

10.5 Passenger boats

For the past twenty years the number of passenger boats based on the non-tidal Thames has been consistently around 50. In addition, boats based on the tideway are often registered to operate on the river above Teddington. There are currently seven such boats, although there were as many as 15 in the mid 1990s.

The passenger boats have an average maximum carrying capacity of around 125 and are usually offered for party hire.

Passenger boat services are distributed along the river on the non-tidal Thames with a heavy concentration near Windsor and Kingston (when the boats from the tideway are included).

Policy 20 - passenger boats

We will support scheduled passenger boat services along the river

Possible actions

- 1 create landing stages at all major towns and attractions
- 2 resist loss/support provision of facilities like dry docks and boat repair yards
- 3 integrate timetable with bus and train links
- 4 if necessary give priority at locks to passenger boats for them to keep to a published timetable
- 5 advertise and promote services (including timetables on web sites)
- 6 build river bus stops with shelter and timetables
- 7 evaluate possible urban commuter services

Passenger trip boats provide low-cost access onto the river.

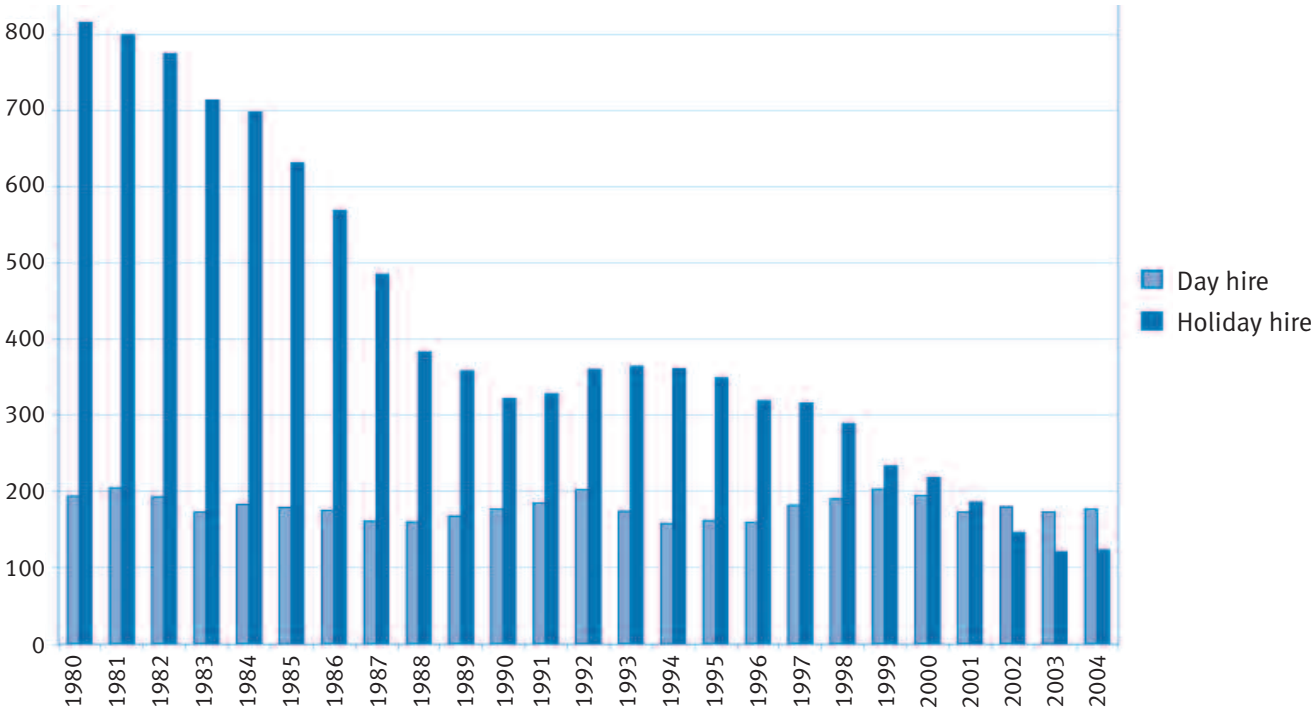


10.6 Hire boats (map 11)

Hire boats provide an accessible way to try boating. Daily hire, in particular, offers a relatively low-cost option.

Whilst there has been a dramatic decline in live-on-board holiday hire boats, the number of boats for daily hire has remained fairly constant.

Figure 6 Thames day and holiday hire boats 1980-2004



Policy 21 - hire boats

We will encourage a thriving, high quality hire boat sector on the river

Possible actions

- 1 provide value for money visitor and overnight moorings at all riverside towns and attractions
- 2 provide facilities for boaters (toilets, water points, refuse disposal etc.)
- 3 support quality grading scheme for boats on the river
- 4 work with trade bodies<sup>1</sup> to support the hire boat industry
- 5 market the river as a tourism destination
- 6 support the creation of new hire boat bases

Since 1980, the number of holiday hire boats registered on the Thames has fallen by 85 per cent, from 815 to 123 in 2004.

<sup>1</sup> For example, the Thames Boating Trades Association and the Thames Hire Cruiser Association.







10.7 Freight transport

It is Government policy to promote alternatives to road transport for both passenger and freight movements. This is partly to reduce congestion and partly to reduce the environmental impact of road transport. Inland waterways have the potential to assist in both these objectives.

Most of the freight traffic carried on the inland waterways is high bulk, low value, and non-urgent. Examples include coal, fuel oil, aggregates, steel, timber, grain and waste. In addition to this traditional freight there is occasional transport of heavy or large loads.

Transport of waste has stimulated the most recent interest. The tidal River Thames is the only inland waterway in the country presently carrying significant quantities of waste materials. On average, 2,500 tonnes per day of municipal waste is loaded onto barges and taken to landfill sites in Essex. One tug and barge convoy journey is the equivalent of 40 to 50 lorry journeys.

*Freight on Water: A New Perspective* identifies freight traffic with most potential on a number of waterways.<sup>1</sup> For the tidal Thames, waste and recyclables, aggregates, construction materials, scrap and containerised traffic were listed. The potential for such traffic to continue onto the non-tidal river should be investigated. On the non-tidal Thames, aggregates (sand, gravel and stone) and domestic refuse are the most likely cargoes.

The Association of Inland Navigation Authorities commissioned a study, *Planning for Freight on Inland Waterways, Transport Energy Best Practice, April 2004*, on behalf of the Department for Transport and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in consultation with The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

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.)

The *Draft South East Plan* includes a specific policy (T12) on freight transport that encourages the movement of freight by water by safeguarding wharves, depots and other sites that are or could be critical in developing water transport. The South East England Regional Assembly is preparing a Regional Freight Strategy for the South East, and it is anticipated this will be completed in spring 2006.

Policy 22 - freight

We will encourage commercial transport of freight on the river

Possible actions

- 1 give full consideration to waterway freight opportunities in 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.

10.8 Residential boats

There is a distinction between:

- houseboats that have no means of propulsion and are therefore permanent residences and
- residential boats that can be navigated but are lived on for all or most of the year.

99 houseboats were registered on the non-tidal Thames in 2004, down from 146 in 1990. However the registration is for a category of boat so some will not be in use for permanent residence. (They could be summer homes or used as a clubhouse, for example.)

We do not know how many other boats are permanently lived on.

There is demand for moorings that have suitable facilities for residential boats. Some consider that boats may provide affordable housing. However,

the responsibilities of the navigation authority, local authority and landowner can be confused. To clarify this and ensure that those living on boats can do so legitimately and safely, the Association of Inland Navigation Authorities (AINA) has established a Residential Boating Issues Group to produce guidance.

There is a long tradition of houseboats and residential boats on the Thames and people living on boats can provide security for moorings, boatyards and other premises. There is some concern that the potential demand for residential moorings in existing or new marinas would reduce space for recreational boat mooring. This could be resolved by limiting residential occupancy to a percentage of total marina capacity.

Policy 23 - residential boats

We will support the creation of new residential boat moorings in off-river basins with suitable facilities

Possible actions

- 1 consider the AINA guidance and adopt as appropriate



<sup>1</sup> Freight on Water - A New Perspective: The Report of the Freight Study Group: Defra, 2002



11.0 Landscape

11.1 Geology (map 12)

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 13)

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 14)

For over a quarter of its length the river runs through designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty<sup>1</sup> (AONB).

The river joins 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 linking the two AONBs at this point.

AONB management plans and landscape assessments will therefore have a significant impact on the river corridor.

The river is also the northern boundary of the Great Western Community Forest.<sup>2</sup> It is one of 12 community forests in England where local people and organisations are working together to create a better environment.

The project aims to create a rich mosaic of woodlands, green spaces and areas for wildlife over 140 square miles around Swindon and the surrounding towns and villages.



Upper River Thames Heritage Project

*willows, water meadows and William Morris*

The project is a partnership of public sector and charitable bodies, led by the Great Western Community Forest and supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund. It will implement a variety of projects to bring a range of community, cultural, landscape and biodiversity benefits. It has identified a number of key attributes that contribute to the character of this part of the river. They include:

- the influence the upper River Thames had on the work of William Morris (whose home was at Kelmscot)
- the value of water meadows today and as historical landscape features
- the importance of riverside willow trees

- the role that the fortified line of the river played in the defence of Britain in World War II

The project will ensure that local communities have the necessary skills to play an active role in the management, protection, enhancement and promotion of the upper River Thames landscape. It will promote inclusive access to an inspirational landscape for the enjoyment of local residents and tourists.

Relevance to plan policies:

- environmental education
- landscape
- biodiversity
- partnership
- tourism

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.



