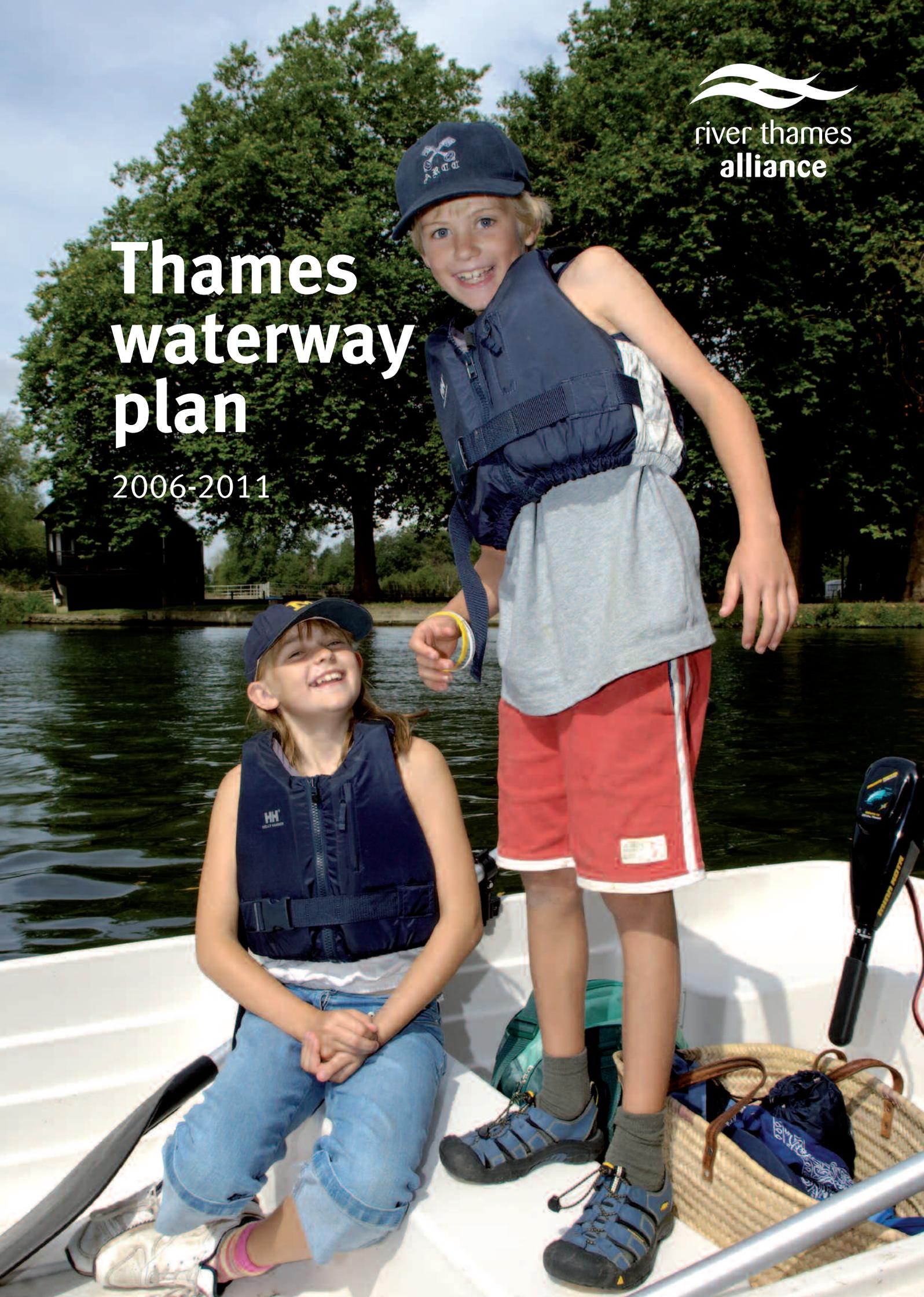




river thames
alliance

Thames waterway plan

2006-2011



Thames waterway plan

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Thames waterway plan

Vision

The vision of the River Thames Alliance is **the healthy growth in the use of the freshwater Thames for communities, wildlife, leisure and business.**

Core objectives

- improve and promote access and information for all users (on water and land)
- improve and maintain the river infrastructure, facilities and services for all users
- contribute to enhanced biodiversity, heritage, and landscape value in the waterway corridor
- increase use of the river and its corridor

The core objectives can only be achieved through action-oriented partnerships. The River Thames Alliance offers a focal point for delivery of the plan.



1.0 Introduction

The Thames waterway plan has been prepared by the Environment Agency on behalf of the River Thames Alliance. The River Thames Alliance is a partnership of the key organisations that have an interest in the river. They include the local authorities that border the river, statutory bodies, trade organisations and user groups. Alliance members who provided information, advice and comments during the preparation of the plan are listed in Appendix 1.

The Environment Agency is the leading public body protecting and improving the environment in England and Wales. It is responsible for pollution prevention and control, making sure industry keeps its impacts on air, land and water quality to a minimum. It also has a major role in flood risk management, conservation and fisheries management.

The Thames waterway plan, however, is concerned primarily with the responsibilities that the Environment Agency has for recreation and as a navigation authority. Its scope is the corridor of the River Thames from its source near Cricklade in Gloucestershire to Teddington on the outskirts of London.

The River Thames Alliance commends the Thames waterway plan and urges individual members of the Alliance to modify their own plans and policy documents to reflect it. The plan often introduces policies using the words ‘we will’. The ‘we’ embraces appropriate members of the Alliance.

The plan builds upon the recreation strategy published by the then National Rivers Authority and Sports Council in 1995.¹ Whilst many of the aspirations in the 1995 strategy remain valid², the policies contained in this plan have been revised to take account of subsequent changes in levels of use and Government policy.

This document provides a strategic framework for the river. It contains suggested actions in support of its policies, but at this stage, most are un-costed and aspirational. In many cases there has been no discussion with the relevant landowners whose agreement would be required. Parish and Town Councils alongside the river will have an important part to play. Some actions will be dependant upon securing planning approval. Many will only be achieved if additional sources of funding are secured.

The challenge for the River Thames Alliance is to translate the policies into planned, funded actions with clearly identified responsibilities and a firm timetable for action. Work is already underway, and throughout the plan we have included examples of good practice. These case studies powerfully illustrate the strength of partnership working. We will encourage the creation of new partnerships as necessary to implement the plan.

We also recognise the significant contributions made by the voluntary sector. These include carrying out conservation work, facilitating access for people with disabilities, providing sport and recreation opportunities, coaching, running events and promoting the river.

The overall aim of the Thames waterway plan is to map out the reinvigoration of leisure and tourism along the river corridor in ways that are both socially inclusive and sustainable.

¹ Space to live, space to play. A Recreation Strategy for the River Thames. Eileen McKeever, National Rivers Authority, 1995.

² In particular, the 1995 policies remain valid and unaltered for the tidal river below Teddington.

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

3.0 Underlying principles

Stakeholder engagement principle

The Thames waterway plan will be developed, reviewed and implemented with the involvement of all interested stakeholders.

We will use the River Thames Alliance to achieve this.

Sustainability principle

The plan will be a model for sustainable development of the river.

Sustainable development means meeting economic, social and environmental aims at the same time, and requires us to consider the long-term implications of decisions to ensure effective protection of the natural environment. This is explained in detail in section 5.

Economic principle

We will optimise the assets of the river to help achieve a sustainable economy.

The river makes a significant contribution to the region's economy. This is explored in more detail in section 7.

Funding principle

Long-term funding is essential to maintain the infrastructure and facilities along the river and implement the plan's objectives.

Recently (2004/05), the Environment Agency received some additional funds from Government, and this has helped with urgent repairs on the river. However, since 1990, capital expenditure on the river has been well below the level needed to maintain its existing assets. Considerable further investment is necessary to maintain and achieve the facility improvements that the plan recommends. Unless additional funds can be generated, then the river and its use, as defined in this plan, is not sustainable.

Health principle

We will optimise the assets of the river for people's health and fitness.

The river provides a readily accessible resource for people's health and wellbeing. It can play a major role in support of Government policy to encourage more people of all ages to take part in active recreation including countryside walking.¹ This is explored in more detail in section 9.



4.0 Context

The river cuts across many other strategies for health, sport, economic regeneration, tourism and the environment. We have, wherever possible, reflected these strategies in later sections of our plan.

We hope that, in turn, the Thames waterway plan will influence the plans of relevant national and regional bodies and those of the local authorities next to the river.

The regional spatial strategy for the south east¹ contains policies covering many topics, such as housing, transport, employment, tourism, and the environment that are relevant to the Thames waterway plan. Some are referenced in later sections. Information on the progress of the South East Plan can be found at:

www.southeast-ra.gov.uk/southeastplan

The Environment Agency is a member of the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities and endorses its strategy for waterways, *Steering a Fresh Course*.²

Government has also set out its requirements from navigation authorities in the policy document *Waterways for Tomorrow* (Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, July 2000).

Together these documents set a clear framework. We are required to:

- increase the economic and social benefits offered by waterways, maximising their potential as catalysts for urban and rural regeneration
- encourage people to make use of the inland waterways for leisure and recreation, tourism and sport
- protect historic buildings and areas

Sustainable development means meeting economic, social and environmental aims at the same time, and requires us to consider the long-term implications of decisions to ensure effective protection of the natural environment.

- maintain and enhance biodiversity and landscape value
- encourage freight and passenger transport by boat.

The way the Environment Agency proposes to achieve this is set out in *your rivers for life ~ a strategy for the development of navigable rivers 2004–2007* (Environment Agency, January 2004).

This waterway plan applies the strategy principles to the River Thames.

The Environment Agency's vision is of a rich, healthy and diverse environment for present and future generations. Achieving this vision means:

- a better quality of life
- an enhanced environment for wildlife
- cleaner air for everyone
- improved and protected inland and coastal waters
- restored, protected land with healthier soils
- a more environmentally friendly business world
- wiser, sustainable use of natural resources
- limiting and adapting to climate change
- reducing flood risk.

The waterway plan will make a contribution to the achievement of this vision (More information about the Environment Agency's strategies can be found at www.environment-agency.gov.uk.)

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) is a directive from the European Union that aims to protect the water environment. We believe this plan follows the principles of the WFD. Information about the WFD can be found at: www.environment-agency.gov.uk.

¹ A Sporting Future for All (paragraph 8.13) Department for Media Culture and Sport, March 2001

¹ Draft South East Plan Part 1: Core Regional Policies, South East England Regional Assembly, July 2005

² Steering a Fresh Course, Association of Inland Navigation Authorities, September 1999

This waterway plan brings together all the interests on the non-tidal parts of the river, but the Thames continues as a major resource through London to the sea. Its importance is recognised in the London Plan's Blue Ribbon Network Policy.¹ The approach adopted by the Blue Ribbon Network could be used as a model for the non-tidal river.

London boroughs are asked to prepare detailed appraisals of their stretches of the river and its environs in collaboration with other boroughs, the Mayor and relevant stakeholders. These appraisals are expected to consider:

- the local character of the river
- public and freight transport (on land and water, existing and potential)
- development sites and regeneration opportunities
- opportunities for environmental and urban design improvements

- sites of ecological or archaeological importance
- areas, sites, buildings, structures, landscapes and views of particular sensitivity and importance
- focal points of public activity
- public access
- recreation and marine infrastructure
- indicative flood risk.

The appraisal should also identify areas of deficiency and the actions needed to address these deficiencies. These relate to facilities for:

- water-based passenger, tourism and freight transport
- water-based sport and leisure
- access and safety provision
- marine support facilities and infrastructure and moorings.



¹ The London Plan, Mayor of London, February 2004

5.0 Sustainable development

5.1 Introduction

The waterway plan aims to be a model for sustainable development of the river. Sustainable development is all about ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, now and for future generations to come. It is about a more inclusive society that achieves and shares the benefits of increased economic prosperity, which is less wasteful in its use of natural resources, and in which the environment is protected and improved.

The UK government is committed to the principles of sustainable development and its approach is set out in *Securing the future – delivering UK sustainable development strategy* (HM Government, 2005). This new strategy develops the 1999 UK Sustainable Development Strategy, which included four central aims:

1. social progress which recognises the needs of everyone
2. effective protection of the environment
3. prudent use of natural resources
4. maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

Sustainable development means meeting economic, social and environmental aims at the same time, and requires us to consider the long-term implications of decisions. The Government's revised strategy shows in more detail how the four central aims can be integrated into sustainable development driven by the following principles:

- living within environmental limits
- ensuring a strong, healthy and just society
- achieving a sustainable economy
- promoting good governance
- using sound science responsibly.

An important element of the UK strategy is a set of indicators and targets intended to focus attention on what sustainable development means, and to give a broad overview of whether we are achieving a 'better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come'.

At a more local level these indicators and targets are presented in Regional Sustainable Development Frameworks (RSDFs). These are overarching documents that inform other strategies and policies in the region and are prepared by a collaboration of several bodies, including the Regional Chamber or Assembly, Government Office and Regional Development Agency.

5.2 The integrated regional framework

The South East of England developed its own RSDF in 2001, with 25 regionally derived objectives and 41 indicators under the four main aims of sustainable development. In 2004 an Integrated Regional Framework (IRF) was published, which establishes a shared vision and objectives for integrated working and, ultimately, sustainable development of the region. The IRF is an evolution of the RSDF and was produced not only by the South East England Regional Assembly, but also the Government Office for the South East, South East England Development Agency, Environment Agency, Department of Health, South East Forum for Sustainability and Regional Action and Involvement South East.

The IRF provides a common reference point for sustainable development and aims to help guide the work of other organisations to ensure sustainable development is at the heart of policy. As well as the same 25 objectives as the RSDF, it also includes the following vision for the South East: 'a prosperous region delivering a high quality of life and environment for everyone, now and in the future'.

The Environment Agency has applied the South East RSDF in preparing the Thames waterway plan. (The vast majority of the non-tidal River Thames is within the South East Region, with just the extreme upstream and downstream reaches falling outside.)

A better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come.

5.3 Sustainable waterway leisure and tourism in the South East

Leisure and tourism activities have significant implications for the environment, economy and social fabric of the River Thames corridor. This is especially apparent within major settlements along the Thames itself, such as Oxford, Abingdon, Reading, Maidenhead, Windsor, Chertsey and Kingston, on the outskirts of London. The River Thames has been referred to as ‘liquid history’ because of the famous riverside towns, stately homes and historic sites, such as Runnymede and Hampton Court, along its course. It is a major tourism and leisure resource that supports a wide range of activities and facilities, including: holiday accommodation, powered and non-powered boating (for both sport and recreation, as well as for commercial purposes), walking, observing wildlife, cycling and angling. However, these varied uses put pressure on the river and its surroundings. We need to plan and manage the use of this unique resource in sustainable ways so that future generations can enjoy it.

The Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East (RPG9) acknowledges and supports the regionally significant role played by the River Thames as a Priority Area for Tourism. Policy TSR7 of RPG9 (approved by the Secretary of State in November 2004) specifically promotes joint working to achieve the potential for informal recreational and sporting uses through improved management and access. Similarly Policy TSR2 (Rural Tourism) requires local authorities (through their planning policies and decisions) to protect access to, and support proposals for, inland waterways and associated facilities. The South East England Regional Assembly sees the Thames waterway plan as a key mechanism for delivering these objectives, which have been carried forward into the *Draft South East Plan*.

Leisure and tourism not only brings economic vitality. It also contributes to the quality of life, through enjoyment of the countryside, improving health and wellbeing. Sustainable leisure and tourism requires an approach that ensures the long-term viability and quality of natural, human and financial resources.

For the river to thrive, some development will be necessary to sustain the viability of its sport, recreation and tourism assets.

5.4 Sustainable development principles

We have used Strategic Sustainability Assessment¹ (SSA) to integrate environmental, as well as social and economic, considerations into the development of the plan. As part of this process, we defined a sustainable development framework for the Thames based on objectives included in the South East’s RSDf and IRF and more detailed criteria pertinent to the Thames (see Appendix 2). The appraisal criteria under each objective were used to test the sustainability of potential Thames waterway plan policies and proposals. Our aim is for the plan to consider the full range of sustainable development issues and to provide criteria against which to judge performance in achieving the plan’s objectives. Where possible the SSA identifies possible targets and indicators.

The SSA is concerned with the assessment of high-level policies and proposals. Environmental Impact Assessment will be applied, as necessary, to individual sites. The principles of sustainable development and the use of SSA will be integral to the further development of the plan and its subsequent revisions. The SSA document and a short summary is available at: www.riverthamesalliance.com

A further SSA will be carried out when the River Thames Alliance has identified responsibilities and a firm timetable for action.

Policy 1 - development

We will support appropriate development necessary to achieve the objectives of the Thames waterway plan

Possible actions

- 1 establish a planning policy sub group of the River Thames Alliance
- 2 develop model policies for the Thames for adoption in Local Development Frameworks
- 3 define ‘appropriate’ with reference to the character of the river, for example, to ensure that tranquil and remote reaches are not compromised
- 4 follow principles of *Thames Environment Design Handbook* guidance
- 5 undertake environmental impact and flood risk assessments of relevant projects and proposals
- 6 introduce mitigation and enhancement measures in accordance with Environment Agency guidance

6.0 The River Thames

6.1 River Thames and its tributaries (map 1)

9950 square kilometres of southern England are drained by the Thames.

The river supplies two thirds of London’s drinking water.

The Environment Agency manages 218 kilometres of navigable river from Cricklade, near its source to Teddington. (The Thames is tidal below Teddington and navigation comes under the Port of London Authority.)

The average fall of the river over this distance is 0.34 metres per kilometre. As a result there are 44 locks and associated weirs, which are manned all year to assist boaters and control water levels for flood defence and water supply.

The river varies considerably in width from 18 metres at Lechlade to 100 metres at Teddington.

Seven main tributaries join it along this distance: Cherwell, Thame, Kennet, Loddon, Colne, Wey and Mole.

6.2 Local Government boundaries (map 2)

The river runs through 25 administrative areas.

For 185 of its 238 kilometres (77per cent of its length) the river forms a boundary between authorities. This brings problems. Although the river is at the edge of a jurisdiction, it is essentially the centre of the landscape. Clearly land use decisions on one bank could have significant impact on the opposite side of the river.

River users hold expectations of consistent standards of provision along the river’s length.

This plan is therefore important in providing a coherent overview to help address these issues.

¹ This approach draws on both Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Sustainability Appraisal (SA). A full explanation is provided in a separate SSA Report, available from the Environment Agency.

