in Local Plans.

8.3.2. Leisure Policies

The awareness of the use of the river for sports and informal recreation is certainly greater among the Local Authorities in the Lower Thames than is in the Upper Thames. There is still, however, an attitude of *laissez faire* with regards to club activity on the river. The only contact is with those clubs who lease facilities from the Local Authorities. Only Elmbridge Borough Council have a Leisure Strategy and this does refer to the use of the Thames for water sports. The London Borough of Kingston are in the process of putting together a Sports Strategy and this should include reference to the importance of the river for water sports.

Sports Development Officers are potentially a key link to the Thames based clubs. Elmbridge, Runnymede and Richmond Boroughs have these Officers and in some cases they help facilitate the introduction of novice training in river based clubs.

It is important that the Local Authority Officers recognise the importance of the Thames as a recreational resource, and that the numerous clubs based on the river provide an opportunity for many local residents to participate in water sport.

8.3.3. Key Issues for the Future

The Increasing Popularity of Countryside Recreation and the Development of the Thames Path: Many sections of the Lower Thames are already popular

destinations for informal recreation, and the fact that key areas of open space are owned and/or managed by public bodies has encouraged the use of the Thames for recreation.

The recent increase in the popularity of countryside visits as a form of recreation has put more pressure on open spaces close to the edge of urban areas. The dense population around the Lower Thames makes it a prime resource. Forecasts of a growth in demand for countryside destinations will increase the pressure on the Lower Thames even more.

The Thames Path will be launched in 1996 and although most of the path in the Lower Thames is already complete, the publicity surrounding the official opening of the path will bring a surge of interest. To cope with and manage this interest river 'managers' will need to review existing facilities and plan for their improvement where necessary.

The Demand for Moorings: The Lower Thames has more moorings than any other stretch of the river. Local Authorities regularly have applications for moorings, but planning control on these is strict, although in some instances each application is judged on its own merit.

Riverside Development Sites: The Lower Thames has a large number of riverside sites which have already been described. These sites are all at different stages of development, but the issue common to all is that their riverside land is part of an important recreational resource and access to it for the public should be safeguarded and enhanced where possible.

River Thames Landscape Strategy: As described above the Landscape Strategy

for the Thames between Hampton and Kew will be implemented in the next few years through the appointment of an Officer and support from the riparian Boroughs. This will have a significant impact on the recreational value of the Thames in the area, by improving the river landscape and access to it. The detailed, site specific strategy will result in actual improvement for the end user.

After-use of Gravel Pits: The best known of all the gravel pits in this area with a recreational after-use are part of the Thorpe Park tourist attraction. There are numerous other gravel pits, both existing and planned, which have potential for recreation. The Borough Councils are keen to develop these areas as a water recreation resource, which would take some activity away from key honeypot areas of the Thames, easing congestion at peak times on the river.

River Thames Strategic Flood Defence Initiative: As part of the NRA's strategy to manage the flood plain of the Thames, there have been several studies to look at options for flood defence in the future. One of these is the Datchet, Wraysbury, Staines and Chertsey Flood Study. Related to the Maidenhead Flood Relief Scheme, the study is looking at the various options for extending flood relief channels further downstream. There are several reasons why this will have an impact on Thames based recreation, the most important being the creation of another water resource. The other issue is that any future scheme may link gravel pits as a basis for creating the channel. In planning for this the after-use of gravel pits must be water based, rather than involving infilling.

Policies, recommendations and action plans which relate to these sites and issues are included within Section 10.



S E C T I O N 9

REVIEWING THE THAMES



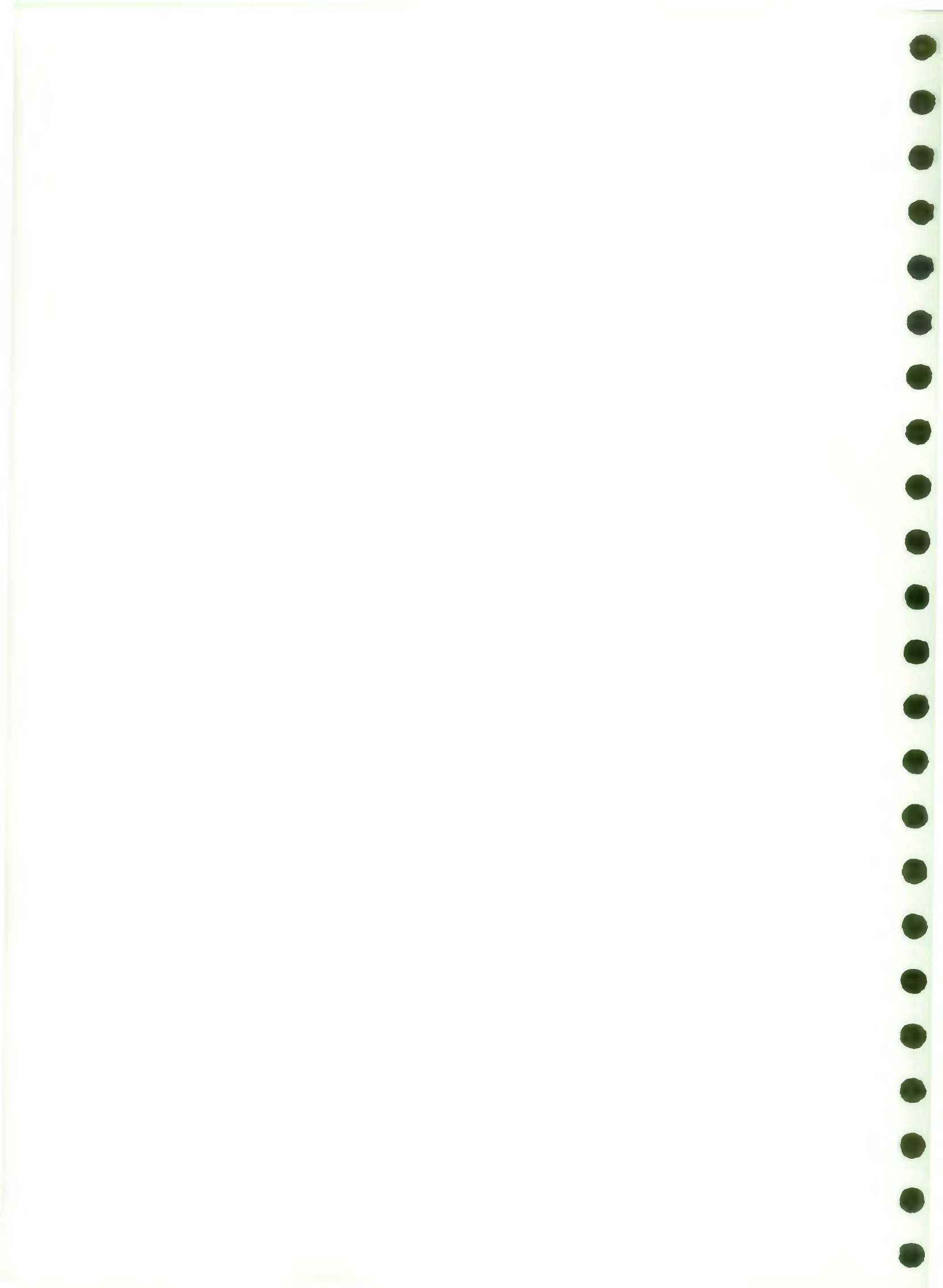


River Thames Recreation
 Strategy:
 Tidal Thames -
 Teddington to Thames Barrier



-  Riparian Local Authority & Thames Region Boundary
-  Urban Areas
-  River Thames
-  Other Main Channel
-  Lock





REVIEWING THE THAMES

9.1. Area 4: The Tidal Thames

9.1.1. *The London Thames*

It is difficult to imagine that the vast expanse of river that flows through London started life in Gloucestershire as no more than a trickle. Almost everything about the Thames in London is different to the river that flows through the rural counties upstream of Oxford. Most significant is the change from non-tidal to tidal river downstream of Teddington. This has a major impact on the character and use of the Thames in London for recreation.

The other main difference is the change in the landscape surrounding the Thames. Although the river valley downstream of Teddington is heavily urbanised, there are significant 'green' areas especially between Teddington and Putney where Richmond Park, Kew Gardens and Syon Park all contribute to the rural atmosphere of the area.

In central London the Thames provides one of the most important areas of open space, linking a number of important parks, buildings and urban spaces all along its length. The importance of the Thames to the landscape of London has been recognised in recent years with many of the new developments required to open visual and physical access to the riverside. There have been several Thames-based projects seeking to enhance its landscape and amenity value, notably the Thames Landscape Strategy²³ which focuses on the river between Hampton and Kew. The London Planning and Advisory Committee's 'Advice on Strategic Planning Guidance' for London also pays

particular attention to the importance of the river.

Another notable, and unfortunate, characteristic of the Thames in London is that rather than being a common, binding feature, it is seen by many as the barrier between the north and south of the city.

9.1.2. *Beyond the Thames Barrier*

The recreation duties of the NRA Thames Region end just downstream of the Thames Barrier in Woolwich, as does the scope of this Recreation Strategy. The Thames Estuary is an important resource for recreation and there are several areas where water sports such as waterskiing, sailing and power boating are encouraged. It is also a very important natural habitat and as part of English Nature's Estuary Management project a management plan is being prepared for the Thames Estuary. Recreation will be considered as part of this plan, which will cover the river from Tower Bridge to Shoeburyness in Essex, and the Medway Estuary in Kent.

9.1.3. *Managing the Tidal Thames*

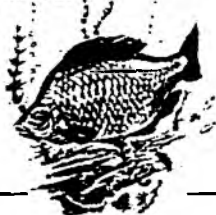
Throughout the length of the Thames there are numerous organisations responsible for managing different aspects of the river. In London the situation is even more complex than upstream. The Port of London Authority (PLA) are the navigation authority, taking over from the NRA at Teddington (see Section 4). The river flows through a total of 14 Local Authorities between Teddington and the Barrier, with only one of these crossing the river (London Borough of Richmond). Inevitably the management of the river bank differs

between Local Authorities, which can lead to inconsistencies. The South East Regional Planning Conference (SERPLAN) provides advice to Government on planning matters, as do the London Planning and Advisory Committee (LPAC) (see Section 1). LPAC also have an officer level Thameside Working Party with representatives of Thames riparian boroughs and other relevant organisations.

Various government departments have a specific interest in the London Thames, including the Government Office for London, incorporating the Department of Transport (River Thames Working Group)²¹ and the Department of the Environment, who carried out a landscape study of the London Thames which will be published in Spring 1995. There are also numerous agencies and groups which represent interests on the Thames, for instance the London Rivers Association and the London Ecology Unit. Since the abolition of the Greater London Council there has been a gap in the coordination of all these interests on the Thames, which has led to duplication of effort.

9.2. The Tidal Thames: Teddington to the Thames Barrier

The study area for this project covers the 23 miles of tidal Thames between Teddington and the Thames Barrier. Although the river valley in London is urbanised, there are areas of different character. For this descriptive summary the tidal river is described in three character sections: The Upper Tideway; The Middle Tideway; The Lower Tideway.



9.3. The Upper Tideway: Teddington to Putney Bridge.

9.3.1. Teddington

The obelisk which marks the boundary of jurisdiction between the NRA and the PLA is located 265 yards downstream of Teddington Lock.

The west bank of the river is relatively busy with moorings and residential development, while the east bank has 200 acres of public open space known as the Ham Riverside Lands (Hamlands), now designated as a Local Nature Reserve. This area includes a 10 acre lake with a cut to the river, which has been developed as a water activities centre known as the Thames Young Mariners Outdoor Education Centre. Jointly funded by Surrey County Council, the London Borough of Richmond and both the Richmond and Surrey Youth Service, the centre provides good off-river training facilities for water and outdoor activities.

Ham House is set back from the river and is one of numerous historic buildings which make this stretch of river bank so impressive. Hamlands, which surround Ham House, have been used by Londoners for many years as a recreation ground.

9.3.2. Twickenham

Twickenham lies on the west bank of the river, which is also home to numerous historic riverside residences, including Strawberry Hill (now a Training College), York House, Orleans House and Marble Hill House. Some of the gardens associated with these houses are now important riverside open spaces, including Marble Hill Park, Radnor Gardens and Orleans Gardens. A ferry operates between Ham House and

Orleans House Gallery providing access between the north and south banks.

9.3.3. Eel Pie Island

This busy island is connected to Twickenham by Snapper Bridge, used by the residents and businesses (mostly boat based) located on the island. It is also home to several clubs including the Twickenham Yacht Club.

9.3.4. Petersham

As the Thames passes Eel Pie Island and enters what is known as Horse Reach, Richmond Hill comes into view, with the Star and Garter Home visible in the background. The view from Richmond Hill, looking down on the river, is one of the most impressive views of the Thames and has been the subject of many paintings. The sightline to St Paul's Cathedral is now protected by a Government directive.

The 'greenness' of this area extends from Richmond Park down to Petersham Meadows, which run along the river bank, and include the popular River Lane slipway.

9.3.5. Richmond on Thames

Richmond has long had a reputation as one of the prettiest towns on the Thames. Although the river features as an important focal point, Richmond has many other attractions, including the 2358 acres of Richmond Park.

Both visual and physical access to the river is very good. Buccleuch Gardens and the recently redeveloped river front in the town centre are very popular recreational spaces. The river is busy with in-stream moorings, dinghy hire and passenger ferries available along the water front.

Corporation Island which lies close to the north bank has a tradition of boat based industry but due to the recession several of these are proposed for redevelopment. Access along the north bank is via Ducks Walk, which is also home to several residential moorings.

Richmond half-tide lock is the last (or first!) lock on the Thames. Operated by the PLA, it celebrated its centenary in May 1994, following a major refurbishment project. There is public access on the footbridge which runs across the lock and weir system.

9.3.6. Kew

This green, 'rural' stretch of the tidal Thames continues on the east bank with the Old Deer Park and Kew Gardens. Although both of these parks run to the river they are not integrated with it, as much of the towpath is cut off from the parks. Kew Gardens has so much to offer in its own right that the river is not an important feature.

9.3.7. Isleworth

Twickenham Bridge marks the border between the London Boroughs of Richmond and Hounslow on the west bank of the river.

The village of Isleworth is the first major focal point on the river downstream of Twickenham. It has several popular riverside pubs along what is known as the Isleworth Promenade. Close to Isleworth the River Crane and the Duke of Northumberland's River join the Thames.

A large island known as Isleworth Ait is home to one of the few remaining commercial boat yards in this part of the river. The island is also an important wildlife habitat and is managed by the

London Wildlife Trust as a nature reserve.

The Hounslow bank has its share of green open space in the form of the 55 acres of Syon Park, which has the only remaining natural tidal meadow on the London Thames, now designated an SSSI. Public access is limited to specific routes through the park.

9.3.8. Brentford

The Grand Union Canal enters the Thames at Brentford: In the past this confluence provided the impetus for a thriving water based industry. Now many of the former industrial sites are derelict, with proposals for redevelopment. British Waterways, who manage the canal, propose to redevelop a site relatively close to the Thames, which would include moorings and leisure facilities.

The Brentford Dock Marina is located close to the canal entrance and has lock access to the Thames.

There are several small islands on the river in this area, including Brentford Ait, Oliver's Ait and Lots Ait. The latter two are valuable wildlife habitats although Lots Ait has a tradition of industrial use. Planning permission was given for a development on Lots Ait which included leisure facilities (restaurant and wine bar) and a footbridge link to the river bank. Due to financial difficulties this development has not progressed.

Close to Kew Bridge is Waterman's Park, a relatively small area of open space owned and managed by the London Borough of Hounslow.

9.3.9. Chiswick

This area is characterised by riverside residences, although access to the bank is generally available. The river becomes

busier with recreational boats, primarily rowers, as it flows under Kew Bridge. The traffic is added to by Kew Pier, used by passenger services bringing visitors to and from Kew Gardens. Kew Bridge Marina and Chiswick Quay Marina are the main areas of mooring, as the PLA in-stream moorings are not popular.

Dukes Meadow's, the associated Sports Grounds and the Riverside Recreation Ground together form a significant open space along the north bank of the river. This concentration of sports facilities, managed by the London Borough of Hounslow and a number of local organisations, includes 3 boathouses and 2 public slipways, although the access to these is sometimes obscured by club based rowers.

Within Dukes Meadow is a small but important Local Nature Reserve. Known as Dukes Hollow it lies close to Barnes Bridge.

Downstream of Dukes Meadow's the river flows through what is known as the Corney Reach. In this area there is a redevelopment proposal put forward by the Corney Reach Development Trust (CRDT), a partnership between local



community groups, The Thames Explorer Trust (an Educational Charity providing information and advice on the Thames to schools and interest groups) and the Local Authority. The Trust aims to create a busy community waterfront capable of sustaining a wide variety of river uses. The development includes several acres for river related use-piers, moorings and improvements to access (see also Appendix 6).

Chiswick Eyot, designated as a Local Nature Reserve, is another valuable island habitat for wildlife, in which local volunteers have taken a keen interest. This island marks the border between the London Boroughs of Hounslow, and Hammersmith and Fulham.

9.3.10. Mortlake

On the south bank the eighteenth century houses along the river in the villages of Mortlake and Barnes are somewhat hidden behind the flood defences. One of the most famous river scenes from this area is of the Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race which is held over the four mile stretch from Putney to Mortlake, finishing at Chiswick Bridge.

9.3.11. Barn Elms

Downstream of Hammersmith Bridge on the south bank of the river, and beyond Harrod's Depository, are the Barn Elms Water Works. Part of the site has been given planning permission for residential development. Another area is an SSSI, which the Wildfowl and Wetland's Trust propose to develop as a nature reserve, with visitor centre and associated facilities. The project has involved collaboration between Thames Water Plc and the London Borough of Richmond.

On an adjacent site is the Barn Elms

Sports Centre, a former ILEA school's Outdoor Centre which is currently owned and managed by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. It has a separate water sports centre along the Thames providing training facilities for rowing and other water sports, primarily for schools (see Appendix 7).

9.3.12. Hammersmith

The north bank of the river along Hammersmith and Fulham is the beginning of the more fully urbanised river bank that is common in London, characterised by flood defence walls, with development behind. In this area the riverside development is often interesting eighteenth century houses and pubs, which add to the character of the river bank.

The key areas of open space along this stretch of river are owned and managed by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. They include Furnivall Gardens which has a privately owned residential pier known as Dove Pier, and Bishops Park, home of Fulham Palace.

There are two other small open spaces known as Roweberry Mead and Stevenage Gardens. Close to Putney Bridge is the Swan Drydock, a small nature reserve run by a local trust. Fulham Football Stadium is a privately-owned stadium used for professional football, but there is no access from the Stadium to the river. Current redevelopment proposals may change this situation.

Access onto the Thames on the Fulham bank is poor although the close proximity of the slipways at Putney compensate.

Further downstream is Hurlingham Park,

a former riverside residence now privately operated by the Hurlingham Club. On an adjacent site is Broomhouse Drawdock, owned by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. Now disused, it was the home of a ship used for a charitable youth training scheme.

9.3.13. Recreational Sites and Opportunities: Teddington to Putney Bridge

RICHMOND RIVERSIDE PARKS: Petersham Meadows, Buccleuch Gardens, Hamlands, Marble Hill Park, Radnor Gardens, Old Deer Park, and Richmond Riverside.

Opportunity: access to the river is well developed in most of these parks, but there are opportunities to integrate some areas more closely with the river, eg Old Deer Park and Kew Gardens.

DUKES MEADOW, HOUNSLOW: Sports grounds and riverside park designated as Metropolitan Open Land. Facilities include the Chiswick Boat House.

Opportunity: to integrate the park and the river, managing the public use of the slipway, and other riverside facilities.

KEW PIER: PLA owned pier used by passenger services.

Opportunity: to develop the pier and associated facilities for visitors to the river and Kew Gardens.

FURNIVALL GARDENS: Riverside park used by local residents. The Dove pub and pier is close by.

Opportunity: to link Furnivall Gardens to Hammersmith Town Centre and review the potential of Dove Pier.

CHISWICK AIT: Island managed as a conservation area.

Opportunity: to develop low key,

managed access and information points/centre to educate visitors.

TWICKENHAM BATHS & RICHMOND ICE RINK: Derelict facilities on separate riverside sites.

Opportunity: to incorporate access to the river for the public on both sites. This could include good slipway access which is needed along this stretch.

LOTS AIT: Island close to Brentford with a tradition of boat based industry.

Opportunity: to create access from the river bank and develop visitor facilities including temporary mooring.

BRENTFORD AND GRAND UNION CANAL: Junction of canal and the river. British Waterways have a scheme for canal-side development.

Opportunity: to integrate the canal-side facilities with the Thames, especially mooring and boat services, with information, signage, and link routes from the Thames.

CORNEY REACH: Riverside area with industrial units, now proposed for redevelopment. Also the base of the Thames Explorer Trust.

Opportunity: To integrate public use of the site, promoting the river and visitor facilities such as a pier, passenger services and refreshment areas. The development should include provision for the Thames Explorer Trust which needs to establish a base from which to expand its educational support service and information centre for the Thames.

BROOMHOUSE DRAWDOCK: Disused dock formerly a mooring site for a ship used for a youth scheme.

Opportunity: To develop the site for low intensity recreational use, aligned to its proximity to the Hurlingham Club, and its ecological value.

9.4. The Middle Tideway: Putney Bridge to Tower Bridge

9.4.1. Wandsworth

On the south bank the London Boroughs of Richmond and Wandsworth meet on the Beverley Brook which enters the Thames just downstream of Barn Elms. The embankment to Putney Bridge passes through Leaders Gardens, a public park which offers good views across and along the river.

Further downstream the embankment is well known for its boat houses and continuous public slipway known as 'Putney Hard'. Among the buildings behind the embankment are several popular riverside pubs.

Putney Pier is owned by the PLA and used by passenger boats on their way to and from Hampton. It is surrounded by in-stream moorings, some of which are operated by the PLA.

Downstream of Putney Bridge the south bank becomes much more industrialised and access to the river decreases. The River Wandle enters the Thames close to Wandsworth Bridge, and although it is the site of a busy waste transfer station, there are proposals to redevelop the Wandle Basin, increasing access and improving its amenity value.

The most significant open spaces along the 6 miles of the Wandsworth bank are Wandsworth and Battersea Parks. The former has been the subject of a feasibility study for a water sports centre with slipway. This proposal has not yet been taken forward.

9.4.2. Battersea

The 200 acres of Battersea Park is a very important area of open space in London, with at least 5000 visitors per day and up

to 50,000 visitors for special events. In 1988 the park was designated as a Conservation Area, with a small area close to river becoming a Local Nature Reserve in 1994. The PLA owned Festival Gardens Pier is now unsafe and is not used. The Riverside Pagoda has become a well known riverside landmark.

Other areas of open space include Vicarage Gardens, the Church of St. Mary, and around Ransomes Dock, another site where there are plans to redevelop for recreational use. Much of the rest of the Wandsworth Riverside is being redeveloped as residential and office accommodation, which should improve riverside access.

The most famous of all the riverside redevelopment sites is Battersea Power Station. Controversy has surrounded the site for many years, with little progress to date on beginning the leisure based proposal.

Access to the river for walking is good in some areas, but poor in others, mostly due to the industrial use of the river bank. There is strong commitment from the Local Authorities to implement the Thames Path when sites are redeveloped, riverside access is increased.

9.4.3. Chelsea

Chelsea Harbour is one of the new landmarks on the Thames in west London. It is separated from Chelsea Wharf by Chelsea Creek, which is also the border between the Boroughs of Hammersmith and Fulham, and Kensington and Chelsea. The Creek is part of the Thames Metropolitan Site of Importance for Nature Conservation, and is included in Kensington and Chelsea's Ecological Survey. There are proposals to

enhance the ecology of the Creek, with the possibility of using it for environmental education.

The only public riverside parks in Chelsea are Cremorne Gardens and a small area close to Albert Bridge. There is, however, good visual and physical access to the river along Chelsea Embankment. The riverside walkway is almost complete in the area, the only major block being the Lots Road Power Station.

Cheyne Walk forms an historic background to the river and its unique architecture has been recognised by the Local Authority, who have designated it a Special Conservation Area. River bank enhancements have had a dramatic effect on the river, with decorative street lights, repaving, benches along the embankment and the lighting of the Albert Bridge.

The primary features on the river are Cadogan Pier, which is owned and managed by the PLA. Another much less used pier is within Cremorne Gardens, and is leased by a local canoe club.

9.4.4. Westminster

The Embankment continues through Westminster, with Victoria Tower Gardens being the only large park on the river bank. It is managed by the Royal Parks Commission. There are several other small but important pockets of linear open space along the river, including Pimlico Gardens and Shrubbery, Riverside Gardens close to the Tate Gallery, and Victoria Embankment Gardens. All are managed by Westminster City Council, the Local Authority responsible for the Thames between Chelsea Bridge and Temple.



Visual access to the river is generally good, although the flood defence walls and the busy road running alongside the river do obscure views. The Houses of Parliament form one of the most impressive riverside buildings and are the backdrop of numerous Thames landscapes.

Among the many popular visitor attractions along the Westminster bank are the Tate Gallery and Cleopatra's Needle. There are also excellent views across the river, and from the Hungerford Bridge to the South Bank Centre, County Hall and Lambeth Palace. One of the most important functions of the Thames as an amenity in this densely urbanised area, is its 'openness'. It provides space in an otherwise built up area.

Access onto the river is limited except via steps and stairs, the primary function of which is as an escape route from the river. The most important facility on the river is the Westminster Boating Base, where training in canoeing and sailing is available to young people. This is the only facility of its kind on the central reaches of the Thames (see Appendix 7).

The Embankment is also home to several pub and restaurant ships which are permanently moored to the bank. All these ships are of historical interest, to maintain the character of the area and add to the river landscape.

Westminster pier is the busiest of the 10 PLA operated piers on the Tideway. It is from here that most tourists explore the Thames on passenger ferries, going upstream to Hampton, or downstream to Greenwich. There have been proposals to upgrade Westminster Pier but as yet the balance between a more commercial development, and maintaining the character of the bank has yet to be resolved.

The Temple and the major open spaces associated with it are an important part of riverside landscape between Westminster and the City.



9.4.5. The City

The 'City' commences at the legal area of The Temple. Although the Embankment continues beyond Blackfriars Bridge, it becomes less busy as it moves away from the tourist honeypots of Westminster. The short length of river bank managed by the City Corporation has only a few missing links in its

riverside walk. Despite the fact that there are no traditional riverside parks, where there have been recent developments riverside recreational space has been included and is popular with local employees on lunchtime breaks.

A significant feat has been the creation of St Paul's vista, enabling views to and from the river of the south transept of St Paul's Cathedral. A series of views of the dome of the Cathedral from along the river, the river bridges and the southern river bank have been protected by the City Corporation since 1938. Views of the Monument to the Great Fire of London and many historical church spires and steeples can also be enjoyed from the river.

Recreation on the river is largely confined to the tourists on passenger ferries, and cruisers passing through London. Temple Pier, owned and managed by the PLA, is busy with passenger services, while Swan Lake Pier was used by the Riverbus Service. There is a long term plan for another pier in the area, as part of the City Corporation's support of the use of the Thames as a transport route.

9.4.6. Lambeth

On the south bank the London Boroughs of Wandsworth and Lambeth meet just upstream of Vauxhall Bridge, an area of the river dominated by the new M15 building. In general the character of the river bank remains industrial along the Albert Embankment, with a busy road hampering access to the river.

Lambeth has several riverside redevelopment sites, the most current being the Effra site, just upstream of Vauxhall Bridge. The development brief is for a mixed development of

residential, retail and leisure use, including a riverside walk.

At present there are few visitors to this part of the river. Lambeth Palace is the first riverside attraction, not least because of the excellent views across the river to the Houses of Parliament.

The south bank has become a popular destination for visitors between Westminster and Blackfriars Bridges. Here there are a series of renowned buildings including County Hall, for which there are plans to redevelop as a retail and leisure complex. The South Bank Arts Centre, the National Theatre and other facilities make this an important part of London's entertainment provision. The South Bank Centre is due for rejuvenation in a scheme being coordinated by the South Bank Employers Group. This will add to the attraction of this area and hopefully increase the use of the river and Festival Pier.

The visitor attractions continue with the community based regeneration project at Gabriel's Wharf and the Coin Street Community development, which has created cafes, craft shops, and riverside open space, including the popular Bernie Spain Gardens. The future of this area as a focus for entertainment will be assured when the refurbishment of the OXO building and the Globe Theatre is complete.

Riverside parks in Lambeth include Jubilee Gardens, an area of Metropolitan Open Land adjacent to Hungerford Bridge. Owned by the South Bank Centre, part of the site is currently used for car parking.

Cross-river communication will be improved by the Cross River Partnership,

a partnership between the City Corporation, Westminster, Lambeth and Southwark councils, and other relevant organisations. It has recently won Single Regeneration Budget Funding (£2.6 million) which will be used to improve accessibility and further integrate the north and south banks of the Thames in central London. Six key infrastructure projects have been identified, including new piers at Millbank and Bankside, the upgrading of Hungerford footbridge, and a southern extension to Blackfriars Railway Station.

9.4.7. Southwark

The London Borough of Southwark takes over from Lambeth just upstream of Blackfriars Bridge, and continues along the south bank to Surrey Docks. As much of this area is still controlled by the London Docklands Development Corporation the Borough's involvement in planning is reduced.

In the past Southwark's river bank was an important industrial area and this character has been retained in much of the redevelopment that has taken place, for example: Hays Galleria, Butlers Wharf, Shad Thames, St Saviours Dock and the Design Museum, all of which are visitor destinations. One of the most significant new attractions is the proposed redevelopment of Bankside Power Station as a Tate Gallery extension. The popularity of all these destinations is dependant on access, and the most obvious route is via the river.

The key focus of activity in this area of the Thames is Tower Bridge. Although most visitors come to the Bridge from the north bank via the Tower of London, the mooring of HMS Belfast on the south bank is an important attraction.

Riverside parks include Bankside Park and Potters Fields, both busy in summer, mostly with local residents.

9.4.8. Recreational Sites and Opportunities: Putney Bridge to Tower Bridge

BARN ELMS SPORTS CENTRE: Former ILEA centre with riverside water sports centre.

Opportunity: to promote the water sports centre and extend the use of the facilities to the general public and other clubs.

PUTNEY EMBANKMENT: Base for much of London's rowing activity, with slipway available to the public.

Opportunity: to maintain the area as one of the most popular access routes to the Upper Tideway, and create better car/trailer parking if possible.

CREMORNE GARDENS: Riverside park with a small pier used by a local canoe club.

Opportunity: to develop the pier, enabling public use of an important, and under used, riverside facility.

CHELSEA EMBANKMENT: Despite the busy riverside road, this is an important 'open' area along the Thames, popular for walks and with joggers.

Opportunity: to maintain and promote the historical features of the riverside.

CHELSEA CREEK: Small creek on the north bank, used for training in white water canoeing. Important natural habitat.

Opportunity: to enhance the Creek, using its ecological value as the basis to create an educational and recreational resource.

CADOGAN PIER: Owned by the PLA and used for permanent moorings.

Opportunity: to promote the use of Cadogan Pier for visitor moorings.

WANDLE BASIN: The confluence of the Wandle and Thames has industrial use, but there are plans to upgrade the area and create visitor facilities.

Opportunity: to create both bankside and river facilities for visitors, including temporary mooring, river access routes and a link to the Thames Path.

WANDSWORTH PARK: Riverside Park, with possible future development of water sports centre and slipway.

Opportunity: to create a controlled access route to the river, and to promote and teach water sports on the Thames.

RANSOMES DOCK: Former industrial dock now with plans for redevelopment.

Opportunity: to use the dock for water based activity and develop the banks for informal waterside recreation, linked to the Thames bank.

BATTERSEA POWER STATION: Well known development site with proposals for leisure/retail use.

Opportunity: to integrate the redevelopment with the river, opening public access, riverside services and the Thames Path.

BATTERSEA PARK: 200 acre riverside park, including the now unsafe Festival Gardens Pier.

Opportunity: to integrate the park with the river, and redevelop the use of the pier, working with the PLA and passenger services.

WESTMINSTER BOATING BASE: A centre which offers low cost training in water sports. Also generates income as a riverside venue for conferences and functions.

Opportunity: to promote the use of the centre as a water sports training facility, to all sectors of the population, by

extending the programme. Requires financial support.

WESTMINSTER PIER: Busiest pier on the river as it is one of the main stops for passenger services.

Opportunity: the pier needs to be upgraded, and there is an opportunity to develop better visitor facilities, integrating the pier with the bank and improving access to the river.

WESTMINSTER RIVERSIDE PARKS:

Includes Victoria Tower Gardens, Victoria Embankment Gardens, and Riverside Gardens at the Tate Gallery.

Opportunity: Maintain and promote these as riverside open spaces.

THE SOUTH BANK: Including County Hall, Jubilee Gardens, & the Arts Centre.

Opportunity: to make better use of the river at what is a popular visitor destination. Improve the visual and physical access to the river and promote the use of Festival Pier.

GABRIEL'S WHARF: Coin Street Community project, including the OXO Tower and pier, the Globe Theatre and the craft shops and restaurants on the site of the old wharf.

Opportunity: to integrate this development with the South Bank Centre forming a major riverside visitor destination.

BANKSIDE POWER STATION: One of the largest redevelopment proposals on the Thames, this redundant power station will become an important leisure attraction, incorporating an extension to the Tate Gallery.

Opportunity: to link the development to other parts of London using the river as a communication route, as well as a landscape feature and integral part of the development.

NEW RIVERSIDE DEVELOPMENTS:

Including Hays Galleria, Shad Thames, The Design Museum.

Opportunities: to increase visitor numbers and encourage them to travel out of the west end to visit these new attractions which make the most of their riverside location.

FUTURE RIVERSIDE DEVELOPMENT SITES: These include Prices Candle Factory, Nine Elms Pier, Effra site.

Opportunity: to integrate the river with the new development by creating and promoting public access, creating the Thames Path and riverside facilities for visitors where appropriate.

9.5. The Lower Tideway: Tower Bridge to the Thames Barrier

9.5.1. Rotherhithe

Once the river flows downstream of Tower Bridge and around the Rotherhithe peninsula it is more obviously a working river, despite the fact that many of the docks and wharfs are no longer active and have been converted to residential units. The main visitor facilities are a Scandic Crown hotel and an important new youth hostel. All of this redevelopment brought with it new pedestrian access along the river as part of the Thames Path.

The Surrey Docks complex covers over 300 acres of the Rotherhithe area. It consists of Russia Dock, Lavender Dock, Canada Dock, Greenland Dock and Surrey Water. Some are disused, others are part of residential developments. Surrey Docks was the site of a marina, and is home to a former ILEA owned water sports centre, now funded by the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) and the Sports

Council, and managed by the London Borough of Southwark (see Appendix 7).

9.5.2. Deptford

The industrial and residential use of the river bank continues through Deptford with the London Borough of Lewisham's housing department owning much of the riverside land. There are a few small parks along this frontage including Pepys Park, a green open space in front of St. George's Square, and a Thames Side Path. Conveys Wharf, which is a busy industrial wharf, is an important part of the Thames in this area.

Deptford City Challenge, which have £37.5m in funds from Central Government, operate over the whole of Deptford and will have a significant positive effect on the area. They are partners in a joint scheme between the London Boroughs of Lewisham and Greenwich, and the Greenwich Waterfront Development Partnership, to regenerate the Deptford Creek area. There are plans for a leisure development at the Creekmouth, which includes an ocean liner berthing facility, hotel and other leisure uses. The proposals also include provision for the Thames Path and Ravensbourne riverside walk. The decision on whether there will be a barrage will affect these proposals.

Another major impact will be the extension of the Docklands Light Railway (DLR) across the river, which would increase access to an otherwise isolated area.

9.5.3. Wapping

Back to the north bank, downstream of the Tower of London and Tower Bridge is one of the most popular marinas in London, St Katharine's Dock. This dock

area was one of the early riverside redevelopments and it is a well established visitor destination in London. Tobacco Dock was another early retail and leisure redevelopment which has struggled to succeed, partly because of poor access and isolation.

As the character of the river bank on the south changes, so it also changes on the north bank, becoming much more industrial, which in many cases is still active. Most of the redundant wharfs and docks have been converted to residential use.

The north bank between the Tower of London and the River Lee is within the London Borough of Tower Hamlets which begins at the Tower of London. As this is part of the Docklands, the LDDC are currently the planning authority.

The Local Authorities have very little land ownership along the bank and as a consequence there are relatively few parks or public open spaces. The most significant of these is Island Gardens Park which lies at the south end of the Isle of Dogs. The LDDC have created public access to and along the river where possible, but this access is not always upheld by local residents. Specific areas of the river front have been designated as Conservation Areas. These include the Tower, Wapping Pier Head, and Wapping Wall.

In general there is little along the river bank to attract visitors, and access to and along it is intermittent. An important site is Limehouse Basin which forms part of the Grand Union Canal system, with the Limehouse Cut providing an important link to the river Lee. Shadwell Basin has a water sports centre which offers training for various water activities, primarily aimed at young people (see

Appendix 7).

9.5.4. *Isle of Dogs*

The most imposing and for some the most impressive building along the Thames is Canary Wharf Tower. Situated in the heart of the Docklands on the Isle of Dogs, the Tower looms over the river and dominates the landscape for miles. The docks themselves now have little operational relationship with the Thames. The main transport routes to the area are via the Limehouse Link and the Dockland Light Railway. There is a river passenger service but it is not well used. The Jubilee Line extension which is due to open in 1996 will bring a major improvement to transport and communications to and within the area.

The Docklands Thames from Island Gardens downstream is relatively unknown, especially as the current route of the Thames Path on the north bank stops at the Greenwich foot tunnel. There is certainly potential for developing and promoting access to the Thames in this area.

9.5.5. *Blackwall*

One of the most significant proposals for this area is the Blackwall Bridge project which would have a significant effect on the Thames, both visually and physically. At present the river in the Beckton area and beyond is very isolated. The LDDC are currently the planning authority but control of this area will return to the London Borough of Newham in 1995. The LDDC will retain control of the Royal Docks until 1998.

The best access to the river at present is via the few small riverside parks that exist, i.e. Lyle Park and Royal Victoria Dock Gardens. There is potential to

improve access and create a recreational facility close to the Thames Barrier. Proposals for a Thames Barrier park on what is now a derelict site are currently being progressed.

9.5.6. *Royal Docks*

The LDDC has set up the Royal Docks Management Authority (RODMA) to manage the Royal Docks, which are primarily used for recreation by the local community and schools. The Royal Victoria Docks Water Sports Centre is one of the largest in London, with key activities being rowing, canoeing, and sailing (Appendix 7). It is envisaged that more competitive activities will be based in the Albert and King George 5th Docks, with more informal recreational use in the Victoria Dock. At present the Albert Dock is privately owned and is used for waterskiing.

Although the major opportunities for water based recreation are in the Royal Docks, there are considerable possibilities for localised recreation along the river.

It is important to mention the London City Airport which is based in the Docklands, close to the Thames. Its flight path is over the river, and it does have an impact on the landscape through noise pollution.

9.5.7. *Greenwich*

The history of Greenwich as a small fishing town which marked the eastern approach to London is still apparent. This has a major effect on the river and its banks, and how they are used for recreation. The isolated atmosphere that surrounded the river as it flowed through the industrial and residential areas disappears along the Greenwich water

front, and the river bank again becomes an important focus for recreation.

The key site in the area is Cutty Sark Gardens, home to its namesake ship and to a busy PLA pier, which transfers many of the 2 million visitors which come to Greenwich every year. Visible beyond the river is Greenwich Park, site of the impressive Old Royal Observatory. The Royal Naval College is close by, and the markets, shops and cafes in Greenwich are popular in their own right.

The Greenwich foot tunnel is an important route between north and south banks, and on to central London via the Docklands Light Railway.

In this area the river is once again used for water sports, with Greenwich home to several clubs offering rowing and sailing on the Thames.

The London Borough of Greenwich have responded to the importance of the Thames by supporting the development of a Waterfront Strategy, prepared by the Waterfront Partnership, a group including local businesses, community representatives and the London Borough of Greenwich. The main role of the Partnership is to coordinate the regeneration of the 1000 acres of development land along the 7 miles of Thames bank in Greenwich.

A major problem with much of this land is that it is contaminated. The Local Authority are seeking financial assistance from central government to enable the decontamination process.

Two of the largest development sites in London are part of the Greenwich Waterfront Scheme, the British Gas site on the Greenwich Peninsula, and the Royal Arsenal in Woolwich.

9.5.8. Woolwich

The industrial landscape continues along the Woolwich waterfront to the Thames Barrier. Located among the working wharfs is the Waterfront Leisure Centre, on a 15 acre riverside site.

The Royal Arsenal is an 80 acre riverside site which has great potential as a visitor destination. Proposals include locating the Royal Artillery Museum on the site and developing the recreational use of the riverside.

9.5.9. The Thames Barrier

This great feat of engineering is now one of London's landmarks, despite its relatively remote location. The history and working of the Barrier are explained in a Visitor Centre on the site, managed by the NRA.

Once through the Barrier, the Thames is still 31 miles from the sea, and the Estuary presents many opportunities for recreation. The area of study for this Strategy is from the Source to the Barrier. English Nature's Thames Estuary Management Plan will include the production of a Recreation Topic Paper for the estuary.

9.5.10. Recreational Sites and Opportunities: Tower Bridge to the Thames Barrier

ST. KATHARINE'S DOCK: Most popular marina in London, just downstream of Tower Bridge.

Opportunity: to promote the use of the dock for visitor/overnight mooring.

TOBACCO DOCK: Retail development within former docks.

Opportunity: to develop and promote the use of the riverside for informal recreation.

SHADWELL BASIN WATER SPORTS



CENTRE: New water sports centre within a redeveloped dock.

Opportunity: to promote the use of the centre to all sectors of the population both for novice training and club use.

SURREY DOCKS: Partially redeveloped docks including the former IEA water sports centre.

Opportunity: to develop and promote the use of the water area for moorings, and encourage the use of the water sports centre for novice training and club use.

LIMEHOUSE BASIN: Junction between Grand Union Canal system and the Thames.

Opportunity: to create a location for visiting craft to moor. Provision of facilities for both river and landside visitors.

CANARY WHARF: Former wharf redeveloped for commercial use but which has become a popular visitor attraction.

Opportunity: to develop and promote the visitor attractions and facilities around the docks and integrate these with the river.

DEPTFORD CREEK: Industrial area of the river which will be redeveloped in the City Challenge project.

Opportunity: to improve the visual and physical access to the river and create facilities for visitors.

CUTTY SARK GARDENS: Busy riverside area of Greenwich.

Opportunity: to develop the facilities and services to customers in the area, as part of the Greenwich Waterfront Development project.



ROYAL VICTORIA DOCK: Largest of the docks which has become a water sports facility.

Opportunity: to develop and promote the facilities as a regional, as well as local base for water sports.

THAMES BARRIER: Flood defence structure which has become a visitor attraction.

Opportunity: to develop the Barrier Visitor Centre on the south bank, adding to the visitor services available. Develop the Thames Barrier Park on the north bank as a public open space, with the possibility of further leisure development on the site in the future.

KEY DEVELOPMENT SITES: Bankside Power station, British Gas site (Greenwich), Royal Arsenal.

Opportunity: to focus on the river, including access for informal recreation, and where appropriate create facilities on the river for moorings, and water sports.

9.6. Recreational Use of the Tidal Thames

9.6.1. Informal Recreation

Upper Tideway: Access to the river bank is available throughout much of the Thames between Teddington and Putney. Access along the river in

Richmond is very good, with walking along the bank, relaxing in the parks and river watching from the pubs and restaurants very popular. In this area, the bulk of visitors are local residents who use the river bank as a park. There are of course well known destinations which attract tourists. Petersham Meadows, Richmond Riverside, and Marble Hill Park are some of the most popular.

The growing interest in conservation and wildlife has led local conservation groups to focus on the river. Several islands are maintained by these local groups. Nationally known destinations such as Kew Gardens, Syon Park and the Old Deer Park are of interest in their own right and although they are sited on the Thames, they do not fully integrate with the river.

The Thames Path follows the south/west bank throughout this area, and forms a very popular route for both short and longer walks. Although the north/east bank is not fully accessible, there is commitment within Local Authority planning systems to create a riverside path where ever possible.

Middle Tideway: As the river bank becomes more urban, active recreation is limited and the river's most valuable recreational asset is open space. Walking, river watching, jogging and cycling along the banks are the most popular activities. When fully implemented the Thames Path will increase access and encourage long distance walking through London.

Many of the riverside buildings are the most visited attractions in London, eg Houses of Parliament, Tower of London, Tate Gallery, and the South Bank Centre. The views to and from these buildings across the Thames attract many people to the river bank.

The foreshore is considered by some a potential recreational resource, but there are the obvious dangers associated with a tidal river. Responsibilities for access routes to parts of the foreshore is unclear. Some Local Authorities discourage access by blocking off stairs and ladders. Even without access, the foreshore in itself is a very important contributor to the openness of the river.

Lower Tideway: Traditionally the Middle and Lower Tideway has been viewed as a transport route, and not associated with recreation. The docks and wharfs were a workplace and the river itself was considered dirty and unattractive by Londoners. It is only really since the redevelopment of wharfs that the Lower Tideway has become a front garden rather than a back yard. The result has been the creation of river front access, with shops, cafes, pubs and homes which look onto the river. The Thames now provides an attractive, relaxing place for local residents, those working close to the river and visitors.

Walking and river watching are the main riverside activities. To increase access on both the north and south banks the Thames Path has been designated to run along both sides of the river.

9.6.2. Angling

Angling on the tidal Thames is free and is popular along stretches of the Tideway where there is good access to the bank or the foreshore. The Upper Tideway is one of the most popular areas, especially where there are quiet 'rural' locations along the bank from which to fish.

In some areas, where there are busy pedestrian walkways, angling is prohibited. It is also impossible where there are permanent bankside moorings,

and where channel moorings come close to the bank.

The Middle Tideway is much less popular for angling for a number of reasons, not least because the flow of river is very fast. As the flood defences are high, anglers need access to the foreshore and this is not always possible. Steps, stairs and ladders are not widely available, and where they do exist, they are often locked or blocked.

On the Lower Tideway where the foreshore is more gently sloping and accessible, angling is more popular.

As clubs do not own fishing rights along the tidal Thames it is difficult to estimate the number of anglers who use the tideway.

9.6.3. Boating

The tidal nature of the river has a limiting effect on its use for water based activities, although it is still a very important resource, especially the Upper Tideway between Teddington and Putney, which is known in London as the 'leisure river'.

Leisure activities on the Middle Tideway between Putney and Tower Bridge is dominated by passenger services carrying tourists to riverside destinations and cruisers passing through. It is generally accepted that recreational boating on these busy central reaches is limited, primarily due to the inherent dangers associated with a tidal river which has high flood defences, and because of large commercial craft using the area. The Westminster Boating Base is the only consistently active source of recreational boats in this area, and as it is a training centre, those on the river are well trained in the skills necessary to navigate

a fast flowing tidal river.

Downstream of Tower Bridge, locally known as the Upper Pool, the recreational traffic is limited to those passing through or using the popular St Katharine's Dock. Smaller, unpowered craft are rarely seen although canoes and sailing boats occasionally come of the docks onto the river from the Shad Thames Water Sports Centre.

Boating activity increases again at Greenwich where there are rowing, canoeing and sailing clubs. Access is good in this area and the river is wide enough to accommodate both recreational and commercial craft.

Cruisers: The number of craft cruising on the Thames decreases dramatically on the Tideway. Relatively few cruisers travel through Teddington Lock, primarily because they are unsure of the tidal river and are not familiar with the few visitor facilities that are available. Many of those who do come onto the Tideway stay upstream of Richmond Lock and Weir, not wishing to cruise on the fully tidal river.

Hire cruiser companies do not normally allow their craft to cruise on the Tideway. One of the key issues raised by those cruisers who do go through Teddington is the lack of visitor moorings, or at least information on where short-term moorings are available.

There are a significant number of cruisers permanently moored on the Tideway. As the PLA do not operate a licensing system it is difficult to be precise, but by estimating the number of moorings, both on the main channel and in marinas, it would seem that there are approximately 1400 craft on the Tideway, above the Thames Barrier.

Hire Craft: Cruisers are not generally available for hire on the Tideway as it is not suitable for novice cruising. Before the Upper Tideway becomes fully tidal, it is possible to hire small rowing boats. Those who hire these are encouraged not to pass through Richmond Lock and Weir.

It is, however, possible to hire a boat with a Skipper. This service is most commonly used for corporate entertainment and functions.

Canoeing: There are 12 canoe clubs on the tidal Thames, that is almost one third of the total on the river. Most of these are based upstream of Putney or downstream in the Lower Tideway at Greenwich, where the river is wider and there are fewer commercial craft. As well as club 'paddlers' the Tideway is used by casual canoeists who gain access via the public slipways, especially those at Putney.

On the Upper Tideway there are some conflicts with other users, particularly rowers and passenger craft who create wash. Access from the high banks can be a problem in some areas.

Sailing: There are 7 sailing clubs based on the Tideway, again these are located on the Upper and Lower reaches, avoiding the busy routes in central London.

Rowing: This is the most popular of all the boating activities in London. There are 61 rowing clubs based on the Tideway, which is over one third of all rowing clubs on the river. The vast majority of these are based in the Upper Tideway, with the Putney reach dominated by rowing. There is a mixture of school and university based clubs, and a number which have evolved from

clubs set up by companies for their employees.

The Upper Tideway is home to one of the most famous of all rowing events, the Boat Race between Oxford and Cambridge Universities.

Rowing becomes popular again much further downstream in Greenwich. There are also facilities for rowing within the waters of the Docklands.

Problems for rowers normally stem from tensions with other users, particularly the passenger services.

9.7. The Tideway: Planning Policies and Strategies for Leisure on the Thames.

There are 13 Borough Councils with riparian responsibilities for the Thames between Teddington and the Thames Barrier. They are listed below with their relevant planning document, normally the most recent Unitary Development Plan (UDP) (see also Section 1 for Regional Planning Guidance).

London Borough of Richmond on Thames: UDP 1992 Deposit.

London Borough of Hounslow: UDP 1992 Deposit.
- Waterside Strategy 1993

London Borough of Wandsworth: UDP 1992 Deposit
- Guidelines for Thames Riverside Development 1990
- The Central Wandsworth 1990

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham: UDP 1991 Deposit.

London Borough of Kensington & Chelsea: UDP 1992 Deposit

Westminster City Council: UDP 1991 Deposit



London Borough of Lambeth:

UDP 1993 Deposit

Corporation of London:

UDP 1994 Adopted

- City Riverside

* *London Borough of Southwark:*

UDP 1991 Deposit

* *London Borough of Tower Hamlets:*

UDP 1992 Deposit

* *London Borough of Newham:*

UDP 1993 Deposit

London Borough of Lewisham:

UDP 1993 Deposit

London Borough of Greenwich:

UDP 1994 Adopted

- Waterfront Strategy

* For some parts of Southwark, Tower Hamlets and Newham the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) are currently the Planning Authority.

9.7.1. Overall Effect of Planning Policies for the Thames

Rather than a feature which joins the north and south of London, the Thames is seen as the great divide. This division is not helped by the fact that only one of the 13 riparian Boroughs (Richmond) crosses the river. As with the non-tidal Thames there appears to be little coordination between the Boroughs, either across or along the river, which can be confusing for the public who do not always realise where the boundaries lie.

The management of the river is further confused by a number of other agencies who have an advisory role. This can lead to inconsistencies and a duplication of effort.

In recent years opinions of the Thames in central and east London have

changed. Rather than being viewed as a dirty, working river which was hidden behind buildings, it is now viewed as an attractive and historical feature to which access is created wherever possible. Positive action to enhance and protect the Thames is the consistent view of all the riparian Boroughs.

9.7.2. Unitary Development Plans

LPAC's Strategic Planning Guidance for London, described in Section 1, will set a more consistent framework within which the Local Authorities can prepare their development plans and adopt measures to safeguard existing sites for essential river related activity.

The Thames has its own section in many of the Unitary Development Plans. If not, it is normally included in the Environmental section and sometimes in the Leisure section. All the UDPs recognise that the river is a very important landscape feature and some Boroughs have designated it as an Area of Special Landscape Value. This special status is extended to riverside open spaces, some of which are designated as Metropolitan Open Land.

Separate policy documents and strategies have been produced for the Thames by several Local Authorities. They include the 'Waterside Strategy' produced by the London Borough of Hounslow; 'Guidelines for Thames Riverside Development' produced by London Borough of Wandsworth; 'City Riverside' produced by the Corporation of London and the Greenwich "Waterfront Strategy" These look in detail at the river bank and recommend site specific as well as overall strategies for the river.

The general theme throughout the UDPs is to protect the setting of the River

Thames in London, and the views to and from it. Public access to the riverside and the completion of the Thames Path is encouraged. The archaeological and ecological value of the river is recognised and there are policies to protect it as a natural habitat. These policies influence development proposals along the river bank. They will be reinforced when the new Strategic Planning Guidance for the Thames becomes available. This will set a more consistent framework within which the Local Authorities can prepare their development plans and adopt measures for safeguarding existing sites for essential river-related activity.

In areas of the river which are derelict and where there is no potential for river related industrial uses, the relevant UDPs specify that any redevelopment enhances the quality of the river bank and access to it.

Piers and Moorings: The leisure use of the river itself is not given priority in the UDPs, except with regards to piers. In general these are supported, as long as they do not detract from the Thames landscape. There is little recognition of the need for visitor moorings as it is felt the marinas fulfil this role. The permanent mooring of ships for a leisure use, such as restaurants and bars, is supported in most UDPs, but the numbers are limited and the ships must be of high quality and/or of historical value. LPAC have policies for permanent moorings published in 1990²³.

Transport: The use of the Thames as a transport route is encouraged by most of the UDPs which cover the Middle and Lower Tideway. Passenger services are supported and in the Lower Tideway policies support the industrial use of the

Thames and its banks, protecting working wharfs and where possible returning redundant wharfs to a river related industry.

Local Thames Forums: Some Boroughs have set up small committees to focus on the Thames. The London Borough of Richmond have the Richmond River Forum which includes both Local Authority representatives and external interests.

The London Borough of Greenwich have taken this a stage further with the Greenwich Waterfront Development Partnership. This consists of local authority, business and community representatives, and it is responsible for managing the regeneration of the river front. It employs Officers to coordinate its work.

9.7.3. Other Relevant Projects

*River Thames Landscape Strategy (1994)*²⁴: This is an important new initiative to develop a strategy for the landscape of the river from Hampton to Kew. The main funders of the project were the Countryside Commission, the Royal Fine Arts Commission, English Heritage and the relevant Local Authorities. Key national and local agencies, including the NRA, were involved in the consultation process and the Strategy was submitted to the riparian Boroughs. It has now been adopted by the relevant Local Authorities as supplementary planning guidance for the Thames.

Launched in June 1994, the Strategy takes a detailed look at the landscape of the Thames, in what is one of its most historic stretches. The objective was to develop a detailed strategy, on a reach by reach basis, for the rehabilitation of

the Thames. Plans were developed to recreate the best of the old Thames, while integrating with new landscapes for the future. The Strategy recognises the importance of the river as a recreational resource and makes recommendations which will enhance its recreational value. These will be reflected in the policies within this Strategy.

The Landscape Strategy has been very well received by the Local Authorities and agencies concerned and a jointly funded Officer has been appointed to implement the detailed recommendations of the Strategy.

Department of Transport - River Thames Working Group: This Working Group was set up to examine the present transport uses on the river, the factors that inhibit the growth of traffic on it, and the potential for developing freight and passenger services. The geographic scope of the project is from Teddington to Southend/Sheerness. The Working Group's findings and recommendations were published on 14th december 1994²².

Increasing commercial transport in the Upper Tideway above Putney would have a significant impact on recreation. Large vessels passing through on a regular basis would make it difficult and unsafe for the numerous small recreational craft who use this part of the Thames.

In the Middle Tideway and further downstream to Greenwich, an increase in commercial traffic would have less impact, as there is relatively little recreational boating, except from the Westminster Boating Base. It will be very important to discuss potential increases in traffic with the clubs who use the Thames.

Department of the Environment - Thames Study: The Government Office have commissioned a study into the Thames between Hampton Court and Greenwich focusing on the river's history, natural and built environment, potential and opportunities for development. The report is expected to be published in Spring 1995 and will be followed by a consultation draft of Strategic Planning Guidance for the Thames.

National Rivers Authority - Landscape Review: As part of ongoing work on improving the landscape of the Thames, the NRA are preparing a detailed landscape review of the Tidal Thames. They are working with the DoE appointed consultants mentioned above, as these studies complement each other. The NRA review is site specific and detailed, and will make recommendations on landscape design. The final report is due to be published in 1995.

9.7.4. Leisure Policies

The Thames is not widely recognised as a leisure resource by riparian Boroughs, particularly in the Middle and Lower Tideway where there is very limited use of the river for water sports. Several Local Authorities are producing Leisure Strategies which focus on the docks and lakes for water sports. Others have employed Sports Development Officers, who in the London Borough of Richmond works with local clubs to encourage water sports.

The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham has an Outdoor Pursuits Officer who has a remit to develop water based activities, focusing on the Barn Elms Water Sports Centre. In Wandsworth a similar role is fulfilled by a Water Sports Development Officer who

is partly funded by the Education Dept.

In terms of facilities the Boroughs of Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham own boat houses which they lease to local clubs. Westminster City Council grant aid the Westminster Boating Base, as do the London Borough of Newham for the Royal Victoria Docks Water Sports Centre. Surrey Docks Water Sports Centre is managed by the London Borough of Southwark's Leisure DSO, although it is funded by the LDDC and the Sports Council.

Local Authorities own and manage several parks and open spaces along the river, but as well as these formal open spaces, the Thames itself is like a 'park', providing open space even where access to it is poor.

9.7.5. Tourism

The riparian Boroughs do appreciate that the Thames is a core element of London's tourism industry, but there is little coordination of promotional activities or facility provision along the river. In the Middle Tideway the north bank in Westminster has always been the main focus, but the redevelopment of the wharfs on the south bank has opened it as a visitor destination. It is in this area that there is an opportunity for the Thames to become a feature which joins rather than divides London.

The Boroughs generally have little contact with the passenger services although these are an important part of tourist industry. There is an opportunity to work with these operators and the PLA to provide a coordinated quality service throughout London, so increasing access along the Thames.

Promoting the Thames as a transport route for tourists increases the number of

visitors to riverside attractions which are inaccessible by road and rail. The London Tourist Board and Convention Bureau have been involved in promotional activity for the Thames and its passenger services. There is certainly scope to work with the riparian Boroughs to develop these campaigns and the Cross-River Partnership will be seeking to improve cross river communications.

9.7.6. Key Issues for the Future

Riverside Development Sites: As described earlier in this section, there are numerous development sites along the Thames in London. Although the UDP system makes provision for public access and the Thames Path, there is pressure to encroach into the river by foreshore reclamation. It is very important to protect the foreshore both for its value as part of the open space provided by the Thames and for its ecological value.

It is also important to consider the effect that riverside development has on visual access around the river. There are a number of historical and memorable views both across and along the river which could be lost by inappropriate development.

In the Lower Tideway redevelopment provides an opportunity to enhance the riverside and open areas which have not been available to the public. The British Gas site on the Greenwich Peninsula and the Royal Arsenal are the most obvious examples. Not only is there an opportunity to open access to the river bank, but also onto the river itself.

The Industrial Use of the Riverside:

London is still the busiest port in the UK and it is important to maintain the working river, which is a key element of

the London economy. It requires a system of wharfs and docks, some of which are in danger of being lost through redevelopment for residential and commercial use. This Recreation Strategy recognises that these wharves need to be protected.

Transport on the Thames: Another part of the working river is its use as a transport route. The Thames is used to transfer 17% of London's waste material and it is proposed that this could increase, as a way to alleviate heavy road traffic through London. There is potential for conflict between recreational craft and the waste transfer barges in the Upper and Middle Tideway. This Strategy recognises the value of the Thames as a transport route and suggests that, as has happened in the past, agreements are reached through discussion and compromise between the various interests.

Piers and Moorings: Permanent moorings on the Tideway are not very popular as many are in the channel and therefore difficult to access. A large number of these are vacant. Marinas are, however, relatively expensive and throughout the recession there has been a decrease in the number of craft within marinas. At present there is a shortage of well planned, accessible moorings, both permanent and for visitor use.

Piers on the Tideway have been through a number of different managing agencies in recent years. Originally they were owned by the Thames Conservancy, then they transferred to PLA control. The GLC took responsibility for them until it was disbanded, when they were handed back to the Thames Water Authority. With the privatisation of the water industry and the creation of the National Rivers

Authority the piers again became the responsibility of the PLA, who now own and manage 10 of them.

Piers are very expensive to maintain and as many are not well used they are an unprofitable operation. The PLA are currently reviewing their piers and will suggest options for their continued operation. In the past plans to develop the busier piers have had difficulty gaining planning consents as it was felt that their development would be detrimental to the character of the river.

It is vital to the river that the piers are maintained and promoted. There is scope to integrate them with the river bank, increasing public access and providing a unique opportunity to bring people onto the river.

River Thames Festival: The plan to celebrate the Thames in 1995/6 with a festival of river events will raise its profile and create new facilities and services which will improve it as a leisure destination. Its long term success will depend on the resulting ongoing activities and the importance given to it by the various agencies. The Festival provides an invaluable coordinating focus which the river currently lacks.

Policies, recommendations and action plans which relate to these sites and issues are included within Section 10.



S

E C T I O N 1 0

FUTURE
POLICIES
FOR
RECREATION
ON THE
THAMES







FUTURE POLICIES FOR RECREATION ON THE THAMES

The policies, recommendations and actions within this Strategy Document are proposed by the River Thames Recreation Strategy Project Team, a partnership between the NRA and the Sports Council. They reflect the NRA's National and Regional Strategies for Recreation and Navigation, and the Sports Council's Regional Strategies for Sport and Recreation. Local Plans and Structure Plans have been considered, as have the views of numerous statutory and non-statutory agencies and interest groups. Finally and most importantly, there has been substantial consultation with those who will be most affected by the Strategy, the river users.

The Policies propose desired position statements for the recreational use of the Thames corridor. The associated Recommendations suggest how the Policies can be achieved, and the Actions are practical guides to implementation. It is suggested that the organisation which is named first takes the lead on the Action.

In general the same policies apply along much of the Thames, with a few site specific differences. Where appropriate

there are separate policies for the tidal river. More detailed background information is described in earlier sections and cross-referenced as appropriate.

10.1. Sustainable Recreation on the Thames

The growth in popularity of outdoor recreation has led to concerns about the detrimental effect which visitors can have on the environment, both natural and built. The topical issue of sustainability is now being applied to recreation in an effort to protect the environment, or at least to limit activity which may cause irreversible, detrimental change to the resource upon which it depends.

In tandem with the growth in outdoor recreation there has been an increase in public concern about the environment and the need to protect it. In the long term the most effective way to achieve a sustainable level of recreational use will be by capitalising on this concern, and positively influencing behaviour.

Although the landscape, character and subsequently the use of the Thames changes throughout its course, there is an underlying theme throughout the



length of the river which supports its recreational use, but not at all costs.

The Thames is a natural resource and an important wildlife habitat. Its banks are also home to many people. If well planned and sensitively managed, recreational activity can live in harmony with wildlife, local residents and other river users, maintaining it as an invaluable landscape feature which is so often taken for granted.

An additional feature of the Thames, particularly in London, is the number of organisations and interest groups with responsibilities for, or have an interest in, its management. The role of all these bodies is not always clear and there is sometimes confusion over both geographical and functional responsibilities. The important factor is the need to manage the river consistently, as a moving, linear feature which is one of the most important natural resources in the country.

An overall approach to the management of the recreational use of the Thames is recommended in Policy 1. This proposes a context for the more specific policies which follow.



POLICY 1: SUSTAINABLE RECREATION ON THE THAMES

1.1. The remote, rural areas of the Thames will be protected from development which will affect its tranquil nature. The enjoyment of these rural areas for recreation should be encouraged, through positive visitor management which is sensitive to nature conservation and to the characteristic river valley landscape.

1.2. In urban areas of the river, open spaces will be protected from development and enhanced where appropriate. The well established recreational use of the Thames and its banks should be encouraged by improving and promoting access to areas which are environmentally robust.

1.3. The Thames in London will be protected as valuable open space and an important landscape feature. Access to and along the river banks will be improved and promoted where safe and environmentally acceptable.

1.4. Developments close to the Thames should reflect its special character, in terms of height, scale and quality, enhancing rather than detracting from the river landscape.

1.5. The management of the Thames and its banks should be coordinated to ensure that there is consistency and cooperation, with a clear understanding of individual responsibilities, both among river 'managers' and the public.

10.1.1. *The Balance between Recreation and Conservation*

Achieving sustainable recreation means finding a balance between recreational use and the conservation of the natural habitat and landscape features. The recreational use of the river is long established and over the years this use has brought substantial change to the natural environment. The role of conservation is to protect and enhance the natural habitat of the river and to ensure that new development on the river bank is carried out sensitively. A new NRA report, to be published in Spring 1995, reviews the research available which measures the impact of recreation on wildlife. The report recommends that further research is needed for river environments²¹.

Specific sites along the Thames have been given special designations which identify them as being important wildlife habitats which should be safeguarded, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) and National and Local Nature Reserves (NNRs and LNRs). General access to these and other conservation areas is controlled to protect against damage to the sensitive habitat. As access is important to realising opportunities for recreation on the river, there is potential for conflict. In environmentally-sensitive areas the answer is to provide managed, educated access, ensuring that visitors are aware of when they can visit, how they should behave and why the area is sensitive.

A major part of managing access and influencing behaviour will be via a process of public education. This could take the form of information boards, guided walks, leaflets, school visits, working through local interest groups

and educational trusts such as the Thames Explorer Trust (Appendix 6).

It is not only designated sites which are environmentally sensitive. The conservation of the river itself as a natural resource must be encouraged. The type and degree of this conservation will depend on the site, its nature and its use. Many areas are already well used for recreation, including rural honeypot sites and some urban areas of the river. The development of these existing sites is encouraged, as opposed to the creation of new honeypots in more environmentally-sensitive areas, where the ecological, archaeological or historical aspects of the river could be damaged.

The majority of those who use the Thames and its banks are aware of the sensitivity of some river habitats, but carelessness can lead to damage. As many of the paths in the Upper and Middle Thames are through fields which are farmed, gates must be closed and care taken with crops and farm animals.

Even in urbanised areas, the river bank is an important natural habitat, and is home to many historic buildings. Litter is a significant problem, especially where rubbish collection is difficult.



**POLICY 2:
THE BALANCE BETWEEN RECREATION
AND CONSERVATION**

Recreation and conservation interests must recognise each other's importance, discuss issues where there may be conflict and be prepared to find a mutually acceptable solution. The recreational use of the Thames and access to it will not be created or promoted where it will cause irreversible, detrimental change to the natural environment and river landscape.

Recommendations:

2a. Initiate a programme of research which will investigate the impact of all relevant forms of recreation on the river environment, with the aim of establishing an environmentally sustainable recreational carrying capacity.

2b. Recreational development should be focused in existing honeypot sites and away from less robust areas.

2c. Where the development of facilities or activities are proposed an environmental assessment should be undertaken, followed by post-project monitoring.

2d. Encourage conservation among members of the public by managing access to sensitive areas and educating visitors about the area they are visiting. This may involve both time and spatial zoning depending on the site and season.

2e. Encourage sports clubs to reinforce environmental awareness among their members, reminding them of the effect their activity can

have on the river and asking them not to cause damage to the river banks, and to collect their litter.

2f. Encourage the provision of information and interpretative material to influence and educate recreational users of the Thames about the natural habitat.

2g. Those using the river bank will be encouraged to remember that farmland may be used for crop growing or keeping livestock, and care should be taken to ensure that there is minimal disturbance.

2h. Those 'managing' the river bank should give priority to rubbish collection, and encourage the public not to litter the river bank.

ACTION

2.1. Review existing research on the recreational capacity of river environments and begin a programme of research which help establish the effect of recreation on a river environment.

FOR: NRA (Recreation & Conservation).

2.2. Identify sites along the Thames which are more environmentally sensitive and less able to sustain recreational use (many of these are already known). Plan and implement managed access to these areas.

FOR: NRA (Conservation & Fisheries), LAAs Countryside/Conservation Officers, local conservation groups.



2.3. Provide and distribute information and advice which encourages all recreational users to be sensitive to the environment, through information boards, leaflets, and local conservation groups.

FOR: **NRA (Recreation and Conservation)**, River User Groups, Conservation Groups, Governing Bodies of Sport, CCPR, Sports Council.

2.4. Organise 'river clean ups' in local areas, encouraging local people to become more involved with looking after their local river.

FOR: **LA's**; Local Groups; NRA (Environmental Services).

10.1.2. Wildlife Issues

There are specific issues which arise from time to time which affect, or are affected by, the natural environment. At present they include an overabundance of Canada geese which destroy the river banks through intensive grazing and fouling. The Department of the Environment have set up a working party to investigate this problem and have published a leaflet, 'Canada Geese - A guide to legal control methods'.

Another issue is the overfeeding of waterfowl (swans, ducks) by the public, which can lead to conflict with other users.

The latest wildlife issue perceived to be a problem by anglers is the suspected depletion of fish stocks by cormorants. Although anglers feel this is an issue, there is no evidence to suggest that there is a problem on the Thames.

Members of the public who have a concern about an environmental issue often do not know where to find relevant information or advice.

POLICY 3: WILDLIFE ON THE THAMES

Those who have a responsibility for conservation on the Thames are encouraged to instigate and promote a system whereby members of the public who are concerned about an environmental issue can seek information and advice.

Recommendation:

3a. The provision of public information on wildlife and their habitats on the Thames, should be continued and developed.

ACTION

3.1. Identify and where possible provide sources of information and advice on specific problem issues.

FOR: **NRA (Conservation)**, RSPB, other relevant agencies.

10.2. Enjoying Recreation on the Thames

The Thames is synonymous with water based activities such as angling, rowing, canoeing, sailing and cruising. Although the river is both a national and regional resource for these activities, by far the majority of visitors to the Thames use it for informal recreation.

The importance of the Thames for informal recreation is often undervalued and undersold. It is taken for granted by many local people and overshadowed by other more heavily promoted visitor attractions, such as the Cotswolds, Oxford, Windsor Castle, and the numerous places of interest in and around London. The pull of visitors away from the Thames to other areas helps it to sustain its attractiveness as a rural retreat, even in urban areas.

The type and nature of visits to the Thames varies from visits to the riverside for picnicking, walking the dog, bird watching, painting, camping, to just river watching. Others hire a cruiser on the river, take a trip on a passenger ferry or walk the Thames Path. For all these activities the river provides an ideal backdrop but although people come to get away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, they still need basic facilities such as toilets and refreshments.

Most trips centre on the riverside cities and towns where visitor services are available. Riverside pubs are particularly busy in summer when customers can take advantage of their location.

There are several sites on the Thames where there is an opportunity to improve the amenity value of the river by the addition of visitor facilities. These include sites where there are already some facilities and established access, as well as areas where there is potential to increase public access. One such site is the official source of the river near Kemble. The Source will mark the beginning (or the end) of the Thames Path, which will be officially opened in 1996. With this in mind it would seem appropriate to mark the area more significantly, but without taking away from the rural environment (see also Section 6).

Lock sites are a prime example of areas where visitor services could be improved, as are the banks of the river in towns and villages. In urban areas such as Oxford, Reading and in London where there is derelict riverside land, there are development plans which it is hoped will improve the riverside, both for visual and physical access. It is only



in recent years that the Thames in central London has been viewed as an asset which adds value to developments on the bank. Consequently the river is now integrated with these new developments, rather than hidden behind them.

Although they contribute significantly to the local economy, visitors are not always popular with local residents.

More specific policies for water sports on the Thames are included later in this section. Policies 8 - 17 apply to all recreational users of the river.

10.2.1. Is the Thames Safe for Recreation?

Before advocating policies which promote the use of the Thames for recreation it is important to clarify the issue of safety. 'Is the Thames safe?' is a common and legitimate question asked by those who are considering using the Thames for recreation. Water safety includes a number of issues, including the risk of drowning, risk of collision and water quality. These apply to all forms of recreation which could result in contact with open water, in other words

both bankside and on water activities.

Water Quality: Although the quality of water in the Thames has improved, there are inherent dangers with the quality of open water. Most activities based on the Thames involve some sort of contact with the water, whether it be angling, rowing or cruising. As it is a public navigation everyone has the right to use the river and they do so at their own risk. The managing agencies must minimise the risks and provide information so that the users can make informed decisions about their activity. At present information on water quality is available, however the public perception is that they do not know where to find this information, and when they do it is difficult to understand.

POLICY 4: WATER QUALITY

Those who have responsibility for water quality will continue to work to maintain and, where possible, improve the quality of water in the Thames.

Recommendation:

4a. A system be developed which gives the public information which they can understand and use to make decisions on how water quality will effect their use of the Thames. The ultimate decision on participation in water sports is, however, with the individual.

ACTION

4.1. The NRA and Local Authority Environmental Health Officers will work together to review the current method of disseminating information on water quality and develop a system which

enables those using the river for recreation to obtain simple information on which they can base their decisions. FOR: **NRA (Water Quality, Recreation);** LAs (Environmental Health Depts).

Water Safety: There are always dangers associated with flowing, cold, open water. For this reason swimming in the Thames is discouraged. The most vulnerable areas are where there is a concentration of people using the riverside and where the banks and flood defence are high. Local Authorities and other agencies provide measures to minimise the risk of drowning in areas which they own or manage. The major difficulty is maintaining safety and rescue devices which are susceptible to vandalism. Another difficulty is knowing which are the most effective measures to use.

The blocking of gates and ladders (often illegal) to prevent access to the foreshore of the tidal Thames has also led to the loss of important escape routes from the river, and grab chains have not always been maintained. The PLA have been working with a number of Local Authorities to improve safety along the Thames, and a report will be published in 1995 entitled 'Review of Lifesaving Provision along the River Thames: Report and Recommendations'. This is a major step forward in terms of public safety along the Thames in London.

In addition the London Rivers Association published 'The Thameside Safety Study - A Guide to Good Practice' giving advice to those with a responsibility for the river bank along the tidal Thames.

For those using boats on the river the NRA issue a 'River Thames Handbook' to all craft upon registration and the PLA

issue the 'Pleasure Users Guide to the Thames'. These include safety guidelines, and 'dos and don'ts' while on the river. The Governing Bodies for the various water sports (see Appendix 6) also issue safety guidance to their members. Despite the high activity levels there have been very few accidents on the Thames.

One of the more controversial issues is the different perceptions of dangerous river conditions. The NRA and PLA are rightly cautious when the river flow is fast. Advice to all river users is not to go afloat in a strong stream. Those who are more experienced in water sports are often afloat in waters which are perceived to be more dangerous than the Thames, and in some instances they do not agree with the advice of the Navigation Authority. Obviously this can cause conflict. The policy to date has been to inform the public of the dangers, encourage them to behave carefully, but in the end individuals are responsible for their own actions.

Information on the state of the navigation is available from the NRA and PLA.

POLICY 5: WATER SAFETY

All river users and the general public will be encouraged to act in a safe and responsible manner when on or close to the river.

Those taking part in water sports should be aware of safety regulations with regards to their activity, equipment and crew, and abide by the Codes of Practice issued by their Governing Body of Sport.

Swimming in the Thames will be discouraged.

Recommendations:

5a. Landowners and managers of areas along the Thames which are used for recreation will be encouraged to provide effective safety equipment. Advice on what is most effective is available from agencies such as RoSPA.

5b. Access routes to and from the river and foreshore, such as gates, steps and ladders should be maintained in a condition which does not detract from their use as an escape route, especially in urbanised areas.

5c. New developments along the bank should be designed with safety in mind and include adequate safety features and rescue equipment.

5d. Structures in the river should be made as safe as possible for the recreational user and, where possible, should improve the potential for recreational use.

5e. Coordinate formal dialogue between the relevant agencies to achieve a consistent approach to safety on the Thames. These agencies include the Local Authorities, NRA, PLA, RoSPA, the Governing Bodies of sport, commercial users, recreational users and relevant landowners.

5f. Improve the provision of information on safety via Tourist Information Points, signage, leaflets, educational campaigns, and training schemes within sports clubs.

5g. Local BCU, ARA and club representatives should continue to discuss safety with the NRA and PLA, particularly with regards to events,

for which they require consent. The system of providing and acting upon information on the state of the river will continue to be reviewed and updated by the NRA, river users and Governing Bodies of Sport.

5b. Those with responsibility for regulating the standards of craft should ensure that these standards are enforced.

5i. Derelict craft abandoned on the river should be removed, as they are potentially dangerous and are detrimental to the quality of the landscape.

ACTION

5.1. Local Authorities with urban riverside will review river access points and escape routes, including chains, gates, ladders, and with the Navigation Authority ensure they are effective. This reflects the PLA Safety review in London.
FOR: **LAs**, PLA, NRA (Navigation).

5.2. The NRA, PLA and Local Authorities will continue to review their advice on water safety and where necessary improve its delivery to both Thames based clubs and the river users in general.
FOR: **NRA (Recreation and Navigation)**, PLA, Local Authorities.

5.3. NRA and local representatives of the BCU and ARA will continue to develop systems for advising on river conditions, with the users ultimately taking responsibility for their own safety.
FOR: **NRA (Navigation)**, BCU and ARA.

5.4. Remove derelict and unsafe boats which have been abandoned in the river.
FOR: **NRA and Local Authorities.**

10.2.2. Access for Recreation

The availability of access to the Thames for recreation varies significantly between rural and urban areas. In rural areas where there are relatively few bridging points or lanes leading to the river, access does not exist. Locks have their own access routes but often these are over private land with no public rights of way.

Even where access routes to and along the Thames exist, they are not always obvious and information about them is not readily available. This applies equally to urban and rural areas. Where industrial use is ongoing access is obviously impossible. Other areas where access is available may be unsuitable as a visitor destination. There are various reasons for this, not least being the historical perception of the urban Thames in London as a 'dirty' river, with unattractive, derelict, and isolated areas of bank.

Improving access brings a dilemma. Too many people and certainly too many cars will change the character of the river, yet there are numerous local people who would appreciate better access. There is certainly scope to improve the signage system on existing routes telling people how to get to the river, both on foot and by car. This also applies to the urbanised Thames where access often exists but it is not always obvious.

When improving access it is important not to cause distress to the rural environment and to look for ways to minimise the impact on the local residents. The concentration of the majority of visitors in robust honeypot sites is favoured by conservationists as it causes least impact on the wider river

environment. Some areas will only be suitable for low key, 'local' use, rather than becoming a honeypot site. Visitor management will be influenced by information provision and the availability of parking (see also Policy 2).



POLICY 6: ACCESS FOR ALL

6.1. The use of the Thames and its banks for informal recreation, including walking, will be encouraged, and the resource maintained and managed to accommodate appropriate activities where there is potential and it is appropriate to do so. Developments along the Thames should include the river as a positive feature, enhancing it where possible, improving public access and protecting historical views.

6.2. Where it is possible and safe, access routes and associated facilities and services will include provision for the disabled. These will be promoted to relevant organisations

and those with a disability will be encouraged to enjoy the Thames.

Recommendations:

6a. Pedestrian access, including provision for the disabled, should be facilitated where possible, with vehicular access where appropriate, in light of environmental, conservation and local interests.

6b. Access to the river for recreation will be focused in areas which are environmentally robust and where the impact on local residents can be minimised through traffic and visitor management programmes. Assessments on appropriate levels of access will be made on a site by site basis.

6c. Existing routes to the Thames which may have become disused or are currently inaccessible should be reviewed and improved if appropriate, with priority given to pedestrian access. Routes to and across the Thames should be signed from appropriate access points.

6d. Circular routes which include the Thames should be created and signed, where appropriate, and based in areas which have existing, or the potential for, visitor facilities.

6e. Public transport routes to the Thames should be encouraged and promoted.

ACTION

6.1. Carry out a review of all access routes to the Thames, both pedestrian and vehicular, including public transport, for both the able-bodied and disabled, suggesting enhancements where

appropriate. This would include a review of the signage system, recommending additional signs in appropriate areas.

FOR: **LAs**; Parish Councils; Countryside Commission, Ramblers Association, NRA (Recreation and Navigation).

6.2. Begin dialogue with the relevant organisations to discuss the possibility of marking the Source of the Thames more significantly and creating better visitor facilities in the area.

FOR: **LAs**, Countryside Commission, NRA (Recreation), local brewery, Cotswold Canal Trust, and the landowners.

10.2.3. *Information*

One of the most frequent comments from visitors to the Thames is the lack of information - leaflets, guide books, databases. There has been a surge in the publication of Thames guides during 1994, but often the general public do not know where to find them. The most popular publication, especially for those wishing to walk the Thames Path, is the Ramblers Association Guide to the Thames Path. In 1996 an official guide to the Thames Path will be published to coincide with the launch of the Path. There are very few guides to local areas of the river, except those put together by voluntary groups.

The NRA and some Local Authorities have been addressing this problem by producing joint leaflets, eg 'Walks around the Thames in Abingdon', produced in partnership with the Vale of White Horse District Council and 'England's River', jointly funded with Wycombe District Council. The NRA also have an ongoing programme to install information points at key lock sites. These include local information and maps, but their use is

limited to those who have already found their way to the lock.

Lack of information is not just a problem for users of the river bank, those cruising on the river, particularly in hire craft, also feel that they are missing interesting features through lack of information and inadequate signing to places of interest from the river.

There is certainly scope for better distribution of public information throughout the river. The newly formed Central South Tourist Board are aware of the problem. The last tourist board guide to the Thames was published in 1984 and an updated version is needed.

The London Tourist Board and Convention Bureau provide a telephone information service, 'Visitorcall', and they have a promotional campaign known as 'Take time to discover the Thames'. This involves numerous organisations, including London Underground.

Information is also an effective educational tool, helping visitors to appreciate the natural environment and understand that the Thames is an important wildlife habitat. This philosophy of conservation through education is strongly encouraged.



**POLICY 7:
INFORMATION FOR RECREATION**

All agencies involved with visitors to the Thames should seek to coordinate their information and publicity material, especially the provision and promotion of good visitor guides, information points and databases.

Recommendation:

7a. New guides to the Thames should be encouraged to include local information which will inform both local people and visitors about the Thames and its surrounds.

7b. Guides should be distributed effectively, in places where the general public would expect to find visitor information, eg Tourist Information Centres (TIC's), libraries, hotels, pubs, and other outlets.

7c. Local TIC's, libraries and other information sources should be familiar with the information that is available on the Thames, with guides and maps available where possible.

7d. The sensitive signing of attractions from the river should be encouraged. This will help those in boats appreciate the areas surrounding the river, as well as the river itself.

7e. Information on the Thames should educate the visitor about environmental issues, encouraging them to appreciate the natural environment and behave in a way which is sensitive to it.

7f. The provision of information points along the river is encouraged. These should be positioned in sites

which will benefit the maximum number of visitors.

ACTION

7.1. Produce and disseminate local information which educates people about the Thames. This will include leaflets, information panels and exhibitions.

FOR: LAs, NRA (Recreation & Conservation), local interest groups.

10.2.4. Facilities

Along with access go visitor facilities, such as car parking, toilets, rubbish collection and refreshments. These facilities are available in most riverside towns and in riverside areas of London which are popular visitor destinations, but they are almost non-existent in the more remote areas, in both urban and rural environments. The character of some rural areas would be diminished by inappropriate development but a possible compromise is the creation of small, low key car parks in suitable areas, set back from the river, preferably in the villages.

Toilets are a particular problem. There are long stretches of the river without any facilities. Some of the NRA locks do have them but often they are not always available to the general public. Toilets pose a particular problem due to the maintenance requirements, but if more visitors are to be encouraged to the Thames, there will need to be an improvement in these basic facilities.

There are numerous pubs and hotels on or close to the river, even in the remote parts of the Upper Thames, but they do not always make the most of their riverside location. They have facilities which many visitors to the Thames cannot find elsewhere, eg car parks,

toilets, and refreshments. There is certainly scope for these pubs to provide an increased service, which would also benefit their business, especially with the new Sunday licensing hours.

Access and facilities can be created when there are developments on or close to the Thames. Not only does this provide a public facility cost effectively, it ensures that new developments consider the Thames and its banks as a recreational resource, reflected in the design of the building and landscape features.

POLICY 8: FACILITIES FOR RECREATION

8.1. The provision of visitor facilities, including toilets, should be a priority as they are a prerequisite for a good service to visitors to the Thames. Current provision should be reviewed, and action taken to fill in gaps where appropriate and acceptable, taking the local environment into consideration.

8.2. Where there is potential to negotiate a planning obligation in respect of development on or near the Thames, through a Section 106 agreement (Town and Country Planning Act), this obligation should be used where appropriate to benefit the needs of recreational users of the river and its banks.

Recommendations:

8a. The provision of visitor facilities including refreshments and other services, eg camping and B&B, will be encouraged in appropriate areas and where there is existing riverside development, eg lock sites, pubs, riverside villages, redundant riverside property, farm buildings.

8b. The provision of small (approx. 20 cars), sensitively-planned car parks, set back from the river, will be encouraged in specific sites where environmental impact will be minimal. Existing car parks should be reviewed and where appropriate the landscape quality improved.

8c. Riverside land owned by the NRA, in particular lock sites, should be reviewed to assess the potential for all forms of recreation, followed by the preparation of integrated site management plans.

ACTION

8.1. Review visitor facilities close to the Thames, ie car parks, toilets, and refreshments, and develop a plan for provision of these in appropriate areas where the impact on the natural environment is acceptable.

FOR: **NRA (Recreation & Navigation)** and LAs.

8.2. Contact riverside pubs, reminding them of the importance of the Thames as a visitor attraction and encouraging them to provide services for those walking along the river.

FOR: **NRA (Recreation)** & LAs.

10.2.5. Customer Services

It is important to recognise that all those using the Thames, whether on a boat, on foot, in a car, on a bicycle or in a wheelchair, should be treated as a customer by those involved in managing the river and its banks.

There will always be difficult customers and those who cause trouble. Vandalism is a problem in some areas, as is anti-social behaviour such as bridge jumping, but most visitors to the Thames are there to enjoy the river scene, relax and have fun. The navigation staff, in particular the

lock keepers, are on the frontline meeting the public, sorting out problems, and encouraging safe behaviour. It is important that these roles be carried out with the customer as the focus. In the past there has been a perception that river users are just those in boats. In fact the vast majority of visitors to the Thames come to use the river bank and they should be treated as customers by those managing the resource.

**POLICY 9:
GOOD SERVICE ON THE THAMES**
Priority should be given to ensuring the provision and delivery of a quality service to those who use the Thames and its banks for recreation.

Recommendation:

9a. Recruitment criteria for staff who will be meeting the public on the Thames will not only focus on technical ability but will require the candidate to have good interpersonal skills and an interest in working with the public.

9b. Those staff who regularly meet the public will be given ongoing training and encouraged to develop their skills in customer care.

ACTION

9.1. Those who are managing the Thames should develop their customer-orientated philosophy and implement a recruitment, induction and training programme which focuses on good customer relations between frontline staff and visitors to the Thames.

FOR: **NRA (Navigation and Recreation)**, PLA, LAs who manage staff on the river.

9.2. Continue to encourage lock keepers to help and inform all visitors to locks.

both those in boats and those on foot, through the provision of local information, leaflets and maps at lock sites.

FOR: **NRA (Navigation and Recreation)**.

10.2.6. Passenger Services

Passenger services are an important part of the services available on the Thames. They bring large numbers of people to enjoy the river in a safe, controlled environment and they provide a good opportunity to educate an interested audience about the river. In London they also provide an important link along and across the river.

There would seem to be an opportunity to extend passenger services to parts of the river where they are currently lacking, with additional stops at the smaller towns and villages in rural areas, and within urban areas.

Obviously passenger services, like most tourist-dependant services, are very sensitive to weather conditions. They only operate in the summer months and depend primarily on tourists. Another limiting factor in their operation is a lack of accessible public wharfs and piers where they could have additional stops.

On the non-tidal Thames busy locks can affect passenger service schedules. There have been calls by the operators for passenger services to have priority at locks but this is not possible under current legislation.

The large size of the boats and the fact that they are on the river almost every day in summer does lead to conflict with other users, particularly rowers.

(See also Section 4).

**POLICY 10:
PASSENGER SERVICES ON THE
THAMES**

Passenger services which provide a quality service should be encouraged as a means of bringing the wider public to the Thames.

Recommendations:

10a. Passenger operators should review the service they offer to the public and improve quality where necessary.

10b. The opening of public wharfs in key towns and villages should be encouraged, in discussion with the passenger services who may wish to have additional stops.

10c. Passenger boats should consider other craft on the river, especially unpowered boats. Wash from large boats is a major problem for rowers, canoeists and moored craft and it can also damage the banks.

ACTION

10.1. Review access to public wharfs and discuss the opening of additional routes for passenger boats.

FOR: **NRA (Navigation)**, PLA, LAs and passenger services.

10.2. Continue formal dialogue between the Passenger Service Federations, the Navigation Authorities and LAs, to discuss the service offered on the river.

FOR: **NRA (Navigation)**, PLA, Upper Thames Passenger Federation, Thames Passenger Services Federation, LAs.

10.2.7. Piers

The system of piers on the tidal Thames is vital to the operation of the passenger traffic on the river. There are a total of

27 piers, 12 of which are currently operated by the PLA (see Section 4). Some of the piers are very well used, others are rarely used. The operation of the piers is expensive, and maintenance costs are very high. The PLA are currently reviewing the operation of piers in the hope that they can become more cost effective. Redevelopment of the more successful piers to improve and extend visitor facilities is one option but has fallen foul of planning controls.

**POLICY 11:
PROVISION OF PIERS ON
THE THAMES**

The active piers on the tidal Thames are an important part of the infrastructure of the river and must be protected, and where possible enhanced to provide improved services for the public.

Recommendations:

11a. The redevelopment of cost-effective piers should be encouraged where the additional features on the pier are leisure related and their design compliments the local environment.

ACTION

11.1. Continue the ongoing review of existing piers, identifying those suitable for redevelopment, followed by feasibility studies for sites which have potential for new piers.

FOR: **PLA**, LAs.

10.2.8. The Hire Craft Industry

The ability to hire a boat, whether a motor cruiser or a small unpowered boat, is the only way most people ever experience boating. Hiring is also the

first step to buying a boat and is seen as very important to the sale of boats. For these reasons it is important to maintain a healthy hire trade on the Thames (see Section 5).

Hire cruisers are still an important tradition on the non-tidal Thames although the industry has declined dramatically since it was at its peak in the early 80's. Currently there are a total of 16 hire operators on the tidal river. Due to the hazardous nature of parts of the tidal Thames, hiring cruisers is not encouraged downstream of Teddington. Small boats can be hired in several riverside towns, but this service is not as widely available as would be expected. There certainly seems to be scope to expand the availability of small craft hire, both powered and unpowered, on the non-tidal Thames.

There are opportunities to hire motor cruisers in most areas of the non-tidal Thames. There has been a dramatic decline in the business over the last decade. Bookings have dropped significantly, companies have not been able to invest in their boats, therefore the quality has declined and customers are less inclined to choose a cruising holiday. Several companies have not survived this downward spiral and have sold up or diversified part of their riverside lands. Within the Local Authority planning system such diversification is not always possible

Customer expectations and holiday patterns have changed and the hire industry needs to adapt by reviewing their holiday offer and promotional techniques. Short breaks, one way trips and special interest holidays are growing in popularity and could be accommodated on the Thames. The

general promotion of cruising holidays on the river appears to be inadequate. In addition, the training of novice boaters is not always as it should be, which can lead to tensions with other users of the river.

The contribution of the hire craft industry to the local economy is significant, not only in terms of employment, but the amount spent by hirers. In a recent survey it was estimated that a hire boat spends on average £347 on a week-long trip.

POLICY 12: HIRE CRAFT ON THE THAMES

12.1. The opportunity to hire craft on the non-tidal Thames is a valuable service and an important component of the river economy which should be protected and encouraged where appropriate. Diversification of hire cruise businesses will only be accepted in the following circumstances:

- hiring craft and associated activities is still the main part of the business;
- without some diversification the business would not survive;
- the diversification does not result in the loss of river bank facilities and is in keeping with the river environment;
- the proprietor is offering customers a quality product with a good, safe service.

12.2. The provision of new hire cruise bases and/or additional moorings for hire cruisers on the non-tidal Thames will only be considered:

- in areas where such a development would be environmentally

-
- sustainable;
- in areas where there is existing development;
 - in areas not already congested with boating activity;
 - when it is believed there is sufficient demand.

Recommendations:

12a. Hire companies should continue to adapt to meet changing customer needs, offering a high quality product and increasing their share of the holiday and visitor market.

12b. Priority should be given to promoting boating holidays throughout the UK. This requires a coordinated effort from both the industry and those who 'manage' the river and its banks.

12c. Those bringing new hire craft onto the Thames will continue the move towards craft with low wash characteristics.

12d. The provision of small craft for day hire in the riverside towns and villages will be encouraged where appropriate.

12e. Companies who hire out craft, especially motor cruisers, should provide comprehensive training for novice boaters, with instruction on passage through a lock and guidance on how to treat all the other users of the river.

12f. Hirers should be provided with comprehensive manuals, including information about the river, visitor facilities, the services available, and most importantly advice on safety, including instruction on the correct use of buoyancy aids and life jackets.

12g. Those who manage the river should review the provision of visitor moorings and associated facilities; adequate and safe laybys at locks; and safety precautions at weirs.

ACTION

12.1. Review the marketing of hire craft on the Thames and produce a 5 year marketing strategy for the industry. Consult with other agencies such as British Waterways, British Marine Industries Federation and the British Hire Craft Federation.

FOR: **THCA**, NRA (Navigation), LAS.

12.2. Review the availability of small hire boats on the Thames and prepare a development plan to improve this service.

FOR: **NRA**, LAS.

12.3. Prepare a 'customer service' pack for the hire cruiser operators, covering training, safety, local information and information on environmental issues on the river. Work with hire cruiser operators to encourage its implementation.

FOR: **THCA**, NRA (Navigation and Recreation).

10.3. ACTIVE SPORTS ON THE THAMES

The issues and policies described for the general recreational use of the Thames apply to all the more formal, sporting activities which take place on the river. In addition there are more sport-specific issues which affect both the quality and quantity of participation. Conflict between activities and the organisation of events on the river are cross-activity issues and the policies for these are applicable to all activities. These are

followed by issues and policies which are specific to individual sports.

10.3.1. Recreational Conflict

Conflicts between a diverse range of recreational users is part of life on a resource where space is limited and activities are not always compatible. On the Thames the conflicts between waterbourne and bankside activities are most acute between anglers and those in boats, primarily motorised craft. The problem is at its worst along the banks which have trees or hedgerows, as boaters often find it impossible to see the hidden anglers, so disturb them when they cruise close to the bank. Moored craft are also a problem for anglers, as they take up bank space, preventing angling.

There can also be problems between the various waterbourne activities. Small unpowered craft are affected by wash from larger boats, although the new byelaws introduced on the non-tidal Thames in 1995 should alleviate this problem as they include a mandatory 8 km speed limit, except for the agreed exemption of coaching launches.

Conflict can also arise between bankside users, particularly walkers who suffer when the footpaths become blocked with angling equipment or where the path has been narrowed due to bank erosion at angling points.

Most of these problems are limited to periods of peak activities, primarily summer weekends when there are numerous craft on the river, anglers along the bank and people walking on the paths.

POLICY 13: MANAGING RECREATIONAL CONFLICT

All river users should recognise that the Thames is a shared resource and that tolerance of other activities is required.

Conflict is best resolved by cooperation and river users should understand the activities of others and learn how to react when they meet on the river, through novice training programmes which explain other activities and provide guidance on the responsible use of the river and bank.

Recommendations:

13a. Governing Bodies of Sport will be encouraged to prepare development plans which examine the position of their sport on the Thames as a whole and its relationship with other activities.

13b. The new byelaws should be effectively disseminated and communicated to all those using the non-tidal Thames, particularly those in motor cruisers.

13c. Those cruising will be encouraged to stay in the main navigation channel and away from the banks of the river where possible, minimising disturbance to anglers.

13d. Encouragement will be given to the extension of the coxswain training programme, which has been successful in Oxford, to other clubs along the river.

13e. Anglers are encouraged not to block footpaths or access routes, or

cause bank erosion when taking part in their sport. The users of fishing poles will be encouraged to be mindful of others on the river bank, as well as those on the river.

ACTION

13.1. Review attendance at River User Groups and encourage better attendance and improved dialogue between river users.

FOR: **NRA (Recreation & Navigation)**, Governing Bodies of Sport, PLA, and Local Clubs.

13.2. Redevelop the users' code for the Thames and distribute to both clubs and casual users.

FOR: **NRA (Recreation & Navigation)**, PLA, Governing Bodies of Sport and Local Clubs

13.3. Educate and influence the casual sportsman using the river by placing leaflets (including the CCPR and Sports Councils Water Recreation Code) with local tackle shops, chandleries, and water sports outlets. Disseminate information at lock sites, access points such as slipways and with rod licences and craft registrations.

FOR: **NRA (Recreation, Navigation & Fisheries)** and Governing Bodies of Sport.

13.4. Governing Bodies of Sport will be asked to provide information on their activity for other users, including guidance on how to minimise conflict, which will be distributed to other clubs.

FOR: **NRA (Recreation)**, Governing Bodies of Sport, CCPR and River User Groups.

13.5. Clubs will be asked to include a section in their novice training scheme which provides information on environmental issues on the river and on

other river activities.

FOR: **Clubs, NRA (Recreation)**, River User Groups.

13.6. The exemption of coaching launches from the 8 km speed limit on the non-tidal Thames could cause conflict. The NRA will ensure that all regulations are communicated to clubs and that these will be strictly imposed.

FOR: **NRA (Navigation)**, Thames Rowing Council (TRC) and Local Clubs.

13.7. The successful Oxford University coxswain training programme will be reviewed in the hope that it can be extended to other parts of the river.

FOR: **TRC, NRA (Navigation)** and Oxford University Boat Club (OUBC).

10.3.2. Events on the River Thames

There are numerous events traditionally held on the Thames, both competitive and more informal. They include angling matches, rowing regattas and competitions, canoe races, boat rallies, canoe tours, and organised group walks along the bank. They range in size from the international Henley Regatta, to the Oxford and Cambridge boat race, to the local Wallingford raft race. All these events add to the river scene, enlivening it and encouraging 'spectators'. For the sports involved they are an important part of the competitive calendar and help to motivate juniors. They also have economic benefits for the local community.

Inevitably there are also negative effects. The most common is conflict with other users due to congestion on the river, which can block the navigation. If the events are not properly organised they can also cause problems on the bank, eg blocking access routes, parking

difficulties and causing nuisance to those walking along the bank.

Both the NRA and PLA set conditions for holding events on the river and at present the PLA operate a system on the tidal Thames whereby the organisers of events which have more than 100 participants agree a code of practice, drawn up by the PLA, Thames Division Police and the St John Ambulance. It must be signed by all parties before the event can proceed.

POLICY 14: MANAGING EVENTS ON THE RIVER

Events on or along the river are an important Thames tradition and should be encouraged where and when appropriate.

Recommendations:

14a. Those responsible for events on the Thames must ensure that they have contacted all relevant parties, including the NRA, PLA, IAs, and land owners to obtain the necessary consents.

14b. Marshalling of the event on the day should be effectively organised to ensure that it is run safely, does not cause an incident, or conflict with other users of the river or its banks.

14c. The dates, times and location of events should be made known to other river users, using the River User Group system, as soon as possible, especially to those in the immediate area. Despite the fact that river events are important, the needs of other river users must not be forgotten.



ACTION

14.1. The NRA and PLA will continue to help with the management of water-borne events, either by their physical presence at the event or, if more appropriate, they will advise on a system of club marshalling.

FOR: NRA, PLA and Event Organisers

Further information on all the activities included in the following policies will be found in Sections 2, 3, and 4, and in Appendices 1, 2 and 3.

10.4. ANGLING

Trends

From a recent NRA National Angling Survey¹¹ it is estimated that there are approximately 2.7 million people participating in angling at least once a year. In the NRA Thames Region it is estimated that there are 600,000 anglers, including children under 12 years. It is impossible to say how many of these fish the River Thames but it is fair to say that many of them do. Although there is high quality game fishing in the tributary streams and in some still waters, the main River Thames is primarily a coarse fishery.

Figures from the National Federation of Anglers show that club membership is in decline, although this is not reflected throughout all clubs on the Thames where membership continues to increase although more slowly than a few years ago. Some believe that many anglers are

no longer joining clubs but buying day tickets when they need them. This is in part due to the increasing cost of club membership, caused by the escalating cost of fishing rights.

Anglers pay for their activity through the national rod licence system and in fees to their club. Currently in the Thames Region the rod licence contributions cover the cost of the NRAs Fisheries Service. Anglers also make a contribution to the local economy, primarily in tackle shops where they buy bait and other supplies.

There has been criticism from anglers that despite the fact that it is one of the most popular participation sports in the country, the Sports Council rarely support angling projects on rivers with grant aid.

Just over half of the clubs based on the Thames believe that the demand for angling is increasing, and most clubs feel that they could accommodate at least some of this demand. About two thirds of clubs say they offer some sort of novice training for those new to the sport.

Upper Thames: Angling is popular in the Upper Thames, especially between Oxford and Cricklade where the relatively few cruisers make life much easier for anglers, as do the mooring-free banks. Much of the riparian land in the area is leased to angling clubs. The Oxford and District Angling Association alone represents 40 clubs who fish in the Oxford area. There are numerous clubs, many from further afield, who have fishing rights on the Upper Thames. The only area available for public angling is in the city of Oxford.

Middle Thames: Angling continues to be popular, although as the river becomes

busier with boating activities the potential for conflict increases. Many angling clubs lease fishing rights from landowners, with public fishing confined to NRA and some Local Authority owned land.

Lower Thames: As the NRA own the river bed in this area, angling is free where the landowner allows access to the bank. This is in complete contrast to the Upper and Middle Thames where angling clubs lease most of the fishing rights. Although angling is popular in some areas, the numerous moorings mean that access from the bank is difficult, and the river itself is very busy.

Tidal Thames: From Staines downstream there is a public right to fish from the river banks of the Thames, except in areas where the Local Authority feel it is not appropriate. These are designated as 'No Fishing' zones. In the Upper Tideway angling from the banks is relatively straightforward, and popular. In the Central and Lower Tideway it is much more difficult as access to the water is reduced due to the high flood defence walls, and fishing from the foreshore is limited to the few hours around low tide. New riverside developments, and concerns about safety has led to the blocking of access to the foreshore, severely restricting the ability to fish on the Tideway.

10.4.1. *Quality of the Fishery*

The Thames is one of the most important fisheries in the country. However there has been a number of issues raised by anglers which they believe have an impact on the Thames as a fishery. These are issues which need further investigation and include:

- over-abstraction of water in the Middle and Lower Thames;
- control of flows via weirs, changes in water levels and low flows;
- water quality;
- loss of breeding areas by habitat destruction, possibly caused by dredging, boat movements, bank protection schemes and stream characteristics.

The effect of boats on the river habitat is perceived by anglers to have contributed to this decline, although there is no scientific evidence to support this view. As yet there has been no comprehensive research on the effect of boating on rivers and previous research on canals is not believed to be applicable to the river environment.

POLICY 15: ANGLING ON THE THAMES

As an important national leisure activity and a traditional Thames sport, angling should be encouraged and the few remaining areas where public fishing is available should be protected for use by the casual angler.

Recommendations:

15a. The needs of anglers should be considered when deciding upon new

developments which could affect the Thames as a fishery or impede access for angling.

15b. The river habitat below water level should be considered when planning developments such as moorings, marinas, and landing stages. Sites for such developments should be sensitively selected to avoid possible damage to habitats, including reed beds and fish breeding and nursery areas.

15c. The remaining areas where public fishing is available should be protected and appropriately signed, as there are relatively few areas of the Thames available to the casual angler.

15d. The Sports Council are asked to review their position on angling, make clear their support system and to view the activity in a positive light as one of the most popular leisure activities.

ACTIONS

15.1. Research commissioned to investigate the quality of the Thames as a fishery.

FOR: **NRA**, possibly as part of a national project.

15.2. Bank management practices to be reviewed by NRA Navigation, Flood Defence, Fisheries and Conservation Sections to establish a system whereby fish breeding areas are created and safeguarded.

FOR: **NRA (Navigation, Fisheries, Conservation).**

15.3. Continue to work on weir fishing at NRA sites, reviewing access, facilities and safety.

FOR: **NRA (Recreation & Navigation).**



10.5. MOTOR CRUISING

Trends (see Section 4)

Motor Cruising is one of the most visible activities on the Thames. The river has been used as a navigation channel since Roman times, so cruising is certainly a traditional Thames activity. As it is a public navigation everyone has the right to travel on the river, as long as they fulfil the legal requirements of the Navigation Authority.

Currently there are 19,400 craft registered on the non-tidal Thames, 70% of which are powered craft. An additional 10,000 craft visit the Thames annually, either as tourists or competing at river events (see Section 4). Just over 10,000 (90%) of all powered craft are permanently moored on the river, 58% along the channel, 42% in marinas.

Motor cruising as expected, is seasonal, with the majority of activity taking place in the summer holidays, and bank holiday weekends. Craft registration and lock traffic information reflects the marked decline in cruising activity over the last few years. With the recession known to be a major contributing factor, it is assumed that as the economy recovers, boating throughout the country will recover and cruising on the Thames will become more popular. It is, however, limited by the ability to moor craft permanently on the river.

There are over 40 motor cruising clubs on the Thames. These clubs own or lease areas of moorings and most belong to the Association of Thames Yacht Clubs. However, the majority of cruiser owners do not belong to a club.

Upper Thames: The uppermost limit of the public navigation on the Thames is the High Bridge in Cricklade, beyond

that any right of navigation has to be negotiated with riparian landowners. The nature of the river above Lechlade, ie relatively narrow and shallow in summer, makes it impossible to take anything other than small boats to the area. In the past there have been unsuccessful lobbies to extend the navigation for larger boats, creating locks and widening the river. These schemes were not supported by the NRA.

The Thames above Oxford has always been much less busy with cruisers than further downstream, and it is home to only 6% of all permanent moorings on the river. As well as the relatively few permanent moorings, larger boats cannot come upstream as they are unable to cruise under the low span of Osney Bridge. The increase in cruising activity above Oxford in the past few years is primarily due to visiting craft coming onto the Thames from the Oxford canal (see Section 4 & Appendix 3).

Between Oxford and Goring the river is much busier as seen in the lock traffic information, although this is not reflected in the number of permanent moorings as the area has only 10% of the total for the river. The more frequent towns, villages and bridging points enable greater access to the banks and several landowners have in the past taken advantage of this, letting moorings on their river bank.

Middle Thames: This area is the busiest in terms of boat traffic, with Caversham lock having the most lock movements on the river (1993), closely followed by Hurley, Temple and Marsh Locks. This increased level of use is expected as the number of permanent moorings increases dramatically, with this 49 mile stretch having 43% of all river moorings. Of these 54% are on the main channel,

41% in marinas and 5% in backwaters (see Section 4 & Appendix 3).

As most people want to cruise at similar times there are dramatic peaks and troughs in activity, with bottlenecks at some locks on busy summer Sundays.

In line with the increased urbanisation of the river valley, there are many more towns and villages where temporary mooring is available. However, it is perceived to be expensive, as there are few services available and little information provided for visitors.

Lower Thames: As the most urbanised part of the non-tidal Thames, it is not surprising that this area has the greatest density of moorings, ie 41% of the total in a 17 mile stretch. Of these 52% are moored on the main channel, 35% are in marinas, and the remaining 13% in backwaters (see Section 4 & Appendix 3).

Lock traffic figures illustrate the popularity of cruising, with Chertsey and Shepperton among the busiest on the river. Further downstream the traffic drops as relatively few boats go through Teddington Lock onto the tidal river.

Facilities for cruisers are better as there are more boatyards and chandleries, with access to shops, pubs and other services frequently available along the bank.

Tidal Thames: Cruising on the tidal Thames between Teddington and the Thames Barrier requires specific skills and a well-powered craft. Relatively few craft leave the non-tidal Thames to cruise onto the Tideway. Cruising on the tideway is also limited due to a lack of accessible moorings, both permanent and for visiting craft.

As the PLA do not require craft to register, information on the number of

craft based in the Tideway is not readily available. However, there are a total of 1400 permanent moorings on the Tideway between the Thames Barrier and Teddington. The PLA licence approximately 770 moorings for both commercial and leisure use. They have a further 82 which are available for temporary mooring. As most of these moorings are offshore, without onshore access or facilities, they are not well used and many are empty.

The most popular moorings on the tideway are within the 6 marinas. They are perceived to be expensive, both for permanent and visitor moorings. It is the lack of visitor moorings on the tidal Thames which is the most common complaint by those who cruise on the Thames.

10.5.1. Demand For Moorings

The key limiting factor for cruisers on the Thames is permanent moorings. In the late 70s when it was felt that cruising on the Thames was reaching saturation point, there was a move by the Local Planning Authorities to limit the number of permanent moorings, especially in rural areas. As a consequence many Local Plans presume against allowing any new main channel moorings.

Although there is said to be a demand for moorings, many of the marinas and commercial moorings have vacancies. The demand is for cheaper, conveniently located, accessible moorings.

It is often said that moorings take away from the landscape value of riverside settings, but recent research has shown that visitors to waterways like to see boats as they add life and interest to the scene. Although it is important to retain the landscape of the Thames, whether urban or rural, it must not become a

deserted environment.

The main reason for curtailing the number of permanent moorings on the lower reaches of the non-tidal Thames was the concern that the river was too busy and adding more boats would cause serious user conflict and traffic congestion. Over the last few years the amount of river traffic has dropped substantially, with few cruisers on the river on weekdays and outside holiday periods.

This decrease in activity does not mean that there can be an automatic relaxation of controls on permanent moorings. If traffic on the Thames is to grow again it must be controlled to avoid the problems experienced in the late 70s. If there is sufficient demand and the supply of existing moorings is exhausted, there is scope for additional off-channel moorings in specific sites, away from current bottlenecks (eg Boveney), and in areas where a sensitive development of moorings would not have an adverse affect on the local environment or the natural habitat. There has, for example, been proposals for a marina in Oxford. If this were small and well planned, then the Thames in that area could sustain such a development.

Planning for the number of moorings on the Thames is difficult as there is no measurement of carrying capacity, other than the perceptions of river managers and users. The following policies reflect current perceptions of river traffic and the views of those responsible for the conservation of the natural habitat. As the changing character of different parts of the Thames is affected by cruising activity, and moorings in particular, there are separate policies for different areas.

POLICY 16: PERMANENT MOORINGS

16.1. *The Upper Thames (above Goring).*

In the Upper Thames the development of additional permanent moorings on the navigation should be resisted in order to maintain the quiet, rural character of the river valley. It is believed there is scope for additional off-stream moorings, but these must be low key rather than very large marina developments. They should be sensitively located, in areas where such development would be environmentally acceptable.

16.2. *Middle Thames (Goring - Staines) and Lower Thames (Staines - Teddington)*

In the Middle and Lower Thames the development of additional permanent moorings on the navigation should be resisted in order to maintain those parts of the river bank which are currently 'empty'.

16.3. *Throughout the non-tidal river the creation of new permanent base moorings should only be considered:*

- **in suitable locations off the navigation;**
- **when existing moorings in the area are fully utilised;**
- **where there are no bottlenecks of river traffic;**
- **where the site chosen is robust in terms of nature conservation;**
- **in an area of the river where there is existing development;**
- **at appropriate NRA locks as part of the site management plan.**

16.4. Tidal Thames:

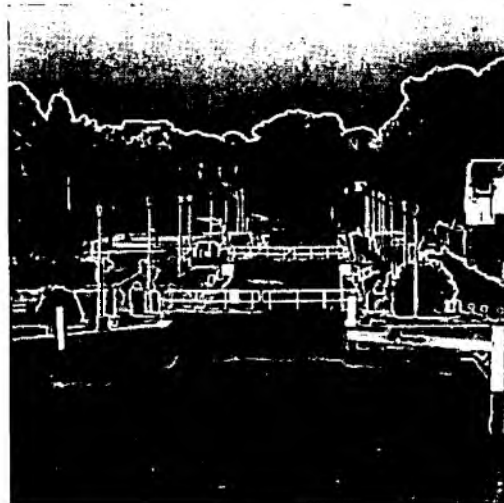
New permanent moorings on the tidal Thames should only be developed in areas where they will be accessible, well serviced, in a location which is not environmentally sensitive.

Recommendations:

16a. Upper Thames: There should be a limited increase in the number of new moorings in the next 5 years, when the situation with regards to river traffic should be reviewed again. A 10% increase equates to 144 additional moorings.

16b. Middle and Lower Thames: There should be a minimal increase in the number of new permanent moorings in the next 5 years. At that stage the situation with regards to river traffic should be reviewed again. In the Middle Thames a 2% increase equates to 78 moorings. In the Lower Thames a 1% increase equates to 37 moorings.

16c. Tidal Thames: A review of the management of existing moorings is required, listing those which are unsuitable and those which are vacant.



ACTION

16.1. Review the banks of the Thames and identify potential sites for off-river mooring.

FOR: **NRA (Recreation & Navigation)**, PLA and Local Authorities.

16.2. Review redundant stages and moorings, remove those which are derelict and re-instate natural margins. Re-establish the use of those which have potential, including the promotion of existing offshore moorings which are usable.

FOR: **NRA (Navigation & Conservation)**, PLA and Local Authorities.

10.5.2. Visitor Mooring

There is a constant demand for visitor moorings at popular locations. Many of the towns have temporary and overnight moorings, but boaters feel aggrieved when they pay a significant fee (£4 plus) for mooring when neither facilities or information are provided. The problem is most acute on the tidal Thames where it is perceived to be virtually impossible to

find a visitor mooring.

Boaters are happy to pay a reasonable mooring fee if they feel they get value for money. Visiting boats make a significant contribution to the local economy. Research shows the average spend per day, per boat, to be £48, spent in shops and pubs.

POLICY 17: VISITOR MOORING

The provision of well equipped, well signed visitor moorings should be a priority at river banks in Thameside towns and villages and in suitable locations on the tidal Thames in London.

Recommendation:

17a. Where possible the provision of facilities such as rubbish collection, toilets, showers and local information should be considered, with details of cost displayed.

ACTION

17.1. Review the provision of well equipped public visitor moorings in towns, villages and urban areas along the river, and investigate how they can be provided, focusing on areas where there is an existing hard river margin.
FOR: **Local Authorities** and NRA (Navigation & Recreation).

17.2. Provide information on the visitor moorings which are available both on the non-tidal and tidal Thames.
FOR: **NRA (Navigation)**, PLA, LAs and ATYC.

10.5.3 Residential Moorings

There are few residential mooring sites on the non-tidal Thames and in general they are discouraged as they require an

infrastructure which is not normally available on the river bank. It is felt that the development of new residential moorings on the main channel removes public access to the river.

POLICY 18: RESIDENTIAL MOORINGS

As with other permanent moorings, residential moorings will not be encouraged on the main river channel or in areas where they will have a detrimental effect on the amenity value and conservation interest of the river.

Recommendation:

18a. All sites of residential moorings should have adequate access, sanitary and rubbish disposal, which is the responsibility of the riparian landowner.

ACTION

18.1. Review residential moorings on the Thames and remove those sites where it is impossible and inappropriate for bankside access and services.
FOR: **LAs**, NRA (Navigation), PLA.

10.5.4. Facilities

In general those who cruise on the non-tidal Thames feel that the provision of facilities for boaters is good. There are two exceptions to this: toilets and petrol, where the safety requirements of sales make it prohibitively expensive to supply. There are toilets at most locks, but these are often only for men and they are not obviously open to the public. At present the general operating policy is that lock facilities are for the boaters using the lock, rather than pedestrians. The problem is most acute

in the Upper Thames where public toilets are not available close to the river in remote rural areas.

The provision of other facilities such as sanitary stations and water points at lock sites is part of ongoing NRA policy. This will be continued as part of a programme to prepare site management plans which will review the recreational potential of all lock sites.

On the tidal Thames there is a general perception among boaters that facility provision is poor, and associated with the lack of visitor moorings.

POLICY 19: CRUISING FACILITIES ON THE THAMES

Existing riverside facilities and services for boaters should be protected and the provision of additional services, especially petrol, should be supported in appropriate areas.

Recommendation:

19a. Facilities and services such as sanitary stations and toilets should be reviewed and provided in conjunction with facilities for pedestrian visitors to the river.

19b. Locks which suffer severe bottle-necks at peak times should be reviewed in terms of layby facilities, with these improved if necessary.

ACTION

19.1. Continue to discuss with the appropriate authorities the provision of fuel supplies, especially petrol which is in short supply on the Thames.

FOR: **NRA (Navigation)**, PLA and Commercial Operators.

19.2. Continue to review NRA-owned land, primarily lock sites, to investigate their potential for permanent and visitor moorings, and facilities for boaters such as sanitary stations, toilets, water points and rubbish collection.

FOR: **NRA (Recreation & Navigation)**.

10.5.5. Access onto the Thames

Often forgotten are the smaller motor boats which are brought to the river by trailer and launched every time they are used. In general the Thames is bereft of all but a few good launching sites, and many slipways are old ferry points with inadequate parking. The problem is added to by the lack of available public information and signage showing where these facilities are. Again the Upper Thames has more access problems, due to remoteness, than other areas of the river. In the lower reaches there are slipways and launching sites but often only a few people know of their existence.

Although the tidal Thames is dangerous for novice boaters, it is important to retain access for those who wish to launch craft onto the river. At present there are 28 launching sites on the tideway, 20 of which are upstream of Putney Bridge.

POLICY 20: ACCESS ONTO THE THAMES

Slipways, drawdocks, and launching sites are an important part of the infrastructure of the river and they should be protected, enhanced and encouraged in areas where they will not cause undue disturbance of the landscape or the natural habitat.

Recommendations:

20a. Existing slipways and drawdocks should be reviewed and where necessary upgraded with adequate car parking. Where new access points are needed the site selected must be environmentally robust and close to existing access points, bridges or settlements.

20b. Information should be provided both in leaflet form and as road signs, telling the public the locations of access points.

ACTION

20.1. Continue the review of slipways and launching sites and prepare a strategy for the refurbishment of old, and development of new, slipways and launching sites, with adequate car parking and signage.

FOR: **NRA (Navigation)**, PLA, and Local Authorities

10.5.6. Economic Factors

Maintaining the navigation of the Thames is a statutory duty of the NRA on the non-tidal Thames and the PLA on the Tidal Thames. On the non-tidal river part of the cost of the Navigation service is covered by the registration fee which all vessels must pay. The remaining costs are covered by National Government funds. The future funding of the NRA navigation service is under review, with efforts being made to highlight all those who benefit. Although the benefits are difficult to quantify, they are significant to the beneficiaries, who include:

- * the Local Authorities whose local economy benefits;
- * local people who use the well-maintained paths and riverside as a park;

- * visitors and tourists who visit the river, lock sites and enjoy the river environment;
- * the boat-based industries and riverside services;
- * riverside residents who benefit from a well-maintained river.

**POLICY 21:
FUNDING THE THAMES NAVIGATION**

The review of how the non-tidal Thames navigation is funded should consider its beneficiaries, not only boaters but all those who benefit. It should review how the costs of maintaining the navigation can be recovered, both directly and indirectly through central or local government.

Recommendation:

21a. The formation of a working party to review the funding of the maintenance of the Thames as a recreational resource should be discussed and progressed by all interested parties, including the Navigation Authorities, Local Authorities and river users.

ACTION:

21.1. Continue discussions, with a view to setting up a working party.

FOR: **NRA (Navigation & Recreation)**, Local Authorities, PLA, River User representatives.

10.5.7. Cotswold Canal Restoration

The possibility of restoring the link between the Rivers Thames and Severn via the Thames and Severn, and Stroud Water Canals has been discussed for many years. The Cotswold Canals Trust has been set up to progress this project.

Success depends on a combination of factors, not least water resources issues which the NRA are addressing. In terms of recreation the project is viewed positively as a reopened canal would provide a circular route to and from the Upper Thames, and consequently an increase in river traffic. It is, however, realised that other issues, including water resources, need to be resolved.

The timescale to complete the project is at least medium term (10-15 years) and possibly longer, but a short term aim of the Canals Trust is to link the Thames to the Cotswold Water Park.

POLICY 22: COTSWOLD CANAL RESTORATION

The rebuilding of the Thames and Severn Canal along its original route is supported as it will create an important water based resource and link the Thames to the Severn without disturbing the natural line of the Thames above Lechlade. Any moves to increase the navigability of the River Thames above Lechlade should be resisted.

Recommendation

22a. The Cotswold Canal Trust should continue to work with relevant organisations to coordinate mutually acceptable methods of restoring the canal.

ACTION

22.1. Continue to open sections of the canal and towpath as they are ready for recreational use.

FOR: Cotswold Canals Trust, LA's.

10.6. ROWING

Trends

Nationally the Amateur Rowing Association estimates that there are 30,000 active participants in rowing. Of these over 40% are based in the Thames region, in a total of 180 clubs. Since the 70s participation in rowing has declined and is now in a static phase. One area of growth has been in women's rowing.

A key difference between rowing and other water sports is that most of it is competition based, with very few 'casual' rowers. Training continues throughout the year, so rowers are active on the Thames all year round, although flood conditions limit participation in winter.

Sculling is growing in popularity, at the expense of eights, leading to more boats and fewer coxed crews. This trend is likely to continue.

The Upper Thames: There are some 40 rowing clubs on the Thames above Goring, 27% of the total number of clubs on the river. Most of these clubs (31 are Oxford College clubs) are located within the 1.5 mile stretch of river between Folly Bridge and Iffley lock where there are more than 3000 rowers. Above Oxford there is very little rowing as access is poor and the river width is much reduced. Most of the riverside towns between Oxford and Goring have a rowing club, and there are several local school clubs.

The Middle Thames: Most towns along the river between Goring and Staines have at least 1 rowing club, with several clubs based at schools, colleges and at Reading University. The most famous of all rowing venues is Henley, home of the international Regatta and soon to be home to a River and Rowing Museum.

Although there are stretches of river which are heavily used by rowers, there are not the same problems as experienced in Oxford. The Windsor area is busy but in the longer term many of the rowers will be using the Eton Rowing Course.

The Lower Thames: Here there are 19 rowing clubs (13% of the total on the river). As access along most of the river bank is reasonable, the clubs tend to be less concentrated in honeypot areas, but are spread throughout the area. Despite the fact that the river is busy with cruisers, both moored on the bank and cruising, rowing in the Lower Thames is both popular and successful.

The Tidal Thames: Rowing is very popular on the Tideway which is home to 61 rowing clubs (which is 41% of the total on the river). Most of this rowing activity is concentrated above Putney Bridge, with a few clubs located downstream at Greenwich. In the Central Tideway rowing is only available at low tide and the increase in commercial traffic makes it more dangerous.

10.6.1. Access and Facilities for Rowing

Rowing has a long history on the Thames and is an important tradition. Unfortunately it is sometimes perceived as being an elitist activity for the privileged few. The dominance of the sport by public schools and universities perpetuates this perception, although rowing is an activity that could be accessible to everyone. Most clubs have novice training available, but as with many sports, promotion is often by word of mouth, rather than more comprehensive campaigns which would reach other sectors of the population.

The Amateur Rowing Association have recognised this imbalance and hope to develop a wider profile for the sport.

There is very little casual rowing on the Thames. Most participants are members of a club based on the river. In general rowing takes place from the club base, rather than travelling by road with trailers to other parts of the river, except for competitions.

When rowers want to train in a quieter part of the river they often row further up or downstream, passing through the locks, some of which have rollers, particularly those in popular rowing areas.

POLICY 23: ROWING ON THE THAMES

As an important national sport and a traditional Thames activity, rowing should continue to be encouraged and accommodated in appropriate areas on the river Thames.

Recommendations:

23a. Following the Sports Council's policies of Sport for All, wider participation throughout all sectors of the population should be encouraged, including young people, women and the disabled.

23b. The development of rowing should be primarily via existing clubs, rather than the creation of new facilities. New facilities for rowing should be limited to:

- areas of the river not already heavily used for recreation;***
- where there is existing development on the bank;***
- where an increase in activity will not damage the natural habitat;***
- where a new activity/facility will***

enhance the amenity value of the river.

23c. To minimise conflict, rowers moving from 'home' waters must respect the activities of the regular users of the waters they are visiting and be given a briefing on the byelaws and codes of practice which may operate on other parts of the river.

23d. The negotiation of access arrangements with and between clubs and schools who have river based facilities is encouraged. Often there are mutually convenient times when facilities are not being used. This 'swap' arrangement is particularly relevant to schools and clubs who use the river at different times.

23e. The provision of rollers or access routes for rowers at locks should be encouraged in areas where they are needed.

ACTION

23.1. Clubs on the Thames which have room for growth will be encouraged to attract new members from all sections of the population via local promotions.
FOR: **Local Clubs**, Regional Sports Council, Local Authorities.

23.2. The generic promotion of rowing will help local initiatives, especially as part of school curriculum. This will be encouraged throughout the Thames Region.
FOR: **ARA**, Thames Rowing Council (TRC), Sports Council.

23.3. Schools and clubs will be encouraged to negotiate on sharing facilities and equipment both between themselves and with other schools or organised groups.

FOR: **ARA**, TRC, Local Clubs, Schools.

23.4. The passage of rowing boats through locks will be reviewed, specifically the need for, and the condition of rollers.

FOR: **NRA**, TRC.

10.7. CANOEING

Trends

Nationally, canoeing is a growth activity with forecasts estimating a 15% increase by the year 2000. This view was reflected by clubs on the Thames who believe demand will increase in the next 5 years. At the moment growth is more or less static, primarily due to the fact that clubs do not promote themselves very widely. The casual nature of much canoeing activity is reflected in the estimated 100,000 regular participants nationally, yet less than 50% of these are members of the BCU. In 1993 there were approximately 5000 canoes registered on the non-tidal river, including club based craft.

A trend in canoeing activity is the growth in popularity of family 'paddling'. Canoeing is suitable for all ages so is ideal for family groups. The recent Canoe Camping Club tour of the Thames (1993) was very popular and brought visitors of all ages from all over the world to the Thames.

At the other extreme, competitive canoeing is also growing, and as a consequence there has been an increase in the number of race meetings on the Thames.

White-water canoeing is popular at some of the weirs on the Thames. These weirs are viewed by canoeists as very important training waters, before moving onto more advanced white waters

elsewhere. There are now several Thames-based international white-water canoeists.

The Upper Thames: There are only 5 river-based canoe clubs, although there are several other non-river clubs which use the Upper Thames, as well as numerous casual canoeists who do not belong to a club or to the British Canoe Union (BCU). Canoeing is one of the few boating activities that can take place in the narrow and shallow river above Lechlade.

The only water sports centre in the Upper Thames, the Riverside Centre at Donnington Bridge (see Appendix 7) specialises in canoe training.

The Middle Thames: All 7 of the river based canoe clubs are centred at local towns and villages where there is reasonable access. Travelling to other parts of the river is not always easy as access points are difficult to find and facilities are inadequate, except in the already busy waters of places such as Reading and Windsor.

Several of the weirs in the Middle Thames are very popular throughout the region for white water canoeing, especially Hambleden and Old Windsor.

There are 2 water sports centres in the Middle Thames which offer canoe training: The County Centre in Pangbourne and The Longridge Scout Boating Centre (see Appendix 7).

The Lower Thames: There are 9 canoe clubs (27% of the total on the river) base on this stretch of river. As well as canoeists in river based clubs, the area is very popular with other clubs who travel to the area. Access is better than further upstream and several of the locks are well known for white-water canoeing,

Shepperton in particular. The Lower Thames is also a nationally important area for the development and training of racing canoeists. For the numerous 'casual' canoeists in the Thames valley, the Lower Thames provides a range of access points with reasonable visitor facilities. The main water sports centre in the Lower Thames is Raven's Ait, Kingston (see Appendix 7).

The Tidal Thames: Canoeing continues on the Tideway, which is home to 12 canoe clubs, which is 36% of the total on the river. Most of these are located upstream of Putney Bridge. Access is reasonably good with a few clubs sharing facilities with rowing clubs, which is a good use of bankside resources.

10.7.1. Access and Facilities for Canoeing

Canoeing has a well established novice training scheme which is taught in many clubs and in water sports centres. It is through these that many young people are introduced to canoeing. As with many voluntary run activities, canoe clubs often do not promote themselves but rely on word of mouth to generate new members.

One of the most frequently cited problems by canoeists is the lack of good access onto the Thames. This is particularly true in the rural Upper Thames where bridging points are few and far between. Where access does exist it is often not well known or signed. Associated with launch sites is car parking, again a particular problem in the Upper Thames. Although there are more slipways and launching points on the Lower and Tidal Thames, they are often not well signed therefore difficult to find.

Canoeists, particularly those who are touring, require basic facilities such as portage at locks, toilets, and campsites. Again these facilities are lacking throughout the Thames, although the problem is more acute in the Upper reaches.

The NRA have recently updated their camping information and published a leaflet, 'Campsites beside the River Thames'.

POLICY 24: CANOEING ON THE THAMES

Access to the Thames for casual, competitive and touring canoeing should be encouraged in suitable areas. Unsupervised novices should be discouraged from canoeing in the central tidal Thames in London.

Recommendations:

24a. The development of canoeing on the Thames will be encouraged through the existing club network, where there is capacity. Local clubs which have the capacity to take on new members should be encouraged to raise their profile in the community and promote the availability of training courses.

New canoe clubs will be encouraged where:

- the river is not already heavily used for recreation;***
- there is existing bankside development;***
- the activity and associated facilities will not damage the natural habitat.***

ACTION

24.1. Where there is capacity, canoe clubs and water sports centres will be encouraged to promote their activities locally and work with Sports

Development Officers to encourage those interested to take part.

FOR: **Local Clubs** and Local Authorities.

24.2. As part of lock site management plans, facilities for canoeists will continue to be reviewed, ie portage, toilets, campsites, etc. This will be followed by recommendations for improvements where necessary, and an agreed timescale for implementation.

FOR: **NRA (Navigation and Recreation).**

10.7.2. NRA/BCU Canoe Strategy

In 1993 the NRA (Thames Region) and local representatives of the BCU came together to review canoeing on the Thames, focusing in particular on the weirs and their suitability for white water canoeing. The end result of this review was a Canoeing Strategy for the Thames, which the NRA and the BCU agreed to progress.

At a national level the NRA and the BCU have been discussing the issue of joint licensing. This would lead to joint NRA registration and BCU membership. The issue has yet to be decided as it will depend on legislative change.



**POLICY 25:
NRA/BCU CANOE STRATEGY**

Liaison between the NRA and regional representatives of the BCU will continue, with both organisations committing time and resources to improving access and safety for canoeists on the Thames.

Recommendations:

25a. The NRA and regional BCU representatives will continue to work closely together on the implementation of the Canoe Strategy for the Thames.

ACTION

25.1. Work will continue on bringing legislative change which may allow a joint licence covering NRA registration and BCU membership.

FOR: **NRA HQ** and **BCU HQ**.

10.7.3. White-Water Canoeing

The primary function of weirs on the Thames is controlling water levels and maintaining the Thames as a public navigation. Over the years the weir pools of some weirs have been used for white water canoeing.

Problems of safety at weirs has always been an issue, particularly with inexperienced canoeists who may not belong to a club. This issue has become more acute with the design of some weirs with 'anti-scour' devices which are dangerous to anyone who falls into the river.

Canoeing is not encouraged close to fish passes on weirs as it is believed to interfere with the operation of the pass.

**POLICY 26:
WHITE-WATER CANOEING**

The design of weirs and other flood defence structures should take the recreational use of the Thames into consideration.

Recommendation:

26a. Discussions between the BCU and river engineers should take place at an early stage of weir design to highlight any potential for recreational canoeing, with subsequent designs accommodating safe canoeing where possible.

ACTION

26.1. When building or repairing weirs discussions will be held between the NRA engineers, recreation and navigation staff, and the BCU local representatives to consider the potential of the weir for safe recreational use.

FOR: **NRA Flood Defence**, Navigation and Recreation, (and other functions if necessary), and **BCU**

10.8. SAILING

Trends

Nationally sailing had a rapid growth in popularity in the 70s and 80s, but the recession slowed growth in the late '80s, as reflected in the membership figures for the Royal Yachting Association and the static membership of Thames based clubs.

National forecasts expect participation in sailing to increase over the next 10 years as the economy recovers from recession, and outdoor sports continue to become more popular. This view is not reflected by all Thames based clubs. A significant number feel that the demand for sailing

on the river is diminishing, with most of the activity, including novice courses, taking place on gravel pits and reservoirs.

Sailing on the Thames is like a specialist form of the sport. It does not appeal to all sailors but there is, and will continue to be, a demand for it.

The Upper Thames: Above Oxford, sailing is confined to the wider reaches of the river, the most westerly club being the Medley club, located close to Oxford. Further upstream the river becomes too narrow.

The other three sailing clubs on the Upper Thames are located close to towns or villages. There is little casual sailing, those wishing to sail join the club system where novice training is normally available. The key locations for sailing in the area are Farmoor Reservoir and the Cotswold Water Park.

The Middle Thames: Sailing is more popular as the river becomes wider. There are 9 sailing clubs based at key locations on the Middle Thames. The Bourne End to Cookham reach is particularly popular for sailing, as can be seen on busy summer Sundays.

The Lower Thames: There is a long established tradition of sailing on the Lower reaches of the river, with 13 clubs which is 40% of the total on the river.

The Tidal Thames: There are 7 sailing clubs based on the Tideway above the Barrier, which is 27% of the total on the river. As with the other water sports, almost all of these are located above Putney, with a few clubs in the Greenwich area, and within the dock which are used for water sports.

10.8.1. *The Decline of Sailing on the Thames?*

Despite the fact that the demand for sailing on the Thames is decreasing, clubs based on the river are very active. However, many of these do not promote themselves and new members are relatively few and far between. This can lead to a perception of elitism. If clubs are to develop and sustain themselves in the future they need to overcome this image and promote themselves to wider sections of the local community as an activity that all sections of the population, young and old, can take part in.

Obviously river sailing is restricted, compared to reservoirs or lakes. The quality of the sailing is affected by several physical factors, one of the most important being depth of water at the edges. When the river banks and edges become silted, sailing is limited and in many cases impossible, especially in reaches which are busy with other users. The simplest answer is to dredge but this is not always acceptable in terms of conservation of the wildlife habitat.

Another physical problem for sailing is tree growth on the river bank which disturbs the wind and can make sailing impossible. Cutting bankside trees is an easy answer but this is not always possible, again in the interests of conservation and the strong public opinion against tree cutting.

As there are so few sailing clubs in the Upper Thames, and they are widely spread throughout the river, accommodating reasonable demands to improve the physical requirements of sailing should be possible, if coordinated effectively. As the number of sailing

clubs increases in the Middle and Lower Thames, making changes to the bank can have a more marked impact on the natural habitat and on other users, therefore it is more difficult to meet the demands of sailors.

POLICY 27: SAILING ON THE THAMES

The opportunity to sail on the Thames should be protected and the activity encouraged to develop through the existing club system.

Recommendation:

27a. Sailing clubs should promote their activities throughout the local community to all sections of the population.

ACTION

27.1. The development of sailing on the Thames will be encouraged by the promotion of the activity through novice training programmes at existing clubs and Water Sports Centres.

FOR: **Clubs**, Sports Development Officers.

27.2. Serious physical problems which are limiting sailing (eg silting, overgrown trees), will be reviewed and in appropriate areas well managed, sensitive dredging and tree management programmes will be agreed.

FOR: **Sailing Clubs**, NRA (Conservation and Fisheries), Local Authorities.

10.9. SCUBA DIVING

Trends

Nationally scuba diving is in a growth phase, with approximately 70,000 participants. This is expected to rise as the number of training courses increases, both here and abroad. The nature of the

sport and the training programme mean that it is a club based activity, with few who dive casually in the UK.

Rivers are not immediately associated with scuba diving but for inland based diving clubs they often provide the only local opportunities for the sport. The Thames is a relatively popular river for divers, and is used by locally based clubs for training purposes. Although it is fondly regarded, it is by no means an ideal diving resource, especially in the busier reaches of the river. The tidal Thames is considered to be too dangerous for diving due to the fast flow, the amount of traffic, the very poor visibility, and the tidal nature of the water. It is strongly discouraged by the PLA.

10.9.1. Lack of Facilities for Scuba Diving

The non-tidal Thames is used by clubs for training purposes primarily because there are no other training facilities in the region. As a training resource the Thames is poor because of lack of depth, poor visibility, water quality issues, and the danger from boats.

Diving in the Thames usually takes place very early in the morning when there are few, if any boats on the water.

There are very strict safety regulations and those who dive in the Thames accept the risks, but as the popularity of the sport grows, the need for good, safe inland training facilities will increase. These are not yet available in the Thames Valley and until they are the non-tidal Thames will continue to be used as a training resource, despite its inadequacy.

**POLICY 28:
SCUBA DIVING IN THE THAMES**

Diving in the non-tidal Thames under safe, controlled conditions is not discouraged, but the provision of good local training facilities, in appropriate gravel pits or lakes, as an alternative to the Thames, is strongly encouraged. Diving will not be permitted where it felt to be dangerous. All those scuba diving in the Thames must follow the local navigation regulations and abide by the rules of the Governing Bodies of sport.

Recommendation:

28a. There should be a review of potential sites for the training of recreational scuba diving in the Thames Valley, with appropriate sites identified and developed as a training centre.

28b. In reviewing accesses to the river (slipways, launching sites, etc), the needs of scuba divers will be considered, with safety issues paramount.

ACTION

28.1. There is an urgent need for good training facilities for divers in the Thames Valley. Sites have been discussed, and the development of the most appropriate site(s) will be supported.

FOR: **Sports Council**, NRA (Recreation), local clubs and local reps of BSAC and the SAA.

28.2. The special safety needs of divers will be highlighted to other river users through clubs and codes of practice.

FOR: **Local clubs**, Governing Bodies of sport, NRA (Recreation and Navigation), CCPR Water Code.

10.10. Water Sports Centres on the Thames

There are ten water sports centres based on or close to the Thames, who offer training in a variety of water sports. Five of these are located throughout the non-tidal river and five are located on the tidal Thames in London.

Most are provided by the public sector (a combination of County and District Councils), and so the services offered are low in cost and available to a wide section of the community.

Funding is the key issue which threatens the survival of these centres, yet for the majority of the community they offer an excellent access route to the Thames. The advantage of these centres is that they provide a safe environment, reasonable equipment and well trained staff who teach novices to enjoy the river without the safety risks that are associated with an unsupervised environment.

These centres are described more fully in Appendix 7.



**POLICY 29:
WATER SPORTS CENTRES ON THE
THAMES**

Water sports centres are a valuable route to the safe use and enjoyment of the Thames for sports and recreation, and their provision should be continued. Provision of additional water sports centres should be considered:

- in areas close to centres of population and to access routes;
- in areas where there is existing riverside development;
- in stretches of the river which have capacity for increased activity;
- where the impact on the environment is minimal and acceptable;
- within a suitable off-river basin.

Recommendations:

29a. The providers and managers of existing centres are asked to review current facilities and services, and make improvements where possible, especially on aspects of the centre which would increase the throughput and generate income.

29b. Programmes should be developed and expanded to include activities for adults as well as children, and increase off-peak use of the centres.

29c. The water sports centres should be more widely publicised throughout their catchment area, not just to schools but through community centres, libraries, newspapers, and local groups.

29d. The water sports centres should operate to high safety standards which are set in writing, constantly

reviewed and updated and always adhered to.

29e. The water sports centres should review the visual impact of the landscape around their facilities and where necessary make improvements.

ACTION

29.1. Each water sports centre should review their facilities, services and marketing, and prepare a development plan which focuses on increasing throughput, and generating income, possibly through other activities.

FOR: **Water sports centres**, in conjunction with Local Authorities, Sports Council and NRA (Recreation).

29.2. Where there are gaps in the availability of facilities in which to learn water sports, sites should be identified and funding negotiated. There is scope to operate these as community centres which incorporate facilities for the public such as cafe's, toilets, car parking and the public use of slipways.

FOR: **Water sports centres**, Local Authorities (Leisure Depts), NRA (Recreation), Sports Council.

29.3. The planned water sports facility at Thames Valley Park in Earley should be taken forward.

FOR: **LAs (Leisure and Planning Depts)**, Developers, Sports Council, NRA (Recreation).

10.11. CYCLING

Trends

In recent years there has been a rapid increase in the popularity of cycling, primarily mountain biking. As the terrain along parts of the Thames is rural and relatively rough, it is becoming more popular as a location for off-road biking. Walkers always have priority over cyclists and as there are areas where the path along the river is narrow, pedestrians can be intimidated by speeding bikes.

There have always been a number of cyclists using the Thames Path, although as it is a public footpath for most of its length, they generally have no right to do so without the landowners permission. Normally landowners, do not object to sensible cycling and in the past there have been very few problems along the Thames.

There are stretches of the Thames Path which have been proposed as suitable for cycle tracks. Usually these are areas where the path is wide, with a good surface, eg the more urban stretches of Oxford, Reading, Richmond, Kingston and in some areas of London. In other areas bikes can damage the surface of the riverside paths, especially when the ground is soft, and where there is heavy usage.

There is currently a proposal by SUSTRANS to create a cycle route linking Dartford to Hampton Court along more than 40 miles of riverside paths and parallel roads.

10.11.1 Growth of Cycling

As cycling has become more and more popular there is potential for conflict with walkers and anglers, and with landowners who may wish to prohibit

cycling on their land. At present cycling along the Thames is not encouraged, except on designated cycle tracks. As a popular and healthy activity there are significant pressures to accommodate cycling along the Thames, but cyclists need to be aware of the types of paths they can legally use and the rights of other users.

In tandem with the growth in cycling there has been a significant increase in the number of requests for information about cycling along the Thames Path. The cyclists appear to be unclear of the law or how it should be interpreted.

POLICY 30: CYCLING ALONG THE THAMES

Cycling will only be encouraged on suitable and legally-defined stretches along the Thames, where it has been agreed by the landowner, and its effect on the environment and other river users is minimal.

Recommendation:

30a. A review of paths along the Thames is needed to establish which areas are suitable for cycling, and which areas could be upgraded to accommodate cycling.

30b. Guidance on the Thames should be provided for cyclists, informing them of the law and how to behave when/if they decide to cycle along the river.

ACTION

30.1. Carry out a review of the Thames Path to establish suitable cycle routes, taking both usage levels and the natural environment into consideration.

FOR: **LAs**, NRA (Recreation), Countryside Commission, Governing Bodies for

Cycling, Ramblers Assoc., SUSTRANS, landowners.

30.2. An information leaflet to be provided on cycling along the Thames. FOR: **Countryside Commission**; NRA (Recreation); Governing Bodies for cycling; Sports Council.

10.12. RIVER THAMES INTEREST GROUPS

There are numerous volunteer groups who have the Thames as their focus. They include local conservation groups, historical societies, and educational trusts. All of them contribute, in one way or another, to the character of the river. (See Appendix 6).

10.12.1. River User Groups

One of the most significant of these groups, in terms of recreation, are the River User Groups (RUGs). These were created following a recommendation in the 1980 River Thames Leisure Policy²¹ where it was suggested that the management of recreation on the river could be improved if there were user groups to coordinate and communicate within specific areas.

Eight groups were created to cover the non-tidal Thames, with one for the tidal Thames to Tower Bridge. Since 1980 some of these have amalgamated and there are now seven User Groups.

An additional group operates on the Tideway - the River Users Liaison Group which is run by the PLA, with membership dominated by commercial rather than recreational users.

The aims of the River User Groups are:

1. To act as a forum of communication and to promote understanding between all users.
2. To safeguard the interests of all river users.

3. To promote safety and goodwill.

River User Groups meet three times a year and all the RUG Secretaries and Chairmen have an annual meeting. All clubs, commercial operators, interest groups and Local Authorities are invited to the meetings, but some activities are better represented than others.

Navigation and Recreation staff from the NRA and PLA are also invited. Although run by volunteers, administration costs are paid by the NRA and PLA.

The River User Group system has run effectively over the last 14 years. Many potential conflicts have been resolved and lines of communication have been opened. The RUGs have a key role to play in implementing this Strategy which focuses on cooperation and communication as the way to optimise recreation on the Thames. The following policies, recommendations and actions are intended to develop and promote the RUG system.

POLICY 31: RIVER USER GROUPS

The system of River User Groups will continue to be supported by the NRA and the PLA, and their role as the a vital communications link between users and managers will be developed.

Recommendations:

31a. RUGs will review their list of contacts on a regular basis to ensure that all river users and relevant interest groups in the area are invited to meetings.

31b. Contact should be established between riparian Local Authorities and RUGs to set up a line of communication with river users.

31c. All clubs and commercial operators should regularly attend RUG meetings and supply information for the annual calendar of events which the RUGs produce.

31d. The NRA will send representatives from both Navigation and Recreation Sections to all RUG meetings. They will act as the link between the various RUGs throughout the river. The PLA will send a representative from their Harbour service RUG 9.

31e. The PLA River Users Liaison Group will encourage more active participation from the recreational users .

ACTION

31.1. RUGs will update their User address list on a regular basis , and make efforts to invite those who are sceptical about the effectiveness of RUGs to meetings.

FOR: **RUGs and NRA (Recreation).**

31.2. RUG Secretaries and representatives of riparian Local Authorities will maintain regular contact. The latter to attend meetings when it is appropriate to do so.

FOR: **LAs (Leisure Dept), RUGs, NRA (Recreation).**

31.3. RUGs to maintain regular contact with each other through minutes of meetings, calender of events, and attendance of neighbouring meetings by key individuals (Secretary, Chairman).

FOR: **RUGs.**

31.4. NRA and PLA Recreation and Navigation to attend all relevant RUG meetings and act as another communication link in the RUG system. The NRA will continue to organise an annual meeting of RUG Chairmen and

Secretaries to exchange information.
FOR: **NRA (Recreation), PLA, RUGs.**

10.13. RIVER THAMES RECREATION STRATEGY: Implementation

This Recreation Strategy presents a comprehensive range of policies, recommendations and actions which could enhance the recreational use of the Thames. The next and most important stage is implementation.

An obvious answer is to create a position where an individual would be given responsibility for ensuring that policies are adopted and actions carried. In the case of this Strategy that is not the answer. To make an impact on the Thames and its environment the philosophy of this Strategy needs to become part of the everyday thinking and operations, of the all those concerned with using or managing what is a multi-functional river. Achieving this will require commitment at a senior level, whether it be within a club, a Local Authority or the NRA.

A major issue is finance - who will pay for implementation of the actions that require financial resources? The most likely way forward is through partnership schemes between Agencies, Local Authorities and users, with help from grants and funds available. Details of sources of funds are included in Appendix 8.

Monitoring and updating the Strategy will require a commitment of resources by the NRA and the Sports Council. Fulfilling recommendations and actions will also require a commitment of time and resources by all those involved.

**POLICY 32:
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RIVER
THAMES RECREATION STRATEGY**

Implementation of the River Thames Recreation Strategy should be given priority by the agencies involved:

- * National Rivers Authority
- * Sports Council (Southern, South East and Greater London Regions)
- * Regional Councils for Sport and Recreation
- * Riparian Local Authorities
- * Port of London Authority
- * Governing Bodies of Sport and Clubs

Recommendations:

32a. Riparian Local Authorities should use the Recreation Strategy as an advisory document when preparing and reviewing their Local Plans and UDPs, and when reviewing planning applications.

32b. The NRA will use the strategy when preparing and reviewing Catchment Management Plans for the Thames.

32c. Departments within the NRA, particularly Recreation and Navigation, Conservation and Fisheries, will use the Strategy to guide future work on the River Thames.

32d. Create a database of Thames information which will be updated as part of the Strategy monitoring system. An individual should be given responsibility for carrying out this task.

ACTION

32.1. Incorporate the Strategy as part of the Thames Catchment Management Planning Process.

FOR: NRA (Planning Depts)

32.2. Discuss the provision of a Thames Information Centre, to include information and advice for those using the Thames for recreation. This could be part of a museum/educational facility.

FOR: **NRA (Recreation)**, Sports Council, LAs.

32.3. Provide, and update regularly, a database of information on Thames-based recreation.

FOR: **NRA (Recreation)** and Sports Council.

32.4. Adopt the Recommendations and Actions within the Strategy as part of future work programmes.

FOR: **NRA (Navigation, Recreation, Conservation, Fisheries)**, Sports Council and Local Authorities (Leisure Services).

32.5. Review the success of the Strategy and its implementation through a joint meeting to be held in 1996.

FOR: **NRA (Recreation)**, Sports Council and Local Authorities.



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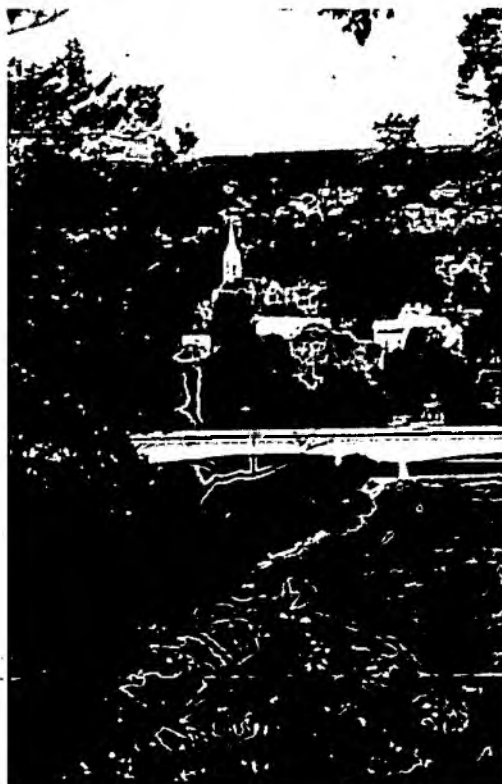
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