

14.0 Built heritage (map 20)

The River Thames provides a richly textured heritage landscape, with one of the highest concentrations of historic buildings, parks and scheduled ancient monuments in the country¹. The diversity and wealth of these built heritage sites are key to the unique landscape character of the Thames, providing powerful reminders of the work and way of life of earlier generations and providing places of enjoyment for local people and visitors today.

The scheduled ancient monuments range in scale from Windsor Castle and Hampton Court Palace to Godstow Abbey and Halfpenny Bridge. Many other bridges over the non-tidal river are scheduled, including those at Radcot, Wallingford, Abingdon and Chertsey. Major historic parks and gardens include Cliveden and Taplow Court.

The river itself also provides an unparalleled collection of built river heritage, from the remains of the 1630's stone pound lock at Iffley Lock to many locks, weirs, and lock houses that remain in use today.

Heritage policy We will maintain and enhance the cultural heritage, historic assets and archaeological value of the river and its corridor

Possible actions

- 1 manage land, buildings and structures (such as locks, bridges and weirs) of historic interest, in harmony with their setting, design, materials and construction methods
- 2 carry out an audit of heritage features
- 3 protect and conserve buildings, sites and objects of archaeological, architectural, engineering or historic interest
- 4 raise awareness of historical significance of sites along the Thames through education, signage and interpretation initiatives

The Thames is world renowned for its character and history which helps to attract visitors and thus contributes to social and economic well-being

POLICY 27

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Can you identify sites where heritage conservation or enhancement measures are particularly important? (Use section 8 – Aspirations)

¹ Scheduled Ancient Monuments are sites of national importance designated by English Heritage as particularly significant and vulnerable to change. English Heritage also maintains a register of parks and gardens of particular historic interest.

15.0 Gateway opportunities

Opportunities exist to establish a clear identity for the river at the junctions with adjoining navigations.

A number of working groups are already applying many of the principles of the Thames Waterway Plan to local studies. These include:

- Reading Waterspace Strategy (where the Kennet & Avon Canal joins)
- Teddington Gateway Project (where the river becomes tidal)
- Oxford Waterways Partnership (where the Oxford Canal joins)
- Cotswold Canals Restoration (which will restore the junction with the Thames & Severn Canal at Lechlade)

The Cotswold Canals Partnership has completed initial feasibility studies for the restoration of the 12km Stroudwater Navigation and the 46km Thames & Severn Canal which together link the Thames to the River Severn and Gloucester. The Heritage Lottery Fund has given stage one approval to a £11.3 million bid for the first stage of restoration from near Stroud to the junction with the Gloucester & Sharpness Canal. The full restoration on to the Thames will eventually change the pattern of boating on the river, introducing through traffic to the upper reaches and intensifying the trend towards more narrow boats using the river.

The proposed restoration of the Wilts and Berks Canal will create a further gateway at Abingdon, and when complete would also create new waterway rings with the Kennet and Avon Canal and the Cotswold Canals.

16.0 Education (map 22)

The Thames can be used to inspire delivery of many areas of the national curriculum. It provides an educational resource, relevant for several subjects, that is easily accessible for study and fieldwork. 804 schools lie within five km of the river.

The river also provides a rich resource for informal learning for people of all ages. In addition sport and recreation provide opportunities for social and physical education.

Education policy We will optimise the contribution the river can make to education and life long learning

Possible actions

- 1 establish an education sub group of the River Thames Alliance
- 2 introduce learning projects in partnership with education resource providers like the River & Rowing Museum, including a pilot using passenger boats on the river
- 3 produce curriculum support material based on the river corridor

The river provides an accessible and interesting resource, relevant to many education disciplines.

17.0 Visitor risk management

There are several reasons for effective visitor risk management: First and foremost we want visitors to the river to return home happy and satisfied with their experiences. We have a moral obligation to consider their safety, and protect them from unnecessary or unreasonable risk.

Under Section three of the Health and Safety at Work Act, we have a duty to ensure the safety of those not in our employment, so far as is reasonably practicable. We need to understand what ‘reasonably practicable’ means. In addition, as owners and managers of land and property, we owe our visitors (including trespassers) a duty of care to ensure they are reasonably safe,

Successful risk management demands a partnership between the manager, the visitor and other groups (such as governing bodies of sport), recognising that each carries a share of the responsibility for safety, dependent on the type of activity and location.

Visitors are frequently away from supervision by staff. This leads to poor reporting of accidents, incidents and near misses.

Different types of river user have widely differing expectations: from white water canoeists seeking adventure, difficulty and challenge to parents looking for a place for their children to picnic and play without coming to harm.

We must take care to avoid implementing safety measures that conflict significantly with our access, recreation, landscape, heritage and environmental responsibilities. Nor should we take away people’s sense of adventure and freedom.

Visitor health & safety policy We will adopt a consistent approach to visitor risk management

Possible actions

- 1 carry out risk assessment and introduce risk control measures in accordance with the guiding principles established by the Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group¹
- 2 gather information on accidents and near misses from user groups

We believe that it is possible to achieve acceptable levels of risk and enhance the environment and encourage public access. Safety, access and conservation need not be mutually exclusive.

¹ Managing Visitor Safety in the Countryside, principles and practice. Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group, April 2003 www.vscg.co.uk The Guiding Principles are shown in Appendix 4