

This recommends that full consideration for freight transport by water should be given in the Regional Spatial Strategy. (The report also provides a valuable, succinct explanation of the relevant planning guidance, and an outline of the Freight Facilities Grant (FFG). The grant is available from the Department for Transport to assist with the extra costs generally associated with moving freight by water by offsetting the capital costs of providing waterside freight handling facilities.)

Freight policy We will encourage commercial transport of freight on the river.

POLICY 23

Possible actions

- 1 give full consideration to waterway freight opportunities in regional spatial strategies, sub regional plans and local development frameworks
- 2 commission a study into the potential for freight transport on the river

Water transport is more environmentally friendly than road or rail.

Q

Are you aware of any potential freight traffic? Would you be willing to contribute to a study of freight potential?

(Use section 9 – Specific Questions)

11.0 Landscape

11.1 Geology (map 14)

The source of the Thames is in the Jurassic Limestone of the Cotswold Hills. Below the Cotswolds it flows on to an extensive area of Oxford Clay. This is the start of the wider, upper Thames flood plain. Between Somerford Keynes and Latton, the clay is covered with extensive deposits of limestone gravel. This mineral has been excavated over large areas, leaving the environmentally diverse Cotswold Water Park.

Below Cricklade, right through to Oxford, the river corridor continues on Oxford Clay. Below Oxford, the Thames flows over more clays before cutting through the chalk escarpment at the southwestern end of the Chiltern Hills at Goring Gap. It continues on chalk right through Reading to Maidenhead.

Below Maidenhead, at Dorney, the river moves on to the London Clay. From here on, the Thames continues flowing on this clay until it reaches the Tideway at Teddington.

11.2 Landscape character (map 15)

The landscape character of the River Thames changes to reflect both the underlying geology and man's influence over the centuries. The river flows through richly varied rural and urban settings encompassing farmland, built up city centres, parks and royal palaces. In combination this gives the river its unique appeal.

The river itself and the activities upon it vary in scale. The upper reaches are narrower and more winding. At 2.28 metres, the headroom of Osney Bridge in Oxford is by far the lowest on the river. This means that the larger motor cruisers common on the lower reaches of the river are unable to cruise above Oxford. This is an important factor in the character of the river above Oxford.

The Thames often exhibits crystal clear conditions. In shallower locations, the bed of the river; patterns of water currents, gravel runs, underwater plant communities and even fish, become part of the natural landscape.

Islands in the river, particularly those with large mature trees, are important landscape features which provide a dramatic visual impact. Without positive action, many of the islands may disappear through erosion, taking with them the wildlife they support and changing the local landscape.

11.3 Landscape designations (map 16)

For over a quarter of its length the river runs through designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty¹ (AONB).

Yet again the river forms the boundary. It marks the southern and southwestern edge of the Chilterns AONB and the eastern end of the North Wessex Downs AONB. Goring Gap cuts the chalk ridge, with the wooded reaches of the Thames separating the two AONBs at this point.

The river is also the northern boundary of the Great Western Community Forest². It is one of 12 community forests in England where local people and organisations are working together to create a better environment.

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Landscape policy We will conserve and enhance the special characteristics of landscape value in the river corridor.

Possible actions River-wide

- 1 conduct a consistent and comprehensive landscape assessment of the entire river, updating existing studies where necessary
- 2 form local partnerships (similar to the Thames Landscape Strategy Hampton to Kew) that will use local river corridor characterisations to develop an agreed set of local prioritised actions, based on a thorough understanding of the natural, built and cultural heritage
- 3 sensitively manage the key landscapes, landmarks, locks, open spaces and vistas
- 4 respect and restore historic features
- 5 minimise the impact from potentially intrusive development
- 6 introduce selective landscape and amenity enhancements to reduce visual intrusion from recreation access, car parking and boat mooring facilities
- 7 create ecological buffer zones between the river and adjacent arable fields, and encourage a greater diversity of indigenous trees, shrubs and other plants where biodiversity has been reduced by agricultural practices
- 8 introduce planting to screen intrusive features (for example: road, rail and pylon routes) and frame views³
- 9 reinstate grassland and water meadows and introduce or regenerate woodland and scrub habitats on marginal land³
- 10 review, update and promote wide adoption of the Thames Environment Design Handbook
- 11 restore river infrastructure using traditional construction materials and appropriate designs (specified in Thames Environment Design Handbook)
- 12 retain headroom restriction on boat size imposed by Osney Bridge

The special landscape qualities are a vital part of the visitor experience.

Q Are you aware of any existing landscape assessments? Would you be willing to contribute to carrying out an assessment? (Use section 9 – Specific Questions)

¹ Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) were created by the legislation of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act of 1949. There are 41 AONBs in England and Wales.

² The Great Western Community Forest was founded in 1994 in part as a result of priorities for environmental protection and sustainable living, established in the Rio Earth Summit Agreement of 1992.

³ Care should be taken to ensure that planting does not create a wind shadow on reaches used for sailing.