

2.0 Approach

The Environment Agency formally started work on the Thames waterway plan in June 2003 with a workshop forming part of the launch of the River Thames Alliance. A broad range of organisations was represented, including local authorities, government bodies, boating associations, environmental bodies, commercial trade organisations and user groups. More than 70 key groups participated in workshop sessions that shaped the core objectives and identified the key dilemmas and opportunities that the plan would need to consider.

The next stage of preparing the plan involved:

- reviewing the cultural strategies, recreation and planning policies of all the local authorities next to the river
- consideration of how the Thames waterway plan objectives might help to achieve the policy objectives of other key groups
- gathering baseline information, including data on navigation and recreation facilities and the environmental, social and economic characteristics of the river corridor
- consultation with commercial operators to help understand the needs of businesses directly and indirectly reliant on the river
- considering the aspirations of users for provision of facilities and services on the river.

Drawing on this, we developed waterway standards, identified key issues and formulated policy options. We examined the sustainability of each option to see what impact each would have. We then considered measures that would reduce any harmful effects, particularly on the environment and identified opportunities for enhancements. The use of Strategic Sustainability Assessment (SSA)¹ has been an integral part of the plan process from the outset. We looked at the potential impacts from boating, towpath use and facility development and used the SSA to identify preferred policies and actions. The SSA also established indicators that could be used to monitor the sustainability of the plan. (These are explored in section 20 of the plan.)

One area of debate was whether (and how) to define a geographical area for the river and its corridor. Some argued that this was essential to establish where the plan's policies would be applied and as the basis for seeking special planning status for a green river park. We decided not to follow this route, preferring instead to focus on outcomes. We believe that they are achievable within the existing framework if members of the River Thames Alliance adopt the policies of the plan, and the importance of the river and its wider valley setting is adequately recognised in the regional spatial strategy.²

Progress on the plan was reported to a meeting of the River Thames Alliance in November 2003. Over 100 stakeholders were invited to share their aspirations for the river at this event or to make written contributions.

The River Thames Alliance also ran workshops in Reading in June 2004 to consider draft waterway standards and to review and prioritise possible policies and supporting actions that would help achieve the core objectives. People were invited to send written comments on the standards, policies and actions by the end of October 2004. Maps were also provided to make it easier for stakeholders to record their aspirations for the river, using local knowledge, on a site-by-site basis. Over 60 organisations sent comments.

We were able to use all this information to help produce a final draft plan that was issued as a formal consultation document seeking views from interested groups within a period of 12 weeks, ending July 2005. In total we received 114 responses. We received 46 consultation responses online, 45 through the post, and 23 letters. We grouped the comments received and gave them all careful consideration. Requests for changes to the plan were considered by the River Thames Alliance Management Committee.

To see a summary of the consultation comments and the changes made, please go to our website www.riverthamesalliance.com. The website also has maps that show where new facilities are needed and improvements suggested by consultees.

If you do not have access to the Internet and would like a copy of the consultation response summary, the improvements maps, or if you have any other questions about the Thames waterway plan, you can:

- telephone us on 0845 6015336
- email us at: visitthames@environment-agency.gov.uk putting 'TWP' in the subject heading
- write to Angela Morris at:
King's Meadow House
King's Meadow Road
Reading
RG1 8DQ

We are very grateful for all the help, advice and comments provided. This plan reflects the issues, opportunities and problems identified by all the individuals and groups who have participated. Appendix 1 lists the organisations that have responded to the consultations.

Taking the Thames waterway plan forward

33 members of the River Thames Alliance have already endorsed the plan. We hope that all our members will quickly integrate the policies and actions into their everyday work. We must turn the plan's objectives into improvements on the riverbank.

All the data, maps and information used in the preparation of the plan are freely available for members to incorporate into their own work. Inevitably, some facts will have changed since the plan was written. We welcome feedback to keep the data and maps accurate.

We will develop a simple way to keep track of improvements made and record new opportunities as they arise. This will allow us to keep the plan alive, active and up-to-date. We will provide annual reports on progress and carry out a full review of the plan in five years time.



¹ SSA is explained in section 5.4 of this plan.

² Under preparation by the South East England Regional Assembly. See section 4.0