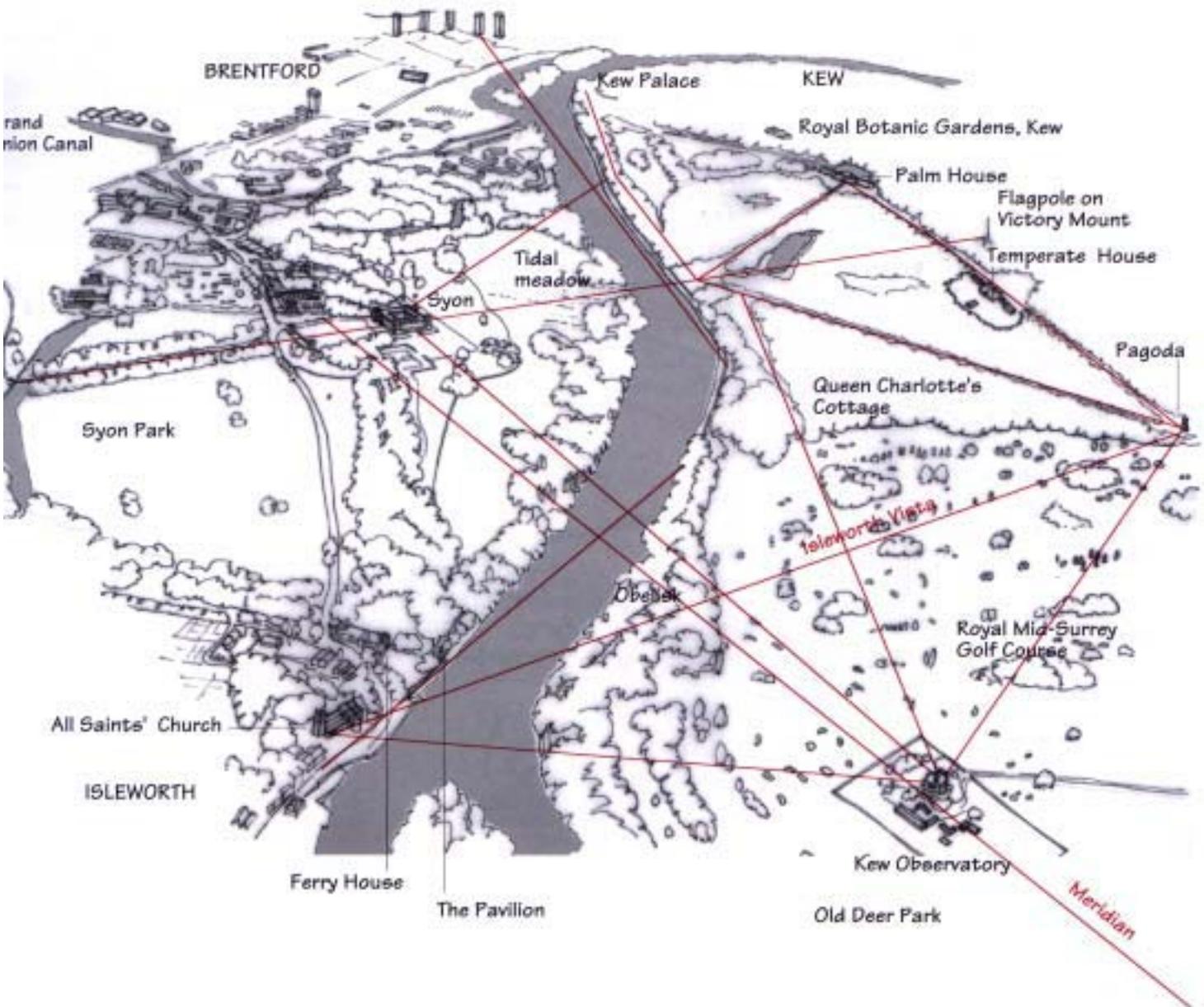


LANDSCAPE CHARACTER REACH

11. Syon



— Vista lines



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER



The Nesfield Avenues in the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew focus onto the Syon vista. This 1920s photo shows the traditional management of Syon Park, maintaining the open tide meadow and Capability Brown tree clumps

The Syon Reach is bordered by two of the most significant designed landscapes in Britain. Royal patronage at Richmond and Kew inspired some of the initial influential works of Bridgeman, Kent and Chambers. The current layouts of Syon and the Royal Botanic Gardens are still basically the work of Lancelot Brown and William Nesfield.

Syon Park is still essentially a Capability Brown landscape. The ha-ha, water meadows and tree clumps survive, though advancing willow and poplar scrub growth have merged the clumps, obliterated much of the meadow and blocked views to the river. An aerial photograph from as recently as the 1920s shows the 18th-century landscape intact. The imposing house, with the lion silhouetted on the roof, is now only revealed by a single narrowing window through the scrub. The channels of the water meadow have become blocked and the clay land drains are steadily eroding away into the Thames.

The Countryside Commission, English Nature and English Heritage are currently working with Syon Park to re-instate the tide meadow, the Capability Brown clumps and the visual connections to Kew and the river. Syon Park Limited has commissioned a landscape masterplan to advise on the management of the historic landscape and the layout and organisation of visitor facilities, parking and public access. The masterplan will help to set the guidelines for Syon's participation in the Countryside Commission Stewardship Scheme.

One of the critical factors in the plan will be the re-instatement of the **visual links** across the river. Lines drawn on the plans of Glover and Kent show an awareness of important sightlines from at least the 17th century. The square of Syon House is arranged on the cardinal points of the compass, to which later designs have responded. The north-south axis relates to the later meridian of the King's Observatory. The east-west axis, through the centre of the House, has been continued along the avenue towards Hounslow to the west and through the centre point of Nesfield's triangle of avenues in Kew towards the flagpole on the mount of the Temple of Victory to the east. Both the Syon and Kew avenues are in need of re-instatement.

The significance of the visual links is also being considered by the **Royal Botanic Gardens**. Nesfield's triangle of avenues still forms the basic structure of the Gardens, linking the Pagoda, the Temperate House, the Palm House and the window to the Thames, with its cross-vista through the centre of Syon House. The lines of the avenues could be sharpened and the triangular framework made clearer in guides to the Gardens, but the basic organising principle is still there. The relationship between the site and the outside landscape is less clear. The Isleworth Vista, marked on the 1920 OS Map between the Pagoda and All Saints' Church, has been blocked by golf course planting and river edge scrub, as has the Isleworth view from the Observatory. The view from Chambers' Observatory to his Pagoda is being closed by conifers. And the views south from both Queen Charlotte's Cottage and Kew Palace have been obscured by scrub. The Royal Botanic Gardens are sensitive to prevailing winds into the site from the south-west and to the intrusion of high rise buildings in Brentford to the north. For example, an office block across the M4 looms over the north-south Nesfield Avenue as well as dominating the view over Kew Bridge from the Green. The westerly views across to Syon, as shown in the Farington engraving and Turner's sketches, could however be re-opened without affecting screenings to the north or south.

The whole relationship between **Kew Gardens and the river** could also be improved. The Gardens have effectively turned their back on the Thames. Gradually the riverside promenades of Bridgeman and Brown have been planted out. The site of the Castellated Palace and Queen Elizabeth's Lawn have been turned over to parking and workshops (see Reach 12). And the river bank itself has been reinforced with massive steep concrete revetments



Joseph Farington's view of Syon from Kew Gardens in 1795, showing the integration of the two landscapes

to meet flood threats of pre-Tidal Barrier days. The parking, infrastructure and protection of the Botanic Gardens are complicated issues and the sums involved in any reorganisation considerable. Over the next century however, it may be possible to plan the future of the Gardens not only as a world-class research centre, but also to take advantage of the exceptional character and riverside setting of the historic landscape.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Syon's recorded history begins when one of Henry V's chantries, the **Syon monastery** opposite his Shene Palace, was moved to the present site of Syon House in 1431. At the Dissolution, the monastery was given to the Duke of Somerset, the Lord Protector, who built Syon House on the site with the materials of the abbey at the same time as he built his great Somerset House in London in 1547. The Protector of the Realm during Edward VI's minority was king in all but name and even addressed the King of France as brother. In 1552 Somerset was overthrown and executed, one of the accusations of his opponents being that he had raised a great terrace around Syon House as a prelude to fortifying it. The manor of Syon then forfeited to the crown, changed hands many times before the lease was obtained from Queen Elizabeth I by the 9th Earl of Northumberland, whose descendants live there to this day.

Syon Park has always combined landscaping by the best designers with a long-standing tradition of horticultural skills. The nuns had cultivated walled gardens and orchards and horticultural activity continued under William Turner, called the Father of English Botany, for the Lord Protector. Queen Mary recalled the nuns temporarily but as Fuller records there was difficulty in reassembling the original occupants of Syon Abbey as '*most of the elder nuns were in their graves and the younger in the arms of their husbands*'.

The 7th Earl of Northumberland, who inherited in 1748 may have been responsible for the demolition of Somerset's treasonable triangular terrace and the formation of a ha-ha. The formal gardens are shown in Jan Griffier's painting of c1710 and are still there on Rocque's survey of London of 1744 but Canaletto's painting of 1749 shows that they have been removed. When Rocque's map of Middlesex of 1754 was published, the landscape is in place with a '*church Walk*', a sinuous shrubbery walk leading from the house to the church at Isleworth. Payments to Capability Brown for one of his earliest commissions began in 1754 and a lake with bridges and Flora's column is described in the Syon entry of the *Environs of London* in 1761. In 1764 Brown worked, as Royal Gardener, for George III at Richmond Lodge, and was able to unite the landscape on both sides of the river. Richard Wilson painted an idyllic Arcadian scene showing the river landscape of Syon and Richmond gardens as they appeared in the 1760s.

Kew Gardens as we know them today are the result of the joining of the two adjacent royal estates of Kew and Richmond, formerly divided by Love Lane; ironically named in view of the animosity of the Prince of Wales and his parents. At Richmond Lodge the Duke of Ormonde had created long avenues from the house to the river and southwards towards Richmond Green. Queen Caroline was the patron of Charles Bridgeman and the new landscaping even before he was appointed Royal gardener in 1728. As seen on the Rocque map, her Richmond gardens had an ornamental canal, a river terrace, forest walks, an amphitheatre, and diagonal wilderness. William Kent's hermitage and Merlin's cave are also shown. It was in these gardens that Queen Caroline held her mock pastoral revels, based on the *fetes galantes* of Watteau's paintings. Chatelain shows the court playing at being simple rustics crossing to the Syon bank in the manner of Watteau's famous pilgrimage to the Isle of Love.

Capability Brown, commissioned by George III, broke up the Bridgeman avenues and formal groves extending the lawns to the river and letting in frequent views to the interior part of the gardens. He also demolished Kent's famous garden buildings. Richmond had always the advantage of the river, whereas William Chambers, working on the Kew landscape to the east had



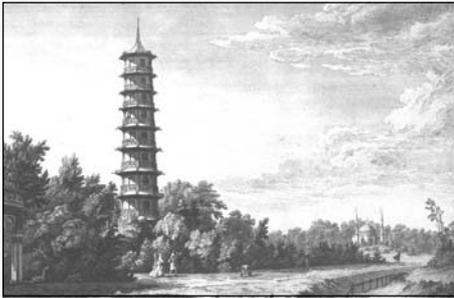
Griffier's view of Syon in 1710 showing the raised terraces and formal gardens



Rocque's Plan of the House, Park and Hermitage of their Majesties at Richmond in 1736



The royal court playing at picnicking rustics in 1736 with Richmond Lodge in the background



Chambers' Pagoda with the Mosque and the Alhambra in 1736



The white swan pedal-boat made for the future George III's seventeenth birthday



The Temperate House, parallel with the Pagoda-Palm House Avenue. A distant office block across the M4 looms over the vista.

an unpromisingly flat and featureless site. As well as the botanical interest already provided for the Princess Augusta by her garden adviser, Lord Bute, and William Aiton, Chambers relied on his garden architecture for inward-looking effect, erecting a mosque, an alhambra, a gothic cathedral, a ruined Roman arch, a Temple of Victory, a classical orangery and the spectacular 10-storeyed pagoda. In front of the White house, he created a lake with a white swan pedal boat, the 'Augusta', made for the future George III's 17th birthday.

When the **two gardens** were amalgamated in the 1840s, the lake was partially filled in and most of the buildings were removed. New entrance gates were erected on Kew Green when Queen Victoria opened the gardens to the public. The orangery and pagoda, a London landmark, remain as notable Chambers landscape buildings. The only Brown feature allowed to remain was his sunken laurel vale of 1773, now replanted as the rhododendron dell. The gardens we see today are the work of Sir William Hooker, the first Director of Kew, and the landscape architect, WA Nesfield. The designs adapted to the new conditions and opportunities that the amalgamation of the sites, public access and scientific research brought.

Nesfield made the new **Palm House**, designed by Decimus Burton, the pivot of his layout with a radiating pagoda vista, a vista of Syon, a broad walk and Holly walk roughly along the old Love Lane. Nesfield's parterre round the Palm House was redesigned after his death in 1881, but his vistas remain. Nesfield had formed a new smaller pond in front of the Palm House from the original lake in the Chambers layout and in 1857, when the **Temperate House** was built, Hooker decided that the pits dug for the gravel for its terrace should be made into a larger, more natural, lake nearer the river, where Queen Caroline's Merlin's cave once stood.

The Queen's Cottage, like Kew Palace, is under the control of the Historic Royal Palaces Agency within the Royal Botanic Gardens. A *cottage orné* with a small menagerie was built for Queen Charlotte and the younger members of her family. Fanny Burney often mentions the Queen's delight in retiring there, but when she took up residence at Kew Palace it was used as an ornamental dairy. In 1806 WT Aiton, who had taken over from his father as superintendent, was asked to design a flower garden in the paddocks of the cottage 'lately occupied by the kangaroos from Botany Bay'. It remained a royal enclosure until 1897 when it became part of Kew Gardens.

NATURE CONSERVATION

At the boundary between the Old Deer Park and Kew Gardens, the grassland beside the **towpath** is dominated by California brome, a North American species which 'escaped' from Kew Gardens in the 1930s and is now common in many places in the area, particularly alongside the Thames. Pellitory-of-the-wall, another plant which has a restricted range within London but is quite widespread locally, grows upon the brick wall in the ha-ha forming the boundary of Kew Gardens. Another special sight along the towpath is the purple hairstreak butterfly. The oak collection in Kew Gardens provides abundant food for caterpillars of the butterfly. This species tends to fly high around the canopy, where it is hard to see, but it will descend to feed on the nectar of bramble flowers which are abundant along the edge of the path.

The strip of secondary woodland which runs along the western boundary of the **Old Deer Park**, adjacent to the towpath, would benefit from woodland management to create a more diverse age structure and to open sunny glades to enhance the woodland habitat, and also the wetland habitat of the ha-ha as described under Landscape Character Reach 10.

Growing in the **tidal mud** on the Richmond side of the river, is a large stand of sea club-rush. This species is typically a brackish water plant, but the river water at this point is fresh at all times except when the river is exceptionally low and salt water can penetrate further upstream. Associated riparian species here include great yellow-cress, pink water speedwell and marsh ragwort, all of which are rare in London. A few plants of purple loosestrife also grow on the intertidal mud but this species is much more abundant on the bank top

where it forms bright swathes in summer. The river banks on the Surrey side of the river have cracks and loose areas which have enabled plants to establish making solid walls look considerably more attractive. A joint NRA/LBRuT project, experimenting with willow spiling, begins in 1994.

The **Royal Botanic Gardens** at Kew has a global significance for its botanical collections. There are also some semi-natural areas, the most extensive of which is the woodland around Queen Charlotte's Cottage in the south west of the gardens. Oak is the main canopy tree, beneath which rhododendron provides cover for mammals and birds. Sheets of bluebells in spring, are followed later in the year by quantities of flowers of two naturalised plants: perfoliate alexanders and martagon lily. Much of the grassland in the gardens has been re-seeded and treated with herbicides in the past, but some areas retain their original acidic character. Herbicides are no longer used on the grassland, and it is intended to return much more of the sward to its original character, especially in the arboreta. There are at least two bat roosts in the gardens, with several species of bats. Breeding birds include all three British woodpeckers, and spotted flycatchers, and the abundant bird and mammal life is preyed upon by sparrow hawks, kestrels and up to four pairs of tawny owls. Woodcocks, rare birds in London, are regularly seen in winter in the Queen Charlotte's Cottage grounds. Frogs, toads and newts all breed in a small marshy pond within the woodland area, and these provide food for grass snakes which were introduced to the gardens a few years ago.

The tide meadow at **Syon Park**, scheduled as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, is one of the few remaining Thames-side wetland areas. It is particularly unusual because part of the land is inundated twice daily by the tide. There is an interesting gradation of habitat from the river bank inland. In recent years, scrub has encroached on the heavily channelled intertidal muds. This is backed by wet grassland and reed beds which are also regularly inundated. In turn this area of grassland is backed by a drier area of grassland extending to the ha-ha fronting Syon House. Apart from the willow woodland, this area had changed little over the past several hundred years until the scrub invasion of the last few decades.

The scrub encroaching onto the riverside muds consists of a wide variety of willows and poplars, merging with historic clumps of lombardy poplar and swamp cypress. The shrub layer is not very diverse, being mostly elder, but the ground flora taking hold on the thick muds includes cow parsley and hemlock water dropwort. As the woodland is relatively recent, it would be beneficial to reduce its extent but keep some areas for roosting birds, particularly herons. The grazing regime will need to be adjusted to restrict encroachment of the woodland over the grassland areas. The creeks, which are a distinctive feature of the site, extend from the Thames well into the grassland. They are largely devoid of vegetation under the shade of the woodland canopy but are otherwise colonised by a large number of marsh plants, as described below. The reduction of the wooded area over the creeks will increase their floral diversity.

The meadow which is regularly inundated is dominated by reed sweet-grass but with a wide variety of other marshland plants also occurring. Marsh ragwort, yellow flag, marsh foxtail, water mint and meadow sweet are some of the flowers. The drier neutral grassland further inland is dominated by meadow-grasses, rye grass and species of bent. There are large tussocks of tufted hair grass in the transitional zone.

Apart from the tidal meadows, the long lake within the pastures west of the main entrance drive, is important for nature conservation. Its margins are normally luxuriously vegetated providing good cover for many waterfowl. However, the lake has recently been dredged and it will be some time before the plants are restored completely. Great water dock, galingale and glaucous bulrush are all species of restricted distribution in London which are found on the lake edge. The surrounding pastures are closely grazed by cattle and are not of particular botanical interest as the sward is mainly rye grass. The proposed management for the pastures is continued grazing with no application of herbicides or fertilisers and this, in time, should lead to the development of a more diverse sward as the fertility drops.

**'So sits in vegetable pride
Imperial Kew by Thames's glittering side'**
Erasmus Darwin



The Syon Conservatory is open for private functions

PUBLIC ACCESS AND RECREATION

The Royal Botanic Gardens and Syon are open to the public, with a variety of facilities ranging from conservatories to the museums at Kew and the Butterfly House at Syon. Both gardens have entrance charges. The Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club is private, but access to the King's Observatory and the astronomy museum, in the centre of the course, can be arranged by appointment.

There is continuous public access via the Thames Path along the towpath to Kew and tortuous access from the Brentford waterfront up the Grand Union Canal to Osterley. A link from the Canal through Syon to Isleworth, if combined with the re-instated ferry to Kew, would create a popular circular walk and perhaps justify the re-opening of the Isleworth gate to the Royal Botanic Gardens (see Landscape Character Reach No 12).

Boatyards: None

Water recreation: Informal

Land recreation:	Kew towpath		LBRuT
	Royal Botanic Gardens	Grade I	
	Syon House and Conservatory	Grade I	Private
	Syon Park	Grade I	Private
	Syon Butterfly House and Museums		Private
	Thames Path		

Refreshment: Royal Botanic Gardens
Syon

Landmarks:	All Saints' Church, Isleworth	Grade II	Church Comm.
	Flora's Column, Syon	Grade II	Private
	King's Observatory	Grade I	Crown Estate
	Kew Palace	Grade I	Crown Estate
	Norwegian flagpole on Victory Mount, RBG		RBG
	Orangery, Royal Botanic Gardens	Grade I	RBG
	Pagoda, Royal Botanic Gardens	Grade I	RBG
	Palm House, Royal Botanic Gardens	Grade I	RBG
	Queen Charlotte's Cottage	Grade I	Crown Estate
	Syon Conservatory	Grade I	Private
	Temperate House, Royal Botanic Gardens	Grade I	RBG
	Syon House	Grade I	Private

LOCAL INTEREST GROUPS:

Amenity and Local History:
Friends of Royal Botanic Gardens
Hounslow and District History Society
Kew Society
Isleworth Society
Richmond Local History Society
River Thames Society (Upper Tidal)

Nature Conservation:
London Wildlife Trust

PRINCIPAL LAND USES

The entire area is still dominated by the historic landscapes of Syon and Kew. The Royal Botanic Gardens, the Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Course and Syon Park Limited have modified the parkland settings for public enjoyment and research.

SIGNIFICANT SITES UNDER PRESSURE FOR DEVELOPMENT:

<i>Sites</i>	<i>Main landscape factors for consideration</i>
Lower Nursery	- importance of the original Bridgeman and Brown river promenades - site of Castellated Palace and Queen Elizabeth's Lawn - setting of Kew Palace - access via constricted Kew Green - parking constraints

The following proposals have been identified as part of the survey and analysis of the Thames Landscape Strategy. The policy proposals amplify the issues raised in Chapter 2 to be included in Supplementary Planning Guidance. The project and management proposals are recommended for incorporation into national agency and local government work programmes, co-ordinated by a Project Officer and Officers' Steering Committee (see Chapter 5). All proposals would require full consultation before implementation:

Policy Proposals

	<i>Policy</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Pol II.1	Conserve and enhance the Syon SSSI and the Grade I historic landscapes of Syon Park and the Royal Botanic Gardens.	LBRuT: ENV 12, 13.32 (7/11) LBH: ENV4.1,4.7, 4.10,5.1
Pol II.2	Protect the visual links between: Syon, the river and Kew Gardens Syon and the King's Observatory King's Observatory and Isleworth The Pagoda and Isleworth The Pagoda, the Temperate House and the Palm House Queen Charlotte's Cottage and the Old Deer Park	LBRuT: RIV 1,ENV 2 LBH: ENV 1.6a
Pol II.3	Prevent any further parking on the river edge and remove existing parking if and when suitable alternative parking sites become available.	LBRuT: RIV 1 LBH: ENV 4.7
Pol II.4	Conserve and enhance the nature conservation interest of the river and its corridor, with particular attention to the tide meadow at Syon Park.	LBH ENV 5.1, 6.7

Project Proposals

	<i>Project</i>	<i>Initiative</i>
Proj II.1	Cut back invading scrub to reveal the Capability Brown tree clumps and re-open tidal meadow at Syon Park.	LBH:ENV4.7,5.1,5.5,6.7 Syon Park Ltd Eng Her, Eng Nat, Countryside Comm
Proj II.2	Conserve and where necessary restore the Syon river banks and water meadow channels.	NRA,Syon Park Ltd Eng Her, Eng Nat, Countryside Comm
Proj II.3	Conserve and enhance the east-west axial visual line through Syon to Kew, re-instating the Syon avenues.	Syon Park Ltd Royal Bot. Gardens
Proj II.4	Sharpen the triangle of Nesfield Avenues as the landscape framework of the Royal Botanic Gardens.	Royal Bot. Gardens
Proj II.5	Make the formal landscape structure of Kew clearer in signs and guides.	Royal Bot. Gardens
Proj II.6	Re-open Isleworth vista from the Pagoda.	LBRuT: RIV 1, 13.32 (11) Eng Her. Royal Bot. Gardens Royal Mid-Surrey
Proj II.7	Re-open Isleworth and Syon vistas from the Observatory.	LBRuT: RIV 1, 13.32 (11) Eng Her. Crown Estate Royal Mid-Surrey Royal Bot. Gardens
Proj II.8	Re-open views south from Queen Charlotte's Cottage over the Hooker ha-ha and from the Nesfield Avenue to the King's Observatory.	Royal Bot. Gardens
Proj II.9	Re-instate the river walk and views in the Royal Botanic Gardens.	Royal Bot. Gardens
Proj II.10	Re-instate the Isleworth ferry and promote the circular walk from Kew to Brentford to the Grand Union Canal and Syon.	LBRuT: RIV 7 LBH:C 5.10,ENV 6.4 Countryside Comm British Waterways

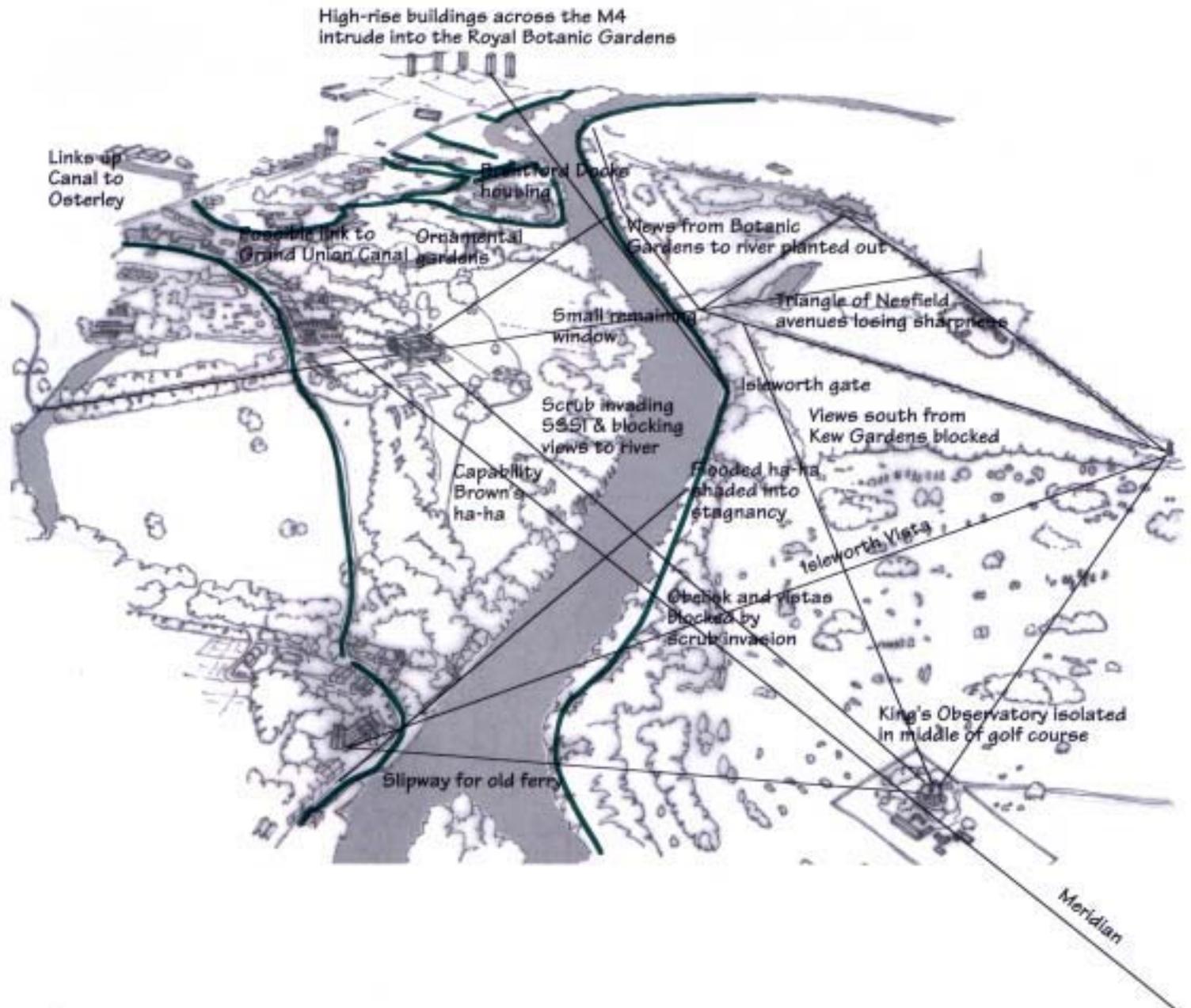
Management Proposals

	<i>Management</i>	<i>Initiative</i>
Mng II.1	Manage the meadows and pastures of Syon Park by grazing, without applying herbicides or fertilisers.	LBH,Syon Park Ltd Eng Her, Eng Nat, Countryside Comm
Mng II.2	Control scrub growth and ha-ha management on the Kew towpath.	LBRuT: RIV 3
Mng II.3	Manage tree screens to protect the Royal Botanic Gardens from prevailing south-westerly winds and intrusive views from the north.	Royal Bot. Gardens LBRuT: ENV 8
Mng II.4	Manage the marshy pond and woodland around Queen Charlotte's Cottage gardens to maintain a thriving wildlife area.	Royal Bot. Gardens



LANDSCAPE CHARACTER REACH

11. Syon



— Vieta lines
— Public paths

