

Thames (in Kingston) Habitat Action Plan



“And when tired at last, he sat on the bank, while the river still chattered on to him, a babbling procession of the best stories in the world, sent from the heart of the earth to be told at last to the insatiable sea”

Wind in the Willows, Kenneth Grahame

1 Aims

- To contribute to strategic efforts to deliver biodiversity conservation targets for the Thames catchment, such as ensuring communication and delivery between flood risk, planning, and biodiversity net gain, linking with other relevant plans and stakeholders.
- To promote public education, appreciation, and research of the Thames within the Borough.
- To promote the delivery of nature-based solutions wherever possible.

Acknowledgements

We thank The Thames Landscape Strategy for their time and expertise in reviewing this plan.

2 Introduction

The river Thames is one of the defining features of the Royal Borough of Kingston, fostering a sense of identity that helps to define the town's character. Between Hampton and Kew is the Arcadian Thames – a landscape that despite being highly modified is a haven for wildlife that has inspired generations of people and provides a playground for London to enjoy.

The town's fortunes have been intrinsically linked with the river since its foundation. Saxon kings were once crowned on a small island at the confluence of the Hogsmill and Thames, whilst the water has provided a means for industry to flourish along the riverside. Since the closure of factories, power stations and tanneries - parks, public open spaces, and the Thames Path now characterise the riverside, providing a valuable recreational and economic resource. A plan to improve Kingston's waterspace is currently being considered by the Borough, and a character analysis of the river landscape is set out in the [Thames Landscape Strategy 2012 Review](#) which is due to be updated in 2023.

As recent as 1957, much of the river was considered to be almost biologically dead. Today, the Thames is a recovering ecosystem, whose healthy fish stocks of over 100 species indicates its present status as a good quality urban water environment. That said, many factors detract from its ecological status including urban runoff, agricultural pollutants from further upstream, abstraction and sewage discharges. Measures to reach 'good ecological status' under the Water Framework Directive are set out in the [Thames River Basin Management Plan](#), which includes some local initiatives relevant to Kingston.

Historically, the river would have been much wider and intrinsically linked to its floodplain. Despite the lower reaches of the Thames being highly modified, it is still a dynamic and complex system, consisting of riverbanks, riverbeds, islands, floodplain, inflows and outflows, as well as the water itself. Subsequently, the Thames should not be seen as just the river. What is left of its floodplain should be considered as a vital part of its ecology.

Restoration is key to increasing biodiversity and should be seen as the re-establishment of habitats and natural processes to the river system. This statement does not imply that the river should be restored to a pre-Industrial Revolution state (this would be impossible as the river landscape is highly modified with many constraints). Rather, it promotes the idea of encouraging nature-based solutions to create self-sustaining, dynamic habitats which induce biological recovery and restore the benefits that we humans rely on.

Through a catchment-wide approach multiple benefits can be achieved, including the enhancement of recreation, local economy, pollution control, carbon storage, tourism, transport and resilience to flood risk in a highly urbanised and populated area. Monitoring will be key and this plan aims to address the low knowledge base regarding the recording of species along Kingston's Arcadian Thames.

3 Current status

a. Legal / policy status

The Environment Agency, the Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat), water companies, internal drainage boards and local authorities all have statutory obligations to conserve river and stream habitats (See Appendix A for relevant legislation). Areas of the Thames may also benefit indirectly from protected species.

b. Conservation status

Rivers are listed as a priority habitat in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. The Thames is designated as Metropolitan Open Land, a Metropolitan SINIC and a Conservation Area, meaning it is afforded the same protection as land within the green belt and that planning permission may be required to demolish relevant buildings or structures, respectively. The Water Framework Directive outlines that the ecological status of the Thames should be not degrading but if possible improving. There are a number of local, regional and national plans which either directly or indirectly conserve the ecology of the Thames (See Appendix B for relevant plans).

c. Distribution

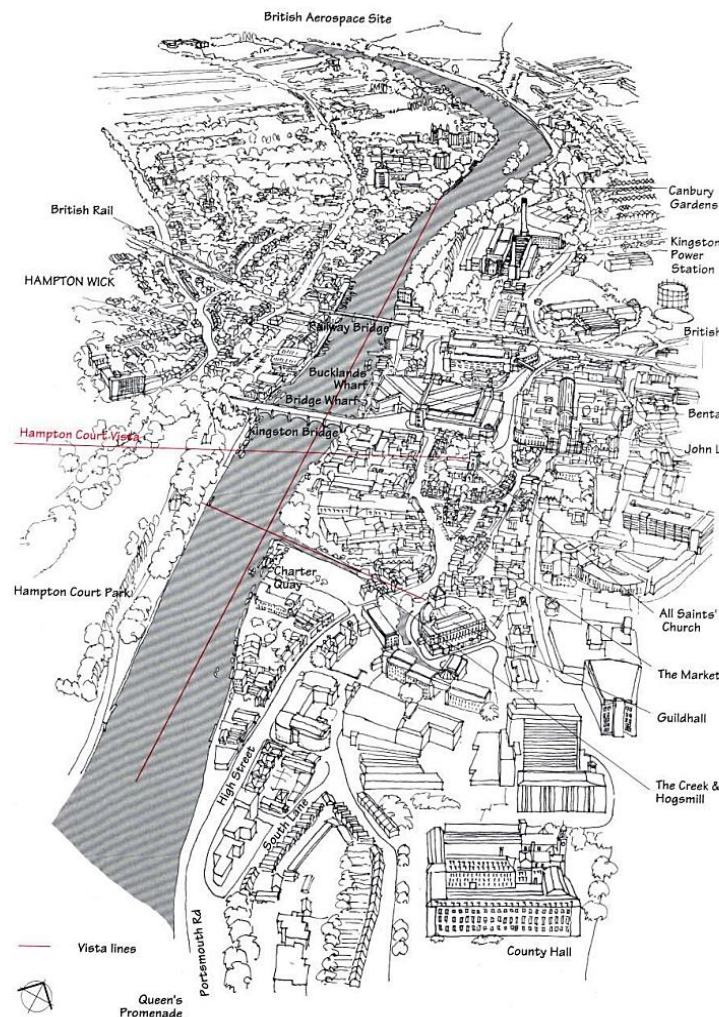


Figure 1 Map of the Thames in Kingston from the Thames Landscape Strategy.

4 Associated Indicator Species

The Thames is home to many species, both above and below the water as well as in the riverbed itself. Of particular note are eels, fish, several bat species, birds and reed beds. Other positive examples that are occasionally spotted in the borough include visiting seals and otters. The potential for making the area safer for these guests by encouraging respect and best practice from the public has been demonstrated elsewhere on the Thames.

This HAP notes the importance of providing habitat for these species, both in terms of spawning and nesting sites, as well as navigation. “Rewilding” of the riverbanks will help to achieve this and measures are already being considered and implemented. For example, re-naturalisation of the riverbank has been proposed in the [Canbury Garden SPD](#) through a variety of avenues, including the removal of hard barriers, native planting, habitat diversification, the introduction of rock edges to minimise erosion, the creation of shallow beaches to improve access and the removal of invasive species.

Increasing the diversity of the Thames in Kingston will create a more efficient and sustainable habitat, for both the wildlife and in terms of flood risk and climate change. There are also some aspirational rewilding projects to enhance habitats for white storks, otters and migratory salmonid fish such as European sturgeon, which would likely benefit a wide range of non-target species. Whilst reintroductions of the stork to the Thames would be challenging and would require neighbouring boroughs to work together, they are an impressive and charismatic bird that would surely be a positive addition.

Table 1 Species associated with river habitats

Group	Indicator Species
Bird	Great crested grebe, mallard, teal, coot, moorhen, tufted duck, common pochard, cormorant, mute swan, little grebe, yellow wagtail, grey heron, kingfisher, sand martin.
Mammal	Water vole, otter, bats (particularly Daubenton's bat). The Thames is known to be a Bat Super-Highway as they navigate between large parkland areas such as Hampton Court, Ham Lands and Richmond Park.
Reptile	Grass snake.
Invertebrate	Mayfly and freshwater shrimp.
Plant	Native reeds, sedges, purple loosestrife, rush, yellow flag iris. Trees: willow, alder, poplar.
Fish	Bream, salmon, pike, carp, chub, barbel, smelt, eel, fry.



5 Ecosystem Functionality and Services (Role in the Climate Emergency)

There is a growing awareness surrounding the importance of freshwater biodiversity and its contribution to ecosystem services, as well as their sensitivity to environmental and anthropogenic stressors. In addition to providing habitat for aquatic species, rivers are important for terrestrial organisms, such as bats, birds, and pollinating insects.

5.1 A Nature-Based Approach to River Restoration & Flood Risk

Rivers and their floodplains are among the most important environments in the UK, supporting a highly diverse habitat and species mix. The value of naturally functioning rivers to society both culturally and by the provision of amenity, water supply, wildlife, health and flood regulation benefits are clear. The modification of rivers however has led to widespread degradation of their natural character, resulting in a loss of characteristic habitat, biodiversity and the benefits we rely on.

The Thames in Kingston is within an urban environment and is highly altered. Whilst it supports a host of wildlife there is considerable scope for river restoration to reinstate characteristic river habitat and biodiversity. Of particular importance in Kingston is riverbank naturalisation and the greening of hard river edges, carried out in a way that reconnects the water with its floodplain. By encouraging the softening of banks, and increasing native riparian vegetation, drainage and filtration can be enhanced to reduce the risk of flooding and build resilience against flood and drought events. Measures to connect any new backwater habitat with the main channel should be explored.

5.2 Carbon Storage

There are some native reeds along the riverbank that act as an excellent carbon sink; storing carbon from the atmosphere and filtering pollutants. Wetland habitats are considered equally or in some studies,

more effective at carbon sequestering than forests. Along the riverbank, it is certainly more appropriate to develop wetland habitats than plant lots of trees. There is potential however, for considerable upscaling their numbers particularly in the Portsmouth Road/Seething Wells reach. Elsewhere, smaller pockets of reed could be planted.

5.3 Mitigating the Urban Heat Island Effect

Rivers and blue infrastructure provide a significant cooling service. This effect results from the high heat capacity of waterbodies, alongside evaporation and heat transfer between air and water which allows cool air to circulate in the surrounding environment. Appropriate green and blue infrastructure can be amalgamated to promote air flow in cities and increase urban comfort in the face of global warming.

5.4 Recreation, Tourism & Economic Development

The Thames is an important and highly valued source of recreation to visitors and residents. It is known to bring visitors to the borough and is the setting for many of Kingston's iconic views and places. Being beside a river is known to have a direct benefit on physical and mental wellbeing. Natural environments have been linked to social cohesion, life enrichment and spiritual experience. The towpath and water space offer scope for exercise including running, walking, rowing, paddle boarding and swimming. The provision of

quiet spaces where an intimacy with nature is possible should be achieved.

The Kingston reach of the Thames has undergone dramatic change in the last 30 years and is now a cherished local amenity. Alongside these enhancements,

the riverbank has been semi-naturalised through the introduction of wetlands and floating habitat mats. This needs to be extended and managed. A [Moorings Plan](#) is proposed for Kingston, measures to enhance biodiversity and create habitat (including reed beds) should be explored.

6 Threats to habitat

6.1 Development

The Thames is and has historically been the focus for considerable areas of development. Under particular threat is Seething Wells Filter Beds - the site of 19th century waterworks located in Surbiton. At 13 hectares, Seething Wells supports the largest area of standing open water within the borough which provides habitat for a range of species including wintering wildfowl, bats, and reptiles, all of which are legally protected within this area. Despite having some of the highest designations to protect it and a Core Strategy stating that 'the site is 'unsuitable for housing', there have been four major planning applications to develop the site for housing since 1992. Additionally, due to management of the site, biodiversity there has declined significantly over the past 5 years.

Ecologically, the Thames is a linear feature that species move about on a catchment scale. In addition, the river forms a green chain between the nature reserves at Ham, Richmond and Hampton. The function of the river as a corridor for wildlife within the wider catchment is constrained by low flows, modified river course, disconnection between the main channel and the floodplain and the hard engineering to stabilise the riverbanks. These reduce the variability of the habitat and curtail the

surface and subterranean floodplain environment. Little is known of the hydrology of the floodplain in the borough. Wherever possible natural flood management techniques should be employed, blue/green measures should be encouraged across the Borough.

6.2 Invasive Species

Non-native species are characteristic of urban waterbodies, posing a threat to ecosystem services and economy as they displace native species, carry diseases that kill fish, block up waterways causing floods and out-compete native fauna. Hypericum, floating pennywort, Himalayan balsam and oil seed rape are a particular threat to Kingston's biodiversity. There is at least one known example of Japanese knotweed along the Thames in the borough on Lower Ham Road which requires immediate management. It is not only invasive plants that threaten

Kingston's waterways as American mink, Chinese mitten crab, and the Asiatic clam have all been recorded. Invasive species can be mitigated or controlled by promoting biosecurity measures for the waterway, by removing invasive vegetation where found and adopting careful risk assessment for clearing away weed or other invasives to reduce cross-contamination to other waterbodies.

6.3 Litter & Plastics

The presence of microplastics in the natural environment is widely increasing, yet information regarding their impact is

lacking in comparison to the marine environment. Given that microplastics are a relatively novel threat, impacts such as ingestion by organisms and the chemical transfer of toxicants are largely unquantified. More research is required on their presence in the freshwater environment, the modes of distribution, the extent of their impacts on aquatic life and their potential impact on human health.

6.4 Water Quality & Pollution

The river is subject to a wide range of pollutants, especially when exposed to surface runoff from impervious materials in the built-up environment. Important examples include salts and metals from roads, fertilisers and chemical treatments from household and industry. Sewage discharge is also a threat to the health of the Thames.

Although background water quality has improved, there remains periodic outflows of untreated effluent from combined sewer systems in response to high rainfall events, which result in reductions in water quality. Without remediation, these occasional but major issues are expected to continue, especially as climate change is due to increase the number of extreme rainfall events and floods. Combatting these issues requires swift reporting of incidents through the statutory processes. Opportunities for the Partnership, Thames Water, EA and neighbouring boroughs should be explored. Improvement of issues with partners such as the Lower Thames Catchment.

6.5 Climate Change

Although the Kingston Thames begins upstream of the established tidal limits (Teddington Lock) it is still influenced by the tidal river up until Molesey Lock meaning Kingston is at considerable risk

of fluvial flood events, especially when floods coincide with a high tide. Global warming which will increase the risk of both flood and drought is expected to have a major impact on the river's ecology over the coming decades. In addition to these threats, it is predicted that more people will use the river and its associated environment for recreation as climate changes.

6.6 Lack of Knowledge

There is currently a recognised lack of knowledge regarding the physical and biological functioning of the river in Kingston including its species mix, with which to effectively inform policy and water management planning.

Monitoring of the river is recommended – working with the EA, Thames Water, and other stakeholders to continue to monitor water quality, flow and species stocks is vital to not only to the statutory requirements, it also provides the opportunity of recognising pollution / litter hot spots, and opportunities for improvement. The catchment partnership is working on a river run-off and water quality map which would be of great use to see where the water is coming in and out and where the most effective locations for improvement projects would be.

6.7 Lack of Long-Term Funding

River restoration and its management requires long term funding – this has traditionally been seen as a low priority, however, as the climate changes and the

need to naturalise and build resilience in the Thames increases, it is anticipated that future funding for nature-based solutions to adapt to climate change will be given greater weight.

6.8 Artificial Lighting

Light pollution is known to be a problem in Kingston, particularly to insects and nocturnal animals. Wherever possible, lighting should be designed to minimise the effect on wildlife and to reduce spillage onto the river itself. In RBK, light pollution from streetlights and nearby businesses is having an effect on the filter beds at Seething Wells and Canbury Gardens which are used by a range of important species including the Daubenton's bat.

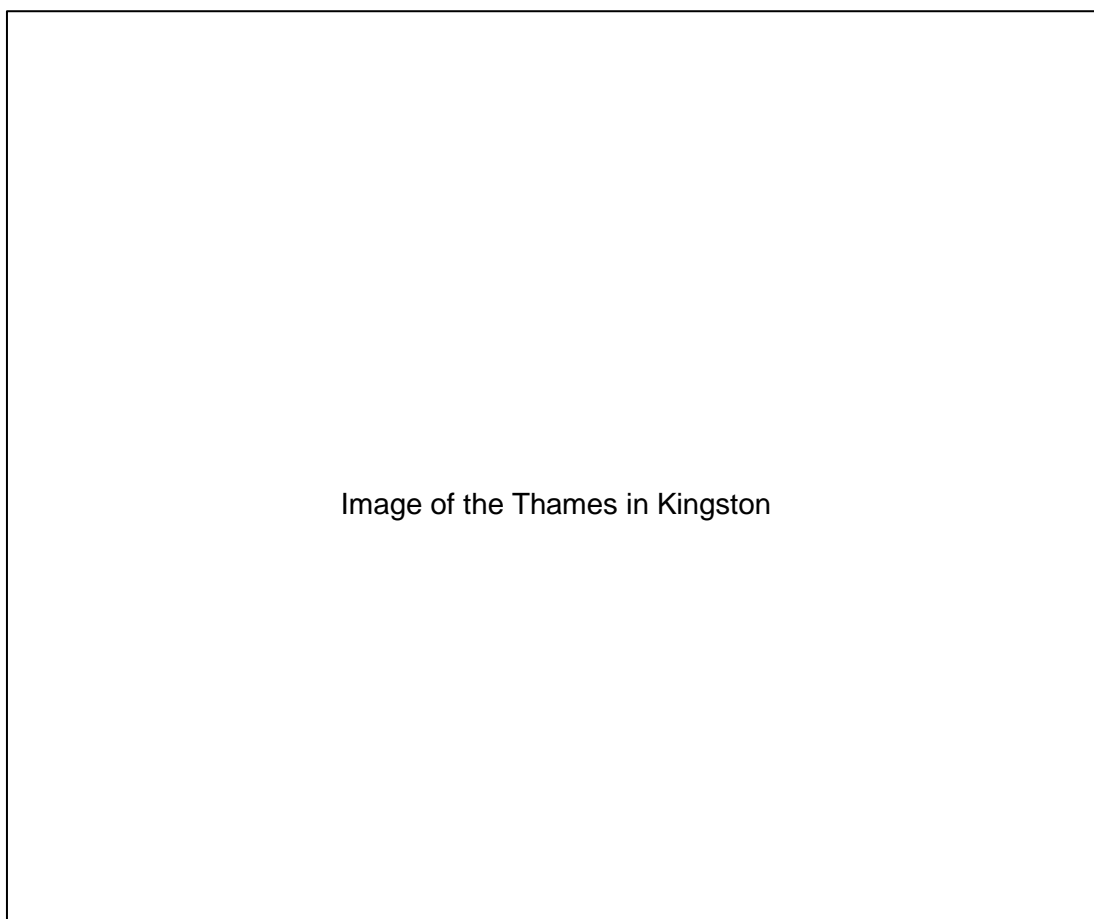
6.9 Abstraction & Flood Risk

During a flood, many aquatic species can be washed over Teddington Weir, whilst in low flow periods, oxygen levels can fall quickly. Natural flood management and

nature-based solutions should be considered to help increase resilience and link to wider Catchment Based Approach

(CaBA) goals. A Riverside Strategy will be required to demonstrate how flood risk will be managed. Scope for nature-based approach to build resilience to increasing flood risk at Canbury Gardens is considerable and an exciting prospect.

There is also continued large-scale abstraction of fresh water for public water supply from above Teddington Lock. Although this is regulated there are still potential changes to river ecology during the low flow summer period. There is potential here for working with Thames Water on sustainable drainage opportunities and public engagement on the relationship between urban drainage and the River. For example, projects like Connect-Right, Only Rain in Rivers and Unflushables can have a collective impact on the sustainability of the River.



7 Conservation actions (Tabulated)

Action	Timeframe	Lead	Partners	Evidence base
T01 - Evaluate the key issues regarding invasive species and target the removal or reduction of priority species along the Thames.	On-going	RBK	EA, volunteer groups TLS	N/A
02 – Rewild Canbury Gardens Riverside to enhance biodiversity and build resilience against increasing flood risk.	Canbury Gardens Masterplan dependant	RBK	TLS EA	Canbury Gardens SPD TLS Rewilding Arcadia River Thames Scheme
T03 - Manage the river wall along the town centre waterfront to enhance the nature conservation value.	Scoping 2023 – develop potential 2023/4	RBK, TLS		TLS Review 4.3M
T04 - Manage the outflow of The Creek/Hogsmill River for nature conservation in line with the Hogsmill Catchment Management Plan.	Concordant with the Hogsmill Plans	RBK, TLS		River Policy K14 (K+20 Area Action Plan) TLS Review 4.1M
T05 - Control scrub growth, and encourage more diverse riparian planting between Ham Lands footpath and river, and manage adjacent grasslands as hay meadow.	Annually	TLS	RBK	TLS Review 5.2M

T06 - Manage the vegetation along the Lower Ham Road riverbank through a three-year rotational coppice of the tree stock and a two year shrub layer coppice.	Annually	TLS	RBK CARA	TLS Review 5.6M
T07 - Encourage planning applications to preserve/enhance wildlife corridors within their scheme. Promote the encouragement of species which have not been found during surveys (if within their range) as well as maintaining known species.	To be included in the Local Plan	RBK	Working Group	Waterways & Wildlife – Canal and River Trust Developing Blue Corridors – GOV.UK
T08 - Identify opportunities to incorporate protections and improvements ensuring net environmental benefits to the river and its corridors through borough mechanisms such as the Local Plan and CIL lists etc.	Ongoing (within Local Plan Cycle)	RBK		River Restoration & Biodiversity - IUCN River Restoration – ECRR Riparian Vegetation Management - SEPA
T09 - Require mitigation for increased urban surfaces in any development e.g. SUDS, green roof, green wall etc. – inclusion in local plans and planning policy.	Ongoing (within Local Plan Cycle)	RBK		Sustainable Drainage Systems - Thames21 Living Roofs & Walls – GOV.UK

T10 - Identify riverside areas for habitat improvement in line with aesthetic and biodiversity objectives (riparian buffer zone of RBK management plan) and other stakeholders.	On-going	RBK, TLS	EA, LWT, Working Group	N/A
T11 - Create nesting areas for waterfowl on Eyots & aits in the Thames.	1 per year	RBK, Landowner	TLS	N/A
T12 – Increase connectivity of the tideway to other surrounding habitats through anthropogenic / development usage of existing and potential corridors (opportunities for new connections from development).	On-going	RBK	LBRuT, Elmbridge, Surrey, EA	See T08
T13 - Increase the connectivity between habitats and species who use the Thames as part of their life cycle (birds/bats/eels/fish).	Aim for a project a year	Landowners		See T08
T14 - Contribute to database of species records in London. Collate existing data from partners.	Annual Count, Citizen Science		Council Led	GIGL, TLS,EA, LWT

T15 - To hydro-geographically map the riverbed within the borough to identify opportunities where the riverbed can be diversified as well as enhancement for fish and aquatic invertebrates. Also map the riverbed to determine any areas of pollutant or sediment contamination.	On-going conversation through the catchment management plans (Tidal Thames and Lower Thames Catchment)		PLA/EA	EA, RBK
Engagement & Awareness	Timeframe	Lead	Partners	Evidence base
T16 - Target the distribution of public information on one significant benefit or concern related to the Thames each year e.g. misconnections, hard standing, invasive species etc. Incorporate into policy approaches and opportunities such as river restorations.	Annual	RBK	EA, LBRuT, Elmbridge Borough Council, Surrey County Council	Water Framework Directive Catchment Partnership Thames River Basin Management Plan The Thames Landscape Strategy
T17 - Actively engage with the Lower Thames Catchment Partnership.	On-going	TLS	EA, TLS	N/A
T18 - Ensure communication with surrounding boroughs for continuity.	On-going	RBK	TLS	N/A

T19 - Ensure coordination with the proposed Eagle Brewery Wharf, Thameside and John Lewis waterfront for potential river projects.	Ongoing	RBK		N/A
T20 - Connect with friends' groups that are doing habitat management on Steven's Ait.	2023 - 2024	RBK		N/A
T21 - Carry out monthly volunteer group flotsam and jetsam clean ups deposited from the spring tides along Lower Ham Road.	On-going	CARA/TLS		N/A
T22 - Help enforce "Check, Clean, dry". Distribution of information to water users (boat clubs, schools, businesses etc). Signage, Interpretation.	On-going	RBK	TLS, H&H	N/A

8 Planning Context - Biodiversity Net Gain

In the UK, a planning condition is defined as 'a constraint placed on the granting of planning permission which allows development to go ahead only if the conditions are satisfied'. When used properly, conditions can enhance the quality of development and enable it to proceed where it would have otherwise been necessary to refuse, by mitigating the adverse effects. As an automatic condition of the Environment Act 2021, applicants will need to measure the existing and proposed biodiversity values of their sites before development begins in order for permissions to be granted.

As priority habitat for the borough, the Thames River should be protected through the planning system and, where possible, habitat creation and enhancement is encouraged.

Backwaters and floodplains should also be considered as part of the rivers' ecology. As part of the new conditions, if the loss of a habitat cannot be avoided appropriate mitigation and compensation actions must be taken, with a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain (calculated using The Biodiversity Metric 3.0). Additionally, these biodiversity enhancements must be secured for a minimum of 30 years. Reaches of adjoining priority habitats, such as grassland, rivers and streams and woodlands may form an integral part of freshwater conservation management.

The new Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) policy does not trump other environmental policies, meaning irreplaceable and locally important habitats should remain protected from development and are not to be insufficiently replaced with newly created habitats. The delivery of BNG through landscaping and green infrastructure is preferred on site. Where on site improvements are not possible measurements must be delivered off site on land holdings or via habitat banks, or as a last resort, through the purchase of statutory biodiversity credits.

9 Monitoring

Metric	Process of Monitoring	Timeframe	Lead	Partners
T01, T02, T03, T04, T05, T06, T11, T12, T13, T14 - Number of habitat enhancement projects undertaken	Ad hoc, Annual report	2023 - ongoing	RBK	TLS
T07 - Number of species/habitat enhancement projects undertaken through the planning system	Ad hoc, Annual report	2023 - ongoing	RBK	
T08 – Number of incorporations into borough mechanisms	Annual account	2023 – 2028	RBK	
T09 – Number of new planning conditions introduced to mitigate increases in urban surfaces	Annual account	2023 – 2028	RBK	
T10 – Square metres of river habitat identified for restoration	Ad hoc, Annual Report	2023 - 2028	RBK	

T14, T15 - Number of monitoring programmes undertaken	Annual report	2023 – ongoing	RBK	
T16, T22 - Number of awareness campaigns delivered	Annual account	2023 – 2028	RBK	
T17, T18, T19, T20 – Log of communications and collaborations	Ad hoc, Annual account	2023 – 2028	RBK	EA, TLS
T22 – Number of volunteers events and number of attendees	Ad hoc, Annual account	2023 – 2028	RBK	

10 Other relevant HAPs/ SAPs

- a. Grassland
- b. Hedgerow
- c. Rivers and Streams
- d. Standing Open Water
- e. Woodland
- f. Amphibians
- g. Bats
- h. Reptiles
- i. Swift
- j. Water Vole

11 References and links

[The State Of The Thames 2021 | Zoological Society of London \(ZSL\)](#)
[Our Guidance Document: The Thames Landscape Strategy Review 2012 – Thames Landscape Strategy \(thames-landscape-strategy.org.uk\)](#)
[The London Plan 2021 | London City Hall](#)
[25 Year Environment Plan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
[Maidenhead to Teddington Catchment Partnership - Thames21](#)

12 Abbreviations

CaBA – Catchment Based Approach
CIL – Community Infrastructure Levy
EA - Environment Agency
GiGL - Greenspace Information for Greater London
HAP - Habitat Action Plan
LBRuT - London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

PLA - Port of London Authority
 RBK - Royal Borough of Kingston
 RMI - Riverfly Monitoring Initiative
 SPD – Supplementary Planning Document
 TLS - Thames Landscape Strategy
 TW - Thames Water
 ZSL - Zoological Society of London

13 Contact information

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14 Appendix

Appendix A. Table of legislation relevant to the London Thames.

Act	Description
The Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) Act 1961	Makes provisions for maintaining or restoring the wholesomeness of rivers and other inland/coastal waters
The Environmental Protection Act 1990	Brings together the system of integrated pollution prevention and control (IPPC)
The Water Resources Act 1991	Regulates water resources, water quality, pollution and flood defence
The Water Industry Act 1991	Sets out the main powers and duties of water and sewerage companies
The Land Drainage Act 1991	Sets out the functions of boards and local authorities in relation to land drainage and requires that a watercourse be maintained by its owner in such a condition that the free flow of water is not impeded

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005	Provides local authorities with more effective powers to tackle poor environmental quality and anti-social behaviour. In particular: nuisance and abandoned vehicles, litter, graffiti, waste, noise and dogs
The Flood and Water Management Act 2012	provides comprehensive management of flood risk/coastal erosion, creates safeguards against rises in surface water drainage charges and protects water supplies for consumers
The Water Act 2014	the aim of this Act was to reform the water industry to make it more innovative and responsive to customers and to increase the resilience of water supplies to natural hazards such as droughts and floods
The Environment Act 2021	The Act includes provisions to strengthen and improve the duty on public bodies to conserve and enhance biodiversity, including mandating a net gain biodiversity through the planning system

Appendix B. List of strategic plans relevant to the Thames

- **National** - HM Government 25 Year Environment Plan sets out a wide range of actions designed to result in cleaner air and water, richer habitats for more wildlife and an approach to agriculture, forestry, land use and fisheries that puts the environment first. It also frames proposals to tackle waste, soil degradation, and the effects of climate change.
- **Regional** - London Plan, Thames Landscape Strategy, River Thames Basin Management Plan, Lower Thames Maidenhead to Teddington Catchment Plan.
- **Local** - Local Plan, Local Development Scheme, Riverside Public Realm, Thames Landscape Strategy for Kingston.

Image of the Thames in Kingston