

# MEDIA RELEASE

14 April 2005

## **Voice your views on the future of the River Thames**

### **Thames Waterway Plan launched for consultation**

Press are invited to the launch of the Thames Waterway Plan consultation draft on April 26, from 16:00 – 18:00 at the River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames. Shots of the River Thames can be taken from outside the Museum. Interviews with Eileen McKeever, Thames Waterway Manager, can be arranged in advance.

How can we make the River Thames meet the needs of people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, whilst enhancing its' beauty and heritage? Does it need more nature reserves perhaps, or maybe better access for people with disabilities. Would you like better facilities to be able to enjoy your visits, like car parks near your favourite fishing spot or more toilets? Whatever your view, now is the time to voice it.

Launched for consultation on April 26, the Thames Waterway Plan aims to improve the way the river is developed and cared for in the future.

Developed by the Environment Agency on behalf of the River Thames Alliance, the Plan will map out how the river could look in the years to come. Produced following a series of workshops with local authorities, trade organisations, river users groups such as the Royal Yachting Association and other bodies including Wildlife Trusts and the Countryside Agency, the Plan identifies areas which could be improved and sets standards for the future provision of facilities.

It also highlights gaps along the river which need filling, such as more toilets at lock sites and more campsites for walkers using the Thames Path National Trail or canoeists and rowers travelling the length of the Thames. The implementation of the Plan will affect everyone with an interest in the river from anglers, boaters and conservationists to local residents and wildlife spotters.

Why do we need a waterway Plan? From the river's source near Cricklade in Wiltshire, to Teddington on the outskirts of London, the non-tidal Thames has been in decline for several years. The Plan aims to tackle this decline by agreeing a new strategy for the River and identifying specific opportunities for improvements.

The River Thames Alliance - a partnership set up in 2003 of the river's local authorities, businesses, regional organisations and residents - will use the final Plan to help deliver, among other things:

- Co-ordinated planning between councils on matters of river front development, and protecting and promoting access, transport and open spaces;
- Protection of habitats and the environment for the future;
- More and better riverside leisure facilities such as moorings, toilets and tourism information, making the trip to the river a more enjoyable experience;
- Plans to regenerate old industrial and working sites;
- More cost efficient promotion of the river, boating and leisure to encourage more visitors and support local businesses.

Eileen McKeever, Thames Waterway Manager for the Environment Agency, said: *"It's been 10 years since we last published leisure policies for the Thames. The river is very important and everyone needs to work together to make it thrive. Gathering the views of all those with an interest in the river is an important part of the Plan's development, and we hope people will take this opportunity to have their say in the future of this beautiful and historic waterway."*

The Thames Waterway Plan will be available for consultation for 12 weeks. The deadline for comments is July 22, 2005. The Plan and details of how to make your comments will be available online at [www.visitthames.co.uk/twp](http://www.visitthames.co.uk/twp) from April 26, 2005. Paper copies of the Plan can be obtained by telephoning Andy Yeates or Angela Morris on 0118 953 5299, or emailing [visitthames@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:visitthames@environment-agency.gov.uk) and putting 'TWP Consultation' in the subject heading.

For more information on the River Thames Alliance and its work see [www.visitthames.co.uk/rta](http://www.visitthames.co.uk/rta).

**Ends**

For more media information please contact Madeline Leahu on 0118 953 5744 or [madeline.leahu@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:madeline.leahu@environment-agency.gov.uk) (not for publication). **Jpeg images of the non-tidal Thames are available on request.**

### Notes to editors

**If you would like an interview with Eileen McKeever, Thames Waterway Manager or other members of the River Thames Alliance, please contact Madeline Leahu 0118 953 5744 or [madeline.leahu@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:madeline.leahu@environment-agency.gov.uk) before Friday, April 22.**

**The River Thames Alliance** aims to improve facilities for all along the non-tidal Thames. The initial proposal for a strategic partnership was launched by the Environment Agency and the River Thames Society at the House of Commons in June 2002. There are now 64 member organisations of the Alliance. The Environment Agency acts as secretariat and is supported by a Steering Group of the River Thames Society, the Countryside Agency, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, South Oxfordshire District Council and ACTVaR (the association of councils in the Thames Valley).

Since the late 1980s there has been a marked decrease in the use of the Thames as a waterway. Privately owned powered boats have fallen 32% from 12,993 in 1990 to 8,920 in 2004. Holiday hire boats have declined by 85% from 815 in 1980 to 123 in 2004.

There has also been a loss in leisure facilities, and access points to the river. Decreasing revenue to the navigation authority (the Environment Agency) has resulted in less investment in the river infrastructure (locks, moorings etc). The Environment Agency estimates the decline in boating and leisure since 1990 has resulted in £111 million being lost to the local economy. The RTA has been established to improve co-ordination among riverside bodies and to turn round this decline.

Recent economic studies of the river show that boating and tourism generates £204m annually for the local community. There are 18,400 people employed in related riverside jobs.

The Environment Agency manages the quality of air, land and water in this country, including on 30,000kms of rivers. As navigation authority for the non-tidal Thames it manages the waterway, promotes the river for boating and leisure, and works with partners to improve facilities and planning. The Agency has spearheaded the River Thames Alliance as a way of improving planning along the river. For more information on the non-tidal Thames, see [www.visitthames.co.uk](http://www.visitthames.co.uk).