

7.0 Socio-economic baseline

7.1 Population (map 3)

10.5 million people, over one fifth of England’s total population, live within 30 kilometres of the non-tidal Thames.

12,000 houses lie within 500 metres of the river.

Boating, walking and cycling give direct physical benefits. People are also mentally and spiritually refreshed near water, valuing the riverside for its peace and beauty.¹

Angling is one of the nation’s favourite pastimes. 11 per cent of the population has fished in the past two years and as many again are interested in going fishing. Among 12 to 16 year olds, this rises to 21 per cent.²

Walkers on the Thames towpath rate scenery/ landscape and relaxation/peace as the main attractions.³

7.2 Economic value⁴

14 million leisure day visits and 28 million casual local visits to the river generate £119 million expenditure annually.

Tourism-related employment is particularly important to the immediate riverside corridor, supporting some 18,400 jobs in the riverside wards.⁵

Tourism volumes are particularly notable in Oxford and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

The presence of the river enhances property values within the surrounding corridor by nearly £580 million.

The 26,000 boats registered to use the river generate £85 million expenditure.



The annual turnover of companies in the Thames Boating Trades Association in 2003 totalled £110 million.⁶

The Environment Agency has a statutory responsibility ‘to enhance the contribution salmon and freshwater fisheries make to the economy’. Within the Thames Region, 108,000 people purchase annual rod licences for coarse fishing, spending almost £70 million on licences, permits, tackle and bait.⁷

¹ Environment Agency Customer Satisfaction Survey 1998, Maritime Leisure Research Group, Southampton Institute. Land based visitors.
² Public Attitudes to Angling, Environment Agency 2000
³ National Trails Thames Path User Survey 1999, Centre for Leisure Research
⁴ Extended Economic Valuation of the River Thames, Ecotec Research and Consulting Ltd, February 2002, (economic value generated by the non-tidal river)
⁵ The smallest unit within a local authority for which government collects statistics
⁶ British Marine Federation Research
⁷ Environment Agency Rod Licence data 2003-04 and Thames Region Fisheries Strategy and Newscast Research, ADAS for Environment Agency, January 2005. Note that over half this spend is likely to be on lake, rather than river, fishing.

7.3 Demographic changes¹

Changes in population demographics impact on waterway planning, particularly for leisure and tourism.

Population in the South East is projected to grow by 1,094,800 by 2027.

This will further emphasise the open space value of the river corridor and its role in providing sport and recreation opportunities close to where people live.

At the same time the population increase, caused by significant inward migration to the region from both within the UK and from outside, will create major demand for new housing.

The population is ageing. There will be a significantly smaller proportion of the population aged 25 to 44 in 2027, but a larger proportion aged over 65.

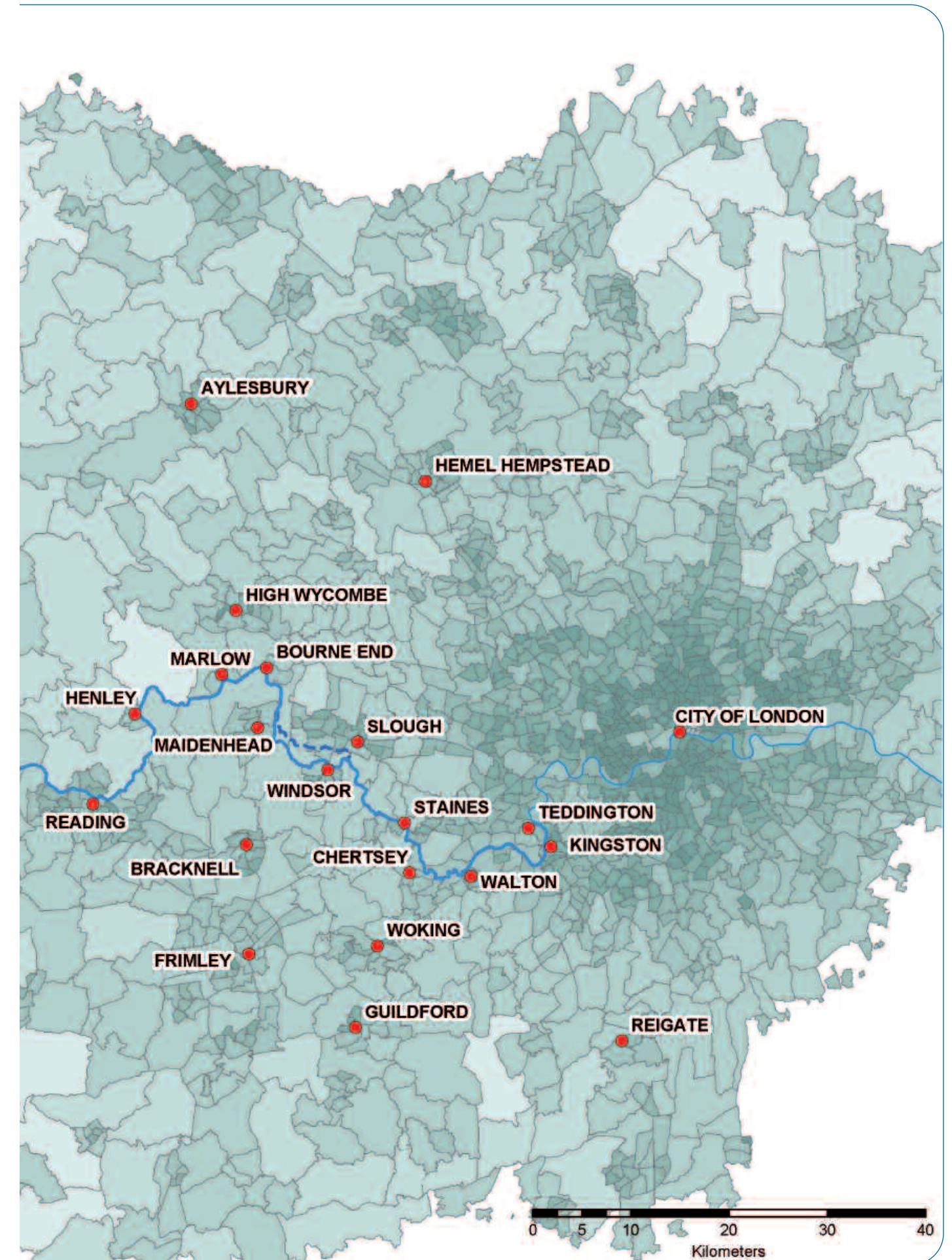
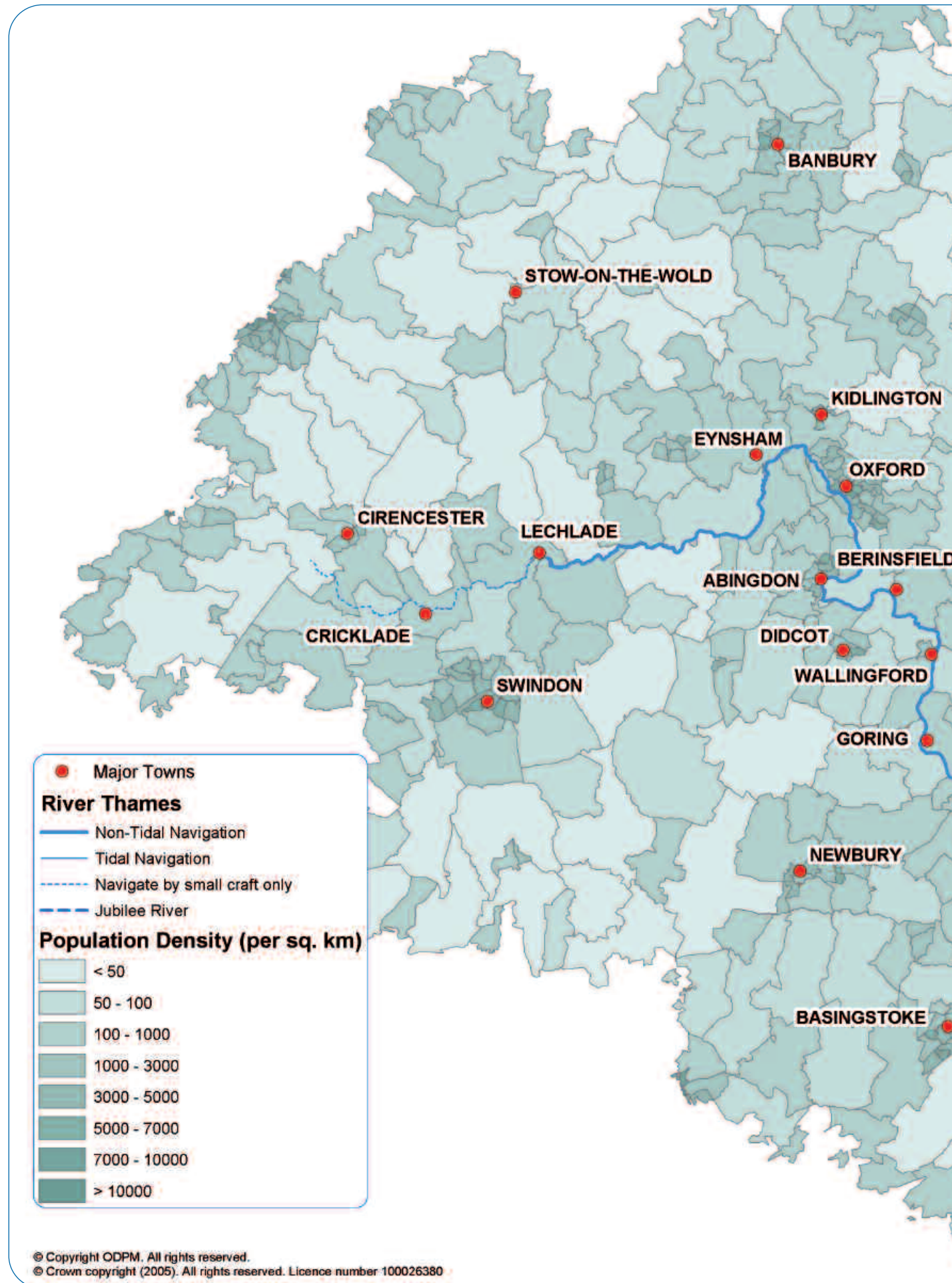
The number of people aged 25 to 44 will actually fall by 1.7 per cent whilst those aged 65 and over will increase by 56 per cent. By 2027, almost a quarter of the region’s population will be aged over 65. 17.4 per cent growth in 45 to 64 year olds is also predicted.

Significantly, these are key age groups of people using the Thames path and owning powered boats. 43 per cent of walkers using the Thames Path are aged 45 and over². 89 per cent of owners of powered boats are aged 45 and over.³

By 2027 almost a quarter of the region’s population will be aged over 65.



¹ South East Plan Consultation Draft Technical Note 5 (revised) Demography, South East England Regional Assembly March 2005
² National Trails Thames Path User Survey 1999, Centre for Leisure Research
³ Environment Agency Navigation licence survey, Test Research, June 2003



7.4 Social inclusion

Government policy is to make waterways accessible to all parts of society.

‘We will support the greater recreational use of the waterways for all, including the towpaths and waterside paths, where practicable.

We will encourage navigation authorities to increase access to the waterways for the young, disabled and disadvantaged’.¹

The Inland Waterway Amenity Advisory Council² (IWAAC) has produced a valuable, detailed report, *The Inland Waterways: towards greater social inclusion* (April 2001). It found key excluded groups to be:

- families and others excluded by low incomes
- disabled people (including those with restricted mobility and sensory disabilities)
- older people (notably 65 and over)
- black and other minority ethnic communities (especially Asian)
- women (because of fear of crime).

The term ‘social exclusion’ was used to describe the disadvantage suffered by individuals, groups of people or communities that were restricted from taking a full and active part in society by a combination of problems such as low incomes, poor housing, bad health, physical disability and high crime environments.

IWAAC defined the key benefits that a waterway could offer to those currently excluded:

1. Better health through
 - walking and active recreation, to develop a healthy lifestyle
 - quiet relaxation to reduce stress and mental health problems.

2. Enhanced community development by
 - providing activities to bring residents together and develop contacts with other members of their community, including those from minority ethnic groups and different age groups
 - providing opportunities to meet and share enjoyable experiences and so make the local waterway a focus of community pride.
3. Increased confidence and understanding through
 - enabling disabled people to take part in mainstream activities with the confidence that facilities will meet their needs
 - encouraging those from black and other minority ethnic communities to use facilities in the wider community with the confidence that their needs will be respected
 - tackling fear of crime and encouraging more people, especially women, to feel more confident in using public spaces
 - enabling those with learning difficulties to enjoy and develop through access to new experiences.
4. Reduced ‘at risk’ behaviour by
 - providing young people with positive alternatives to offending or antisocial behaviour
 - encouraging local schools to take a pride in, and ownership of, their local waterway
 - providing a positive focus, which brings parents and children together, thus enhancing parenting skills.

5. Wider opportunities for education and economic development through
 - use of waterway themes within schools and the national curriculum to illustrate subjects such as geography, history, citizenship and environmental sciences and to learn new skills linked to training and personal development
 - developing new opportunities for training and employment through waterway-based regeneration and development.
6. Greater appreciation of the local environment through
 - regular contact with the historic buildings, environment and history of the waterway.

Government also requires local authorities to undertake Best Value Reviews that take into account the wider benefits of sport to health, social inclusion, regeneration, educational opportunities and crime prevention.¹ Investment is needed to maintain the river to provide sport and recreation opportunities that can deliver these wider benefits to local communities.

The Environment Agency has a statutory responsibility ‘to enhance the social contribution fishing makes as a widely available and healthy form of recreation’.

Investment is needed to maintain the river to provide sport and recreation opportunities that can deliver wider benefits to local communities.

Case study 1

River Thames Boat Project

The River Thames Boat Project is a registered charity that owns and operates Richmond Venturer, a Dutch barge that has been converted into a community boat and floating classroom. It is fully accessible to people with disabilities and equipped with a variety of educational resources about the Thames.



From its base in Kingston, the Venturer provides day and residential cruises and educational activities tailored to meet the needs of socially excluded groups. In 2005 58 per cent of their work was with older people and people with disabilities and 25 per cent involved education and training programmes. 14 per cent of the users came from minority ethnic groups.

The charity is run on a budget of £72,000 by one full-time and one part-time member of staff, four skippers and a team of 60 volunteers (including the Trustees). 43 per cent of the volunteers are female. Two teachers deliver *School on the River*, a day of curriculum-based, hands-on, environmental education activities.

Relevance to plan policies:

- fully accessible for people with disabilities
- social inclusion
- environmental education

¹ Waterways for Tomorrow, Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, July 2000

² The Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council (IWAAC) is a statutory body set up under the 1968 Transport Act to advise on strategic policy for the use and development of inland waterways.

¹ A Sporting Future for All (paragraph 8.19) Department for Media Culture and Sport, March 2001

7.5 Deprivation (map 4)

Government has produced a measure of deprivation derived from a combination of relevant weighted factors.¹ These are:

- income
- employment
- health deprivation and disability
- education, skills and training
- housing
- geographical access to services.

The score for the least deprived of England’s wards² is 1.15 and the most deprived scores 75. It is evident that the river generally passes through areas of relative affluence.

However, there are small pockets of relatively high levels of deprivation near the river in Swindon, Oxford, Berinsfield, Reading, Slough and Hounslow.

These are possible locations for targeted actions to support the social inclusion policy.

The river can also provide accessible recreation access for disadvantaged young people living in otherwise remote rural areas.

7.6 Ethnicity (map 5)

Hounslow and Slough have large Indian and Pakistani communities, with some Hounslow wards having over 50 per cent Asian population.³ (On average in England, 91 per cent of the population is white.)

Three Slough wards adjoining the Jubilee River⁴ have Asian populations of 25, 31 and 43 per cent.

Elsewhere there are only small ethnic variations. Two wards near the river in Oxford (Iffley and Cowley Marsh) have approximately 10 per cent Asian population. Four riverside wards in Reading have Asian populations of between eight and 15 per cent, and Black populations between six and nine per cent.

These are possible locations for targeted actions to support the social inclusion policy.

Policy 2 - social inclusion

We will make the benefits of the river available to all parts of society

Possible actions

- 1 focus attention on areas of deprivation
- 2 gain understanding of barriers to participation and act to remove them
- 3 develop projects to increase involvement of ethnic minorities, women and people with disabilities
- 4 work with clubs and user groups to promote existing opportunities to all

Reports by the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council and Sport England reveal socially excluded groups have low levels of participation.

¹ Source: Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, Indices of Deprivation 2000
² The smallest unit within a local authority for which government collects statistics.
³ 2001 Census
⁴ The Jubilee River runs alongside the Thames for 11.6 kilometres providing flood alleviation for Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton. For details, see the case study on page 81.

Case study 2

Falcon Rowing and Canoe Club Oxford

The club provides a number of rowing and kayak paddling programmes that have been specially developed to encourage participation by young people and socially excluded groups. The club setting helps to reduce the dramatic drop in participation that usually occurs when children leave school. The initiatives include:

- outreach work with schools in deprived urban wards in east Oxford, such as Blackbird Leys, introduces children to the river and active recreation
- rowing coaching for pupils from state schools as part of the 2006 Active Sports Programme
- canoeing group for people living with mental illness
- rowing and canoeing for people with physical disabilities
- outreach programme to an Asian community
- canoeing for children from Asylum Welcome (an Oxford-based charity working to support refugees).

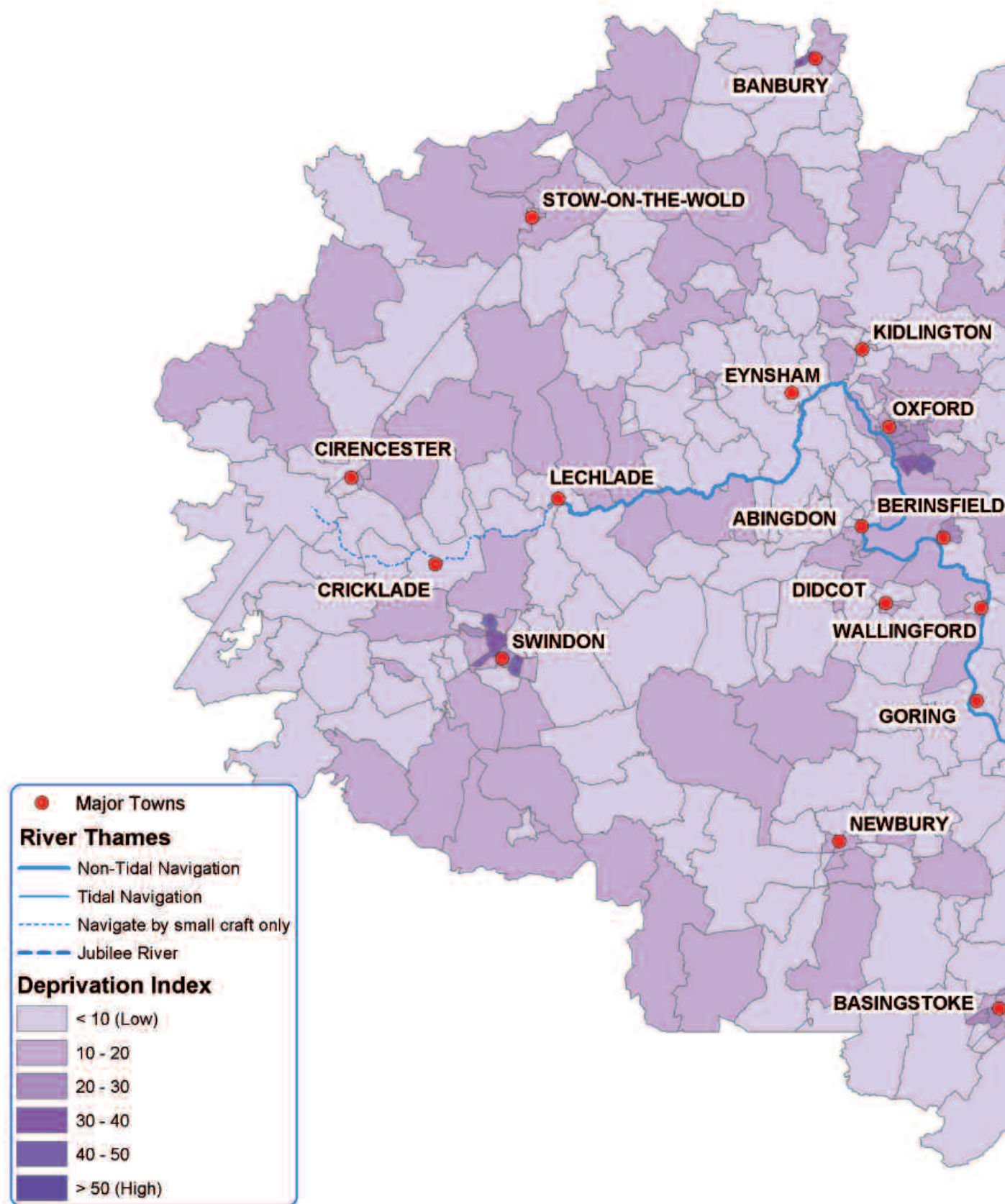
Around half Falcon’s 240 members are women. But the club’s continuing work reaching out to local communities is constrained by inadequate facilities. They have plans for a new building of low environmental impact, fully accessible, that will include showers and toilet facilities to



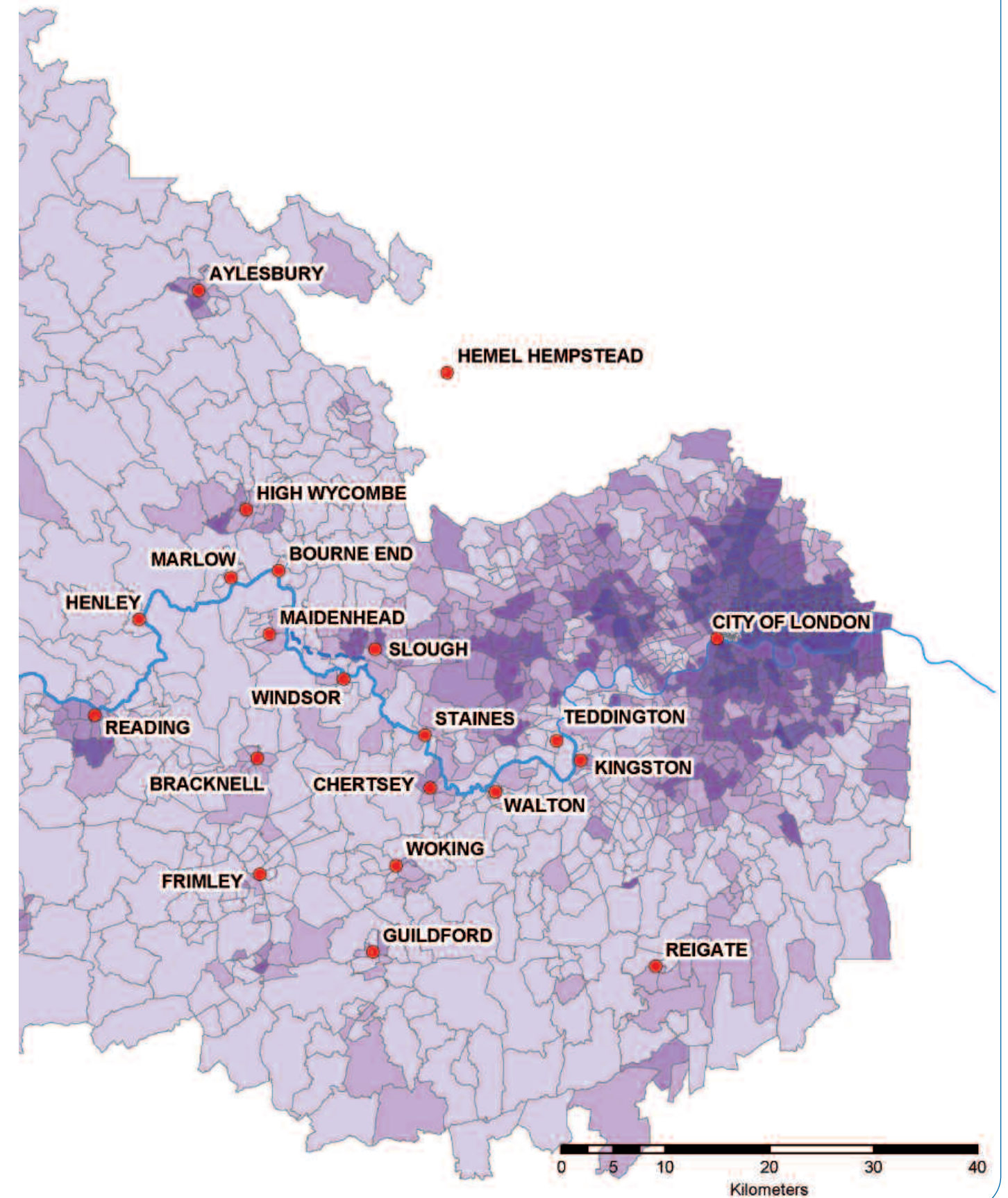
cater for the needs of all the above groups. Storage space for more boats, secure bike racks, kitchen, warm-up room and a community hall will enable the club to support an initial 20 per cent growth in participating schools, a 10 per cent increase in participants from hard to reach groups, backed up by 10 per cent more volunteer coaches, with similar year-on-year growth to follow. The club is seeking partners to fund this £750,000 investment in new facilities.

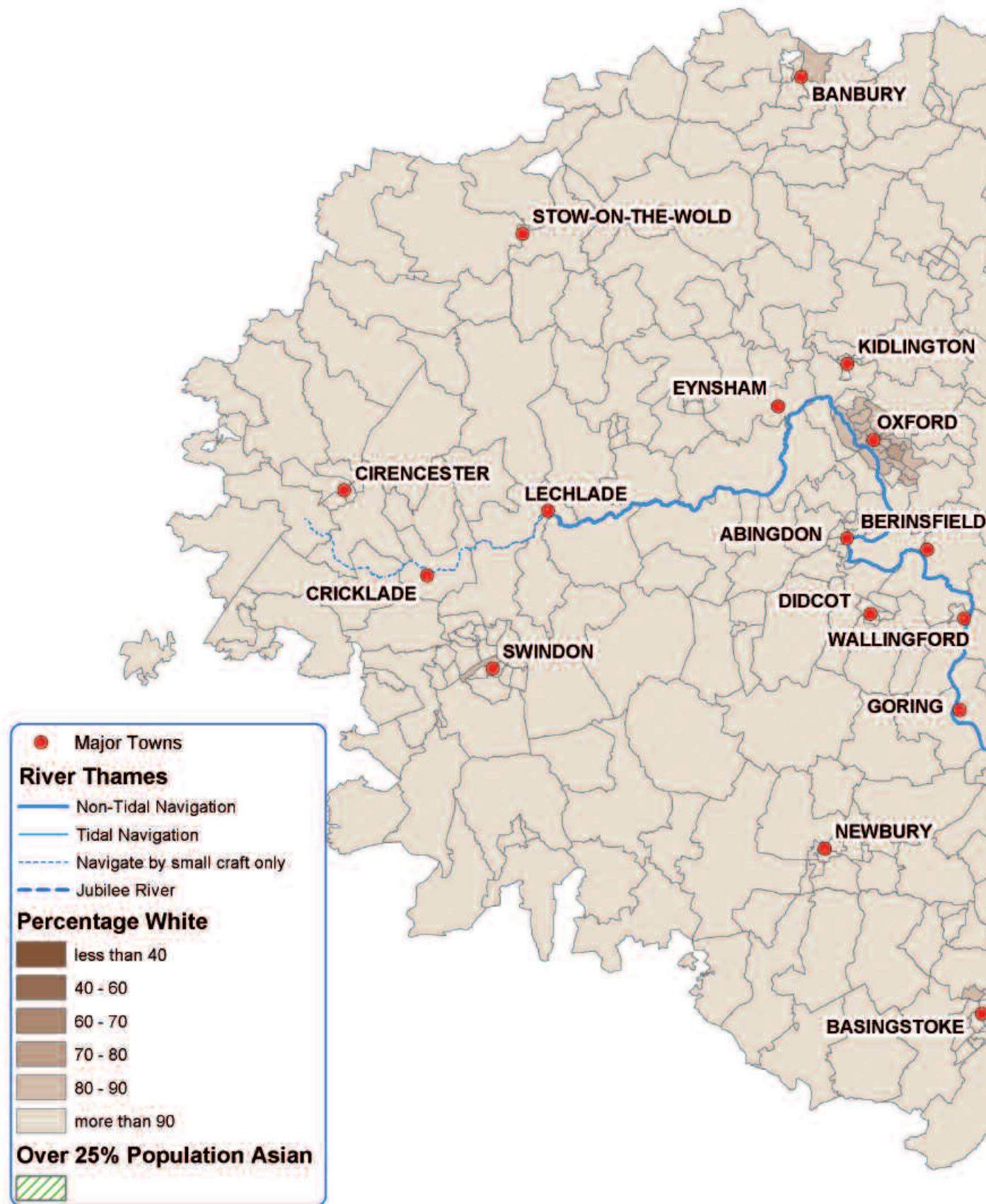
Relevance to plan objectives:

- social inclusion
- increased participation in sport and active recreation



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