

Riverside Management

The riverside is a particularly difficult environment to manage. The diverse needs of biodiversity, aesthetics, lack of funding, and recreation all have to be balanced and in much of the TLS area any maintenance plan has to account for daily tidal inundation and difficult environments to access.

For these reasons, the Thames Landscape Strategy is working with communities, appointed consultants, and local councils to produce an annual TLS Riverside Management Plan that covers everything from litter collection, access, tree management to grass cutting. The success of the management plan has been considerable and achieved through developing new ways of working in harmony with the river and in partnership between local communities and riparian owners.

Litter

Throughout much of London the flood defence walls keep litter largely within the river channel. In the upper reaches of the tideway however, much of the river corridor consists of low laying parks, towpaths and open spaces that are regularly inundated by the high tide.

For this reason the monthly fluctuations of the tide have to be accounted for in the development of work schedules. It is during periods of spring tides that most of the litter found on the towpath is deposited by the high water. The TLS management plan accounts for the natural rhythm of the tides in that it allows for the litter to accumulate during the spring tides to be cleared away immediately after the cycle changes to lower water. Signage is placed at key points along the towpath to inform visitors why the riverside is covered in flotsam and jetsam and the dates that it will be cleared. This approach has seen a staggering 80% reduction in the overall amount of litter and significantly increased enjoyment and understanding of the riverside.

In the town centre areas, the TLS has been working with riparian councils to reduce the amount of litter from riverside users. This was a particular problem at honey pot locations such as Richmond. Small temporary skips are now installed at key locations along side fixed litter bins on warm dry days to increase capacity and recently the introduction of recycling bins has been trailed. Extra litter pickers during busy periods have been employed and early morning refuse collections now clean the riverside before most visitors are even out of bed. In addition, TLS projects are paying for new litter bins at key sites that have been identified as litter hot spots.

Vegetation Management

The TLS plan includes the mowing of grass, tree and scrub management and weeding of riverside structures. These are now managed in a more sustainable way to account for complex river eco-systems, views and recreational use and is devised to dovetail with regeneration work. In this way projects are integrated at inception with day-to-day management. Each stretch of the river has to be managed differently accounting for local characteristics and is constantly modified as survey work throws new light on environmental considerations. For this reason the Management Plan is broken into many small site specific sections – there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach. This has necessitated in close co-operation with Council contractors and the consolidation of management areas.

The plan looks to the long-term establishment of a healthy, diverse and natural riverside ecosystem. This approach starts on the river bed and moves up through the river bank to the land and accounts for the diversity found in such environments including aquatic species, plants, insects, birds and mammals. Traditional countryside management techniques are being re-introduced including native hedge planting (over 5km to date), hedge laying (almost 2km), willow spiling, reed planting and coppicing of trees. Historic views are kept open and improved scrub management and hay cutting has seen a considerable increase in the diversity of riverside species. Several transect locations have been established along the river to monitor changes. At one such site the number of native species has increased from 10 to 40 including all manner of flowering plants, reeds and sedges.

A key consideration in the development of the plan has been the recreational use of the river. In certain places, grass is kept short for picnickers or fisherman whilst in others scrub is allowed to grow to mask unsightly views or block the way to a particular site that was regularly vandalised.

Traditional native waterside trees are being planted or encouraged along the riverside including willow, ash, alder and black poplar and are managed in traditional ways including coppicing and pollarding. Dead wood is being left in situ where possible and where it needs to be removed (for example in the tidal areas) is placed nearby or used to create habitat loggeries for insects and stag beetles.

Volunteers

Volunteer work has been factored into the TLS Management Plan and is now an integral part of the management process working alongside council contractors at specified times. Volunteers carry out a range of tasks including weeding, comprehensive litter picks, foreshore clearance, coppicing, hedge laying, structure repair and removal of invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam. In 2008 a staggering 16,500 volunteer hours were carried out on TLS projects in Molesey, Kingston, Teddington, Ham, Twickenham, Richmond, Kew and Brentford. Volunteers ranged from local people and families to riverside businesses or large corporations.

The use of community service, probation and prison service workers is being introduced at present to carry out a range of tasks as part of the rehabilitation process. Following a successful pilot scheme at Molesey in partnership with the Swingbridge Community Boat Project and the Surrey Care Trust, this approach has been rolled out in Richmond, Ham, Twickenham, Isleworth, and Kingston.

The TLS Towpath Management Plan looks to the long-term and although there is still a lot more work to do it has been one of the great success stories of the Thames Landscape Strategy's first decade and has had a considerable influence on the appearance, enjoyment and diversity of the Thames corridor. The management plan is updated each year and can be downloaded from the TLS website.





Information Leaflet No. 4

A Message from Sir David Attenborough
Patron of the Thames Landscape Strategy

Thames Landscape Strategy Leaflet No. 4

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THAMES LANDSCAPE STRATEGY
Hampton to Kew

Riverside Management and Volunteering

The Thames Landscape Strategy in Action

DISCOVER THE ARCADIAN THAMES



Thames Landscape Strategy Leaflet No. 4



“The Thames Landscape Strategy is that very rare animal: an organisation with real popular appeal and an imaginative sense of what it is about landscapes that fires people’s imagination. We need to take active steps now to ensure

that we maintain a varied wildlife habitat, support traditional river activities, and manage the landscape to complement the marvellous historic buildings, nature reserves and parks that line this stretch of the Thames. The ideas proposed by the Thames Landscape Strategy are truly groundbreaking and really moving forward. We should rejoice in having such an enthusiastic and committed organisation to guide this process and I look forward to continued success throughout the coming years”.

During the 18th Century, Arcadia, an idyllic pastoral landscape was created along the Thames between Hampton and Kew. Magnificent royal and aristocratic palaces, gardens and parks were constructed and linked by a series of avenues, set within a framework of meadows and woodland.

Today this stretch of the Thames is recognised as one of the world’s great urban landscapes, allowing Londoners to escape the hustle and bustle of modern day city life.



The Thames Landscape Strategy is one of three sub-regional partnerships for the Thames in the greater London area, whose focus is the remarkable river corridor between Hampton and Kew. Launched in 1994, the strategy is a 100-year blueprint for the Thames, whose vision is to conserve, enhance and promote for the future, one of the world’s great urban landscapes. To achieve its aims, the strategy brings together a partnership of statutory and non-statutory organisations, local groups and individuals to inform strategic policy and to implement a broad range of projects and management proposals.

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