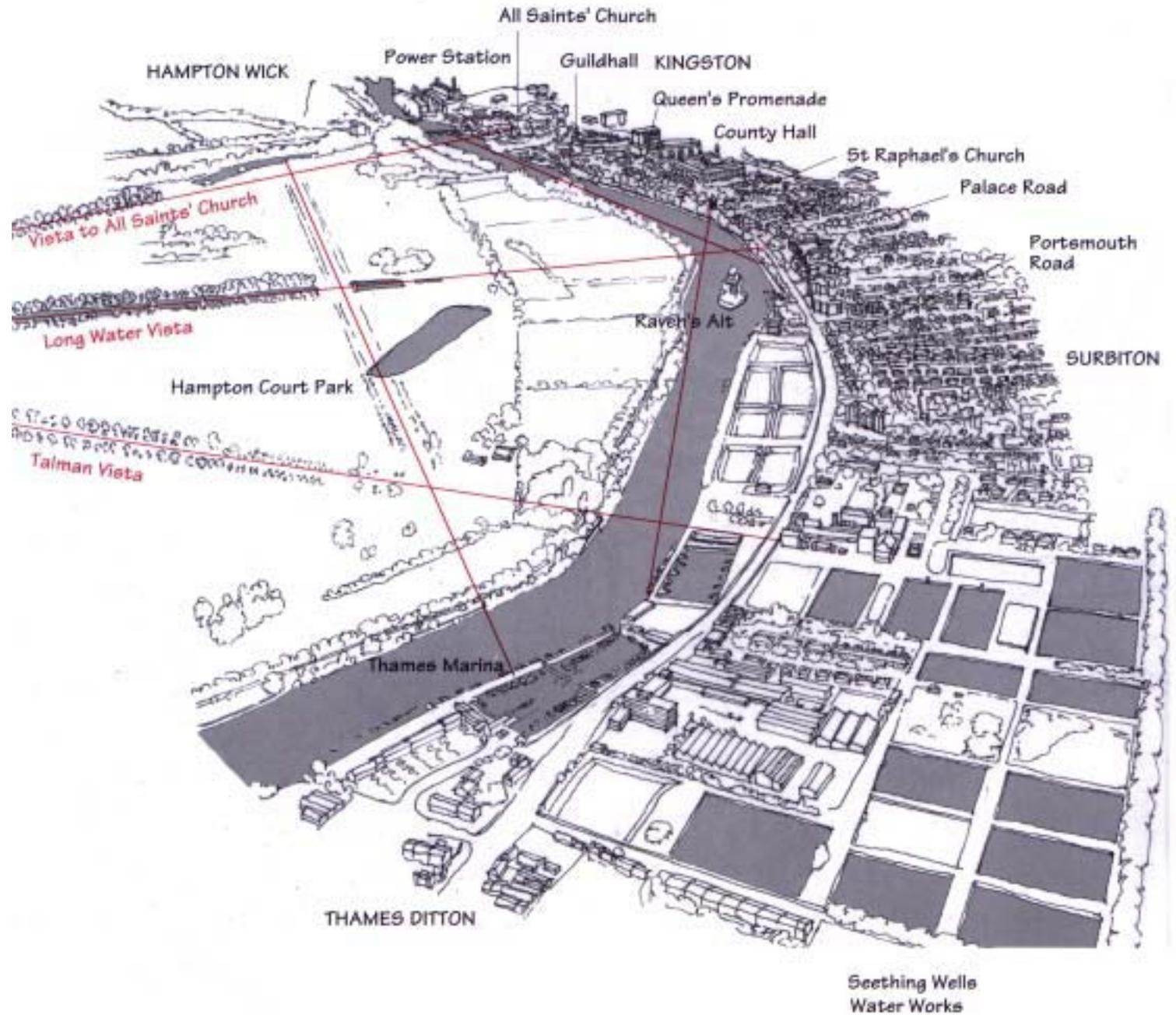


# LANDSCAPE CHARACTER REACH

## 3. Portsmouth Road



— Viata lines



**LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

The Portsmouth Road Reach runs north from Seething Wells up to Kingston. The reach has a character of wide open grassland, interrupted only by trees, park and water works' walls and the Portsmouth Road blocks of flats. Hampton Court Park extends over the entire Middlesex side right up to Hampton Wick, while the Surrey bank divides between the Water Works and the Queen's Promenade.

The **Portsmouth Road** follows the river the length of the reach on the Surrey side. This is one of the only sections of the upstream London Thames where a road has been built alongside the river. The busy road and associated linear developments make a harsh contrast with the rhythm of parkland and historic town waterfronts which characterise the rest of the river.

**Hampton Court Park** is held in the circling sweep of the Thames, as its flow curves from south to north. Charles II's Long Water and baroque avenues still radiate across the Park, aligning on points over the river in Kingston and Surbiton. Planting along the river banks lift the eye to distant views of the tree-covered Surrey Hills on the skyline, broken only by a series of church spires. From much of the Park one has the impression of a continuing 17th-century landscape, where deer still graze the wild grass between long avenues of lime trees. At points where flat-roofed blocks of apartments and offices intrude into the scene from Hampton Wick and across the river, the impact is therefore particularly jarring.

A band of riverside trees softens the impact of the Surrey bank developments on the Park by blocking the ground level view. Of the three main *patte d'oie* avenues, the Kingston All Saints' Church vista still remains intact; the Long Water vista now focuses on an uncomfortable assortment of 3/6 storey apartment blocks; and the Talman vista terminates in the recently listed Seething Wells Pumping Station. The north-south cross avenue would focus on the Thames Marina development, but at present the vista terminates in trees at either end. A programme of replanting the Hampton Court Avenues is well underway. The Hampton Court Park stud farm works within the existing planting structure, but the fairways, greens and bunkers of the golf course strike an incongruous note in the grazed grassland.

**The Barge Walk** continues along the length of the Middlesex bank, providing a peaceful, uninterrupted, riverside path of 4.5 kilometres from Kingston Bridge to Hampton Court Bridge. The trees which back the Walk give a sense of scale and enclosure in the expansive landscape, but the suckering of diseased elms and rampant poplars have created a dense and ragged barrier which blocks off any glimpses into the Park. Where ornamental cherries have been planted and scrub has established between the Walk and the water's edge, the traditional relationship between the towing path and the river is destroyed. The low vegetated banks and the gravel path work well with the context, but the sparse municipal benches could be improved. The fine mature plane trees by the Lodge and Park Field help to blend the buildings into the landscape, but the concrete fencing panels beyond and the white railings of the Coach House detract from the rural character of the Barge Walk.

Across the Thames, the **Seething Wells** Water Works provide a substantial area of open space, linking down to the river and separating Thames Ditton from Surbiton; a welcome relief from the continuous built-up swathe along the Surrey bank from Kingston, through Surbiton and Thames Ditton, to East Molesey. The Water Works are now largely obsolete and Seething Wells presents the largest area (7 hectares along the waterfront with a further 19.5 hectares inland) under consideration for re-development along the whole of the upstream river.

The river frontage is formed by high Victorian banks of arched brick walls, topped by broom and willow. The electric yellow of flowering broom is

dramatic against the dark purple of the bricks. The sunken honey-comb of empty settling basins and filter beds has an impressive scale of Victorian engineering. Together with the gothic effect of the castellated pumping stations and the substantial iron railings along either side of the road, the Water Works have created an open area of bold, functional spaces in an otherwise unremitting density of later suburban housing. In places where the basins have been re-used as a marina, the form and character of the area is retained and the use, while updated, still relates to the river. An area of offices and showrooms behind the marina and the introduction of car parking at eye-level between the road and the river relate less well to the water.

A short stretch of boat clubs and a pub separate the Water Works from the Queen's Promenade. The bright white paint and large signs of the restaurant, echoed on **Raven's Ait**, stand out prominently on the river bend.

Beyond the bend, the **Queen's Promenade** retains much of its Victorian character with colourful flower beds, shrubberies, strips of lawn and cast iron railings. The long narrow space down beside the water is very popular with young and old alike. Trees, shrubs and the change in level help to reduce the impact of cars on the Portsmouth Road. However many of the trees are now in poor condition and the access points from the road pavement to the Promenade have become obscured.

Large Victorian houses on the eastern side of the **Portsmouth Road** have gradually been replaced by blocks of apartments. Some of the blocks are up to 8 storeys high, dwarfing the surrounding houses and standing out for miles around. 'Thames Haven' and 'Andlers Reach' are particularly intrusive, dominating the bend in the river between Seething Wells and the Queen's Promenade.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

**Surbiton**, although not mentioned in Domesday, existed as a farming hamlet from as early as the 12th century. But by the early 1700s its seclusion and closeness to town brought it a new role as a '*Private Place, long mark'd to entertain / Kept Mistresses e'er since great William's Reign*'. It never had the cachet of the lower river, and a spa at Seething Wells appears to have failed fairly swiftly.

The earliest house in Surbiton seems to have been Berrylands Farm on Surbiton Hill, but by the early 19th century a number of villas such as Surbiton House and Surbiton Lodge had been built around the hamlet, and maps show them in extensive landscaped grounds. However, with the arrival of the London and South Western Railway in 1836 after the councillors of Kingston declined a station in the town, modern Surbiton or Kingston-on-Railway as it was then known, was born. The 1808 Enclosure Act enabled the common and farm land to be comprehensively parcelled up for development, and this proceeded apace following the opening of the station in 1838. After the Surbiton Improvement Act of 1855, development was overseen and controlled by the Surbiton Improvement Commissioners. This led to a high quality of development, much of which survives, and helped to give Surbiton the title '*Queen of the Suburbs*', a name later appropriated by Ealing.

The purer waters of the upper Thames also attracted some of the works supplying water to the expanding Victorian metropolis. Up river from Raven's Ait, on the site of the **Seething Wells** spa, the Lambeth Waterworks Co. opened in 1852 and the Chelsea Waterworks in 1856. The steam-powered machinery has gone, but most of the buildings remain as monuments to high Victorian engineering. The Chelsea Company's Norman towers designed by James Simpson in 1852 are now listed. The Thames Marina occupies former settling basins.

While the contrast between the suburban and industrial Surrey side and the rural and emparked Middlesex side seems complete here, Palace Road was nicely aligned on the main vista in the Hampton Court Park along the Long Water, and the roadside planting of limes nods to the great avenue across the river.



The basin at Seething Wells converted to a popular marina



Autumn squill: Hampton Court has the only sizeable population of autumn squill in south-east England



Acid grassland at Hampton Court Park, grazed by deer and sheep

**Queen's Promenade** was given its royal name in 1856, opened unwittingly by Queen Victoria after a well-placed diversion forced her to drive along the adjoining road on return from one of her visits to Claremont. She was not pleased when she learnt of the ruse. The road had been newly improved, having long been a hazard where it bent sharply with the line of the river. The burghers of Kingston had rejected as too costly a scheme by Brunel to straighten the river. The course was eventually modified in 1852-54, using spoil from the excavations at Seething Wells.

The promenade was first conceived by the property developer William Woods, with the intention of providing an exclusive walk between Ravens Ait and St Raphael's church for the residents of his new villas on the Portsmouth Road. But in return for assistance with its construction, Woods agreed to the walk being made into a public promenade and eventually, in 1896, it was extended all the way to Kingston.

On the Middlesex side, a band of meadowland separated the **Hampton Court Park** from the Barge Walk and the river. Rocque's plan of 1754 shows how the cross avenue joining the ends of the three great avenues shut out this aspect of the river, except for the vistas themselves and the Lower Wilderness, added during William and Mary's reign.

The Home or House Park is dominated by the goose foot of avenues. This originated with the great canal planted with 'sweete rows of lime trees', designed by André and Gabriel Mollet for Charles II in the French Grand Manner. The two outer avenues were planted later for William and Mary, resulting in the famous *patte d'oie*, which complemented the new east front aligned by Wren on the Mollet canal. The three avenues radiate from the semi-circular Great Fountain Garden in front of the palace, for which Daniel Marot designed the elaborate parterre shown in his proposals sketch of 1689. The overgrown yews are being left here, unlike those in the Privy Garden, and the lime arcade has been restored.

Marot's sketch shows how the northern, Kingston Avenue, was aligned on the spire of All Saints' Church, Kingston. Henry Wise, Queen Anne's gardener, refers to a 'a great hill in Kingston avenue which much obstructed the view from the house and gardens and was thought proper to be levelled'. It was intended by William that the southern, Ditton Avenue, would also have an eyecatcher and in c1699 William Talman designed a Trianon to be built at Long Ditton, though this was never implemented.



All Saints' Church, Kingston  
- the spire is now a tower

## NATURE CONSERVATION

Like Bushy Park, **Hampton Court Park** lies on River Terrace Gravels and contains extensive acid grassland and a variety of ponds and canals. It has far fewer trees than Bushy Park, and these are mostly in the lime avenues. The golf course fairways in the southern half of the park are kept close mown, but the roughs contain an excellent acidic grassland flora. The northern half is grazed by sheep as well as deer, so the turf tends to be rather shorter than in Bushy Park and bracken invasion is not a problem.

The area of greatest nature conservation interest lies along the south-eastern edge of the golf course, alongside the Thames towpath near Jubilee Gate. The number of rare plants here include subterranean clover, which forms large drifts of white flowers in May. The many anthills in the area, and indeed all over the park, are topped with the rare changing forget-me-not. Pride of place among the plants of Hampton Court Park, however, must go to autumn squill. During August and September, hundreds of these beautiful lilies send up their spikes of purple flowers along the south eastern edge of the park; this is the only sizeable population in south-east England.

The **towpath**, beside Hampton Court Park, has an attractive countryside feeling along this reach with park edge trees and river edge trees on either side of it. There is a proliferation of young growth which will need cyclical cutting to create a mosaic pattern of open, dense regrowth and woodland areas, to benefit birds and woodland flora particularly.

Behind the park wall, and indeed walled off from the rest of the park, are the **Hampton Court Paddocks**. Lying on alluvial deposits from the Thames, the grasslands here are of a very different character to those of the rest of the park, being much damper and of neutral pH. The greatest botanical importance of the fields is the marshy vegetation associated with a series of ditches which criss-cross them. There is a wonderful diversity of wetland plants with numerous London rarities, including water speedwell and marsh arrow-grass. The northernmost three or four fields are cut for hay, while several others are grazed by sheep, by the Queen's horses and the Prince of Wales' polo ponies, as well as by an abundance of rabbits. This sympathetic management has helped to form an area with one of the largest numbers of naturalised wetland plants to be found in such a small space almost anywhere in London.

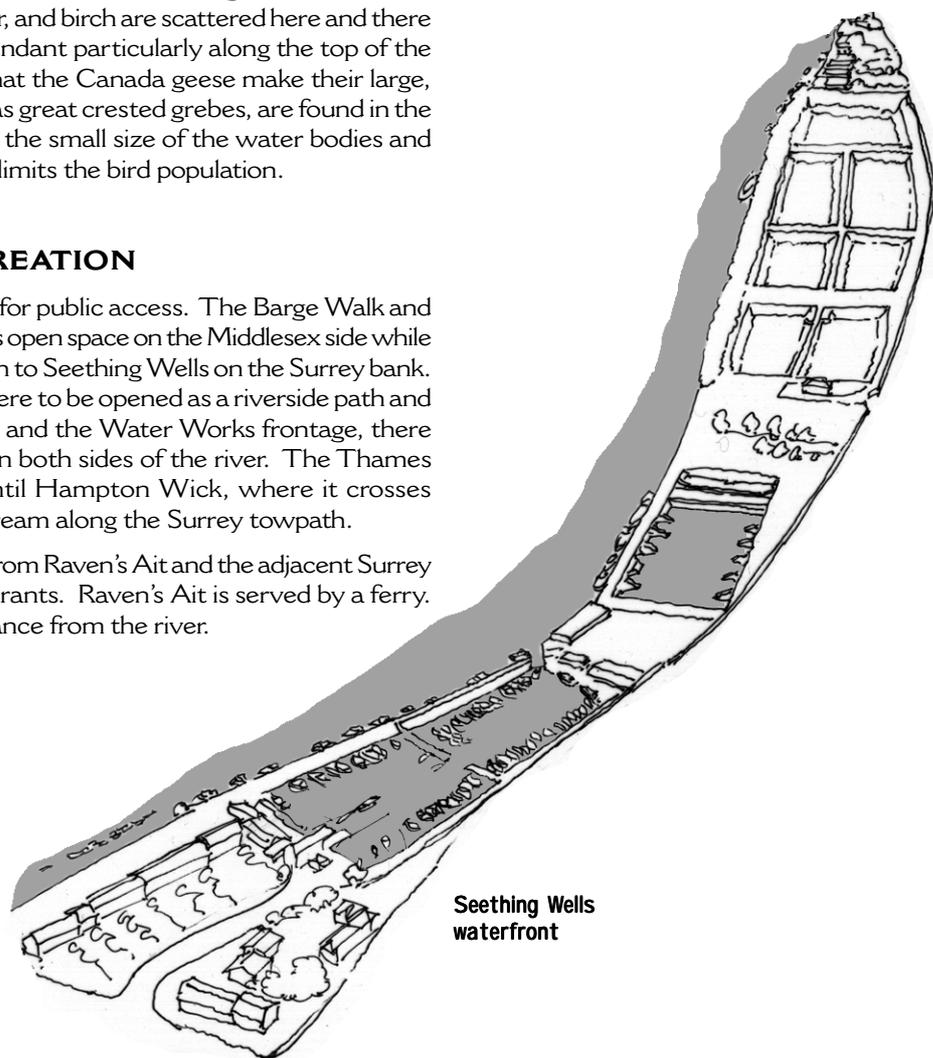
On the opposite side of the Thames, **Seething Wells Reservoirs** are built on the site of a spring. The reservoirs have steep brick banks, draped in ivy-leaved toadflax, ivy, and stoncrop, and encrusted with mosses and lichens. The internal grass banks are 3 metres deep and have great richness of plant species. The secret of these steep grassland meadows is that for nearly 150 years, since construction, no fertilisers or pesticides have been used for fear of contaminating the drinking water. The grassy slopes appear to be composed largely of a dry, calcareous substrate with old brick and stonework, the cracks of which have been colonised by plants. The calcareous base means that alkaline-loving plants have flourished although the floristic picture is complicated by areas of more acidic substrate and the differing aspects of the banks. Liberally scattered throughout the meadows are wildflowers such as burnet saxifrage, common St John's wort, hoary plantain, salad burnet, and unusually, 3 types of scabious: devil's bit, field, and the rarer small scabious, which together form mauve drifts, alive with bees and butterflies.

The grassland has been kept largely free of scrub, although there are some bushes in the grassland: dog rose, elder, and birch are scattered here and there but it is broom which is the most abundant particularly along the top of the river wall. It is beneath the broom that the Canada geese make their large, down-lined nests. Other birds, such as great crested grebes, are found in the reservoirs in the breeding season but the small size of the water bodies and the scarcity of any food in the water limits the bird population.

## PUBLIC ACCESS AND RECREATION

The reach is particularly well-served for public access. The Barge Walk and Hampton Court Park offer continuous open space on the Middlesex side while the Queen's Promenade links Kingston to Seething Wells on the Surrey bank. If the Seething Wells embankment were to be opened as a riverside path and a link made between the Promenade and the Water Works frontage, there would be continuous public access on both sides of the river. The Thames Path follows the Middlesex bank until Hampton Wick, where it crosses Kingston Bridge to continue downstream along the Surrey towpath.

Sailing, rowing and canoeing operate from Raven's Ait and the adjacent Surrey bank, overlooked by cafes and restaurants. Raven's Ait is served by a ferry. Surbiton railway station is some distance from the river.



Seething Wells waterfront

<b>Boatyards</b>	Hart's boatyard Thames Marina boatyard		
<b>Water recreation:</b>	London River Yacht Club Thames Marina Thames Sailing Club		
<b>Land recreation:</b>	Barge Walk Hampton Court Park Thames Path The Queen's Promenade	<i>Grade I</i>	Royal Parks Historic Royal Palaces  RBKuT
<b>Refreshment:</b>	Fox & Hounds Harts Boatyard Inn Raven's Ait The City Arms		
<b>Landmarks:</b>	All Saints' Church, Kingston County Hall, Kingston Guildhall, Kingston Kingston Bridge Kingston Railway Bridge St Raphael's Church, Kingston Seething Wells Pumping Hall	<i>Grade I</i> <i>Grade II</i> <i>Grade II</i> <i>Grade II*</i> <i>Grade II</i> <i>Grade II</i> <i>Grade II</i>	Church Commissioners Surrey County Council RBKuT RBKuT British Rail Roman Catholic Church Thames Water

### LOCAL INTEREST GROUPS:

#### *Amenity and Local History:*

Kingston Society  
Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society  
River Thames Society (Teddington-Windsor)  
Surbiton Central Area Residents' Association

#### *Nature Conservation:*

London Wildlife Trust  
Surrey Wildlife Trust

### PRINCIPAL LAND USES

Parks, housing, the Marina and the disused Water Works are the main land uses along this reach. An area of offices and showrooms have colonised part of the Seething Wells site and pubs and boat clubs have become established on the Raven's Ait bend in the river.

### SIGNIFICANT SITES UNDER PRESSURE FOR RE-DEVELOPMENT:

#### *Sites*

Seething Wells Water Works

#### *Main landscape factors for consideration*

- role of open space in separating Surbiton & Thames Ditton
  - existing scale and character of Victorian Water Works
  - listed Water Works buildings and railings
  - fine arched brick river embankment
  - views into site from Hampton Court Park and Palace
  - views across site of tree-covered Surrey Hills
  - views across site from Portsmouth Road to river corridor
  - nature conservation value of river wall, grassland and filter beds
  - existing recreation & boatyard facilities at Thames Marina
  - traffic pressure on busy Portsmouth Road
  - need to introduce public access along river's edge
  - need to make footpath link with Queen's Promenade
- Housing along Portsmouth Rd
- existing character of Victorian housing stock
  - distinction between Surbiton and Kingston
  - skyline effect on views from Hampton Court Park/Palace
  - skyline effect on views of tree-covered Surrey Hills
  - need to retain visual dominance of St Raphael's church tower from river
  - role of existing mature trees in reducing impact on river
  - need for more trees along Portsmouth Road

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 3.1	Conserve character of the reach with the rural 17th-century nature of Hampton Court Park and the Barge Walk, contrasting with the Victorian waterfront of Seething Wells and the Queen's Promenade.	ElmbB: W4 LBRuT: 13.26 (1) RBKuT: STR 15 SCC: PE 10-12
Pol 3.2	Protect the visual links between: Hampton Court Palace and All Saints' Church tower, Kingston Hampton Court Palace & the Pumping Station gable, Seething Wells Hampton Court Palace and the Long Water Vista to the Surrey hills Seething Wells & the towers of St Raphael's & All Saints' Churches The Queen's Promenade and Kingston Bridge	LBRuT: RIV 1, ENV 2 RBKuT: STR 12, 15, UD 1
Pol 3.3	Prevent any further high buildings which would encroach into the view from Hampton Court Park.	RBKuT: STR 12, 15, UD 1
Pol 3.4	Conserve the long views of the tree-covered Surrey Hills skyline.	RBKuT: STR 12, 15, SCC: PE 7
Pol 3.5	Conserve and enhance the nature conservation interest of the river and its corridor, with particular attention to Seething Wells and Hampton Court Park.	ElmbB: EN 40 LBRuT: RIV 5, RIV 12 RBKuT: STR 15
Pol 3.6	Conserve the feeling of open space, created by the Water Works, particularly between the Portsmouth Road and the river.	ElmbB: W5/6 RBKuT: STR 15, OL 5, 9 SCC: 1.14, ST 1
Pol 3.7	Retain a clear separation between the Dittons and Surbiton at present provided by the Water Works site by only allowing low rise development incorporating open spaces as appropriate south of the Portsmouth Road and keeping land to the north of the Portsmouth road free of built development.	ElmbB: W5/6 RBKuT: STR 15,
Pol 3.8	Prevent any further visible waterfront car parking and attempt to eliminate existing parking on the river's edge.	RBKuT: STR 15
Pol 3.9	Conserve the Victorian embankments and roadside railings which define the Water Works boundaries.	ElmbB: W4 RBKuT: STR 15
Pol 3.10	Retain water-related uses on the Seething Wells river frontage.	ElmbB: W5/6/7 RBKuT: OL 16
Pol 3.11	Prevent any new building in the vicinity of St Raphael's Church which might detract from the church tower's dominance as a river landmark. Conserve the grouping of trees around the base of the tower.	RBKuT: STR 12, 15, UD 1, 11, 19
Pol 3.12	Examine the possibilities of extending the Thames Area of Special Character designation into the Borough of Elmbridge and the Metropolitan Open Land designation into Queen's Promenade and the Seething Wells waterfront.	LPAC: EN 8 & 9

## Project Proposals

	<i>Project</i>	<i>Initiative</i>
Proj 3.1	Open glimpses into Hampton Court Park from the Barge Walk, particularly along the main vista lines, while still protecting the Park from views of developments across the river.	Hist. Royal Palaces
Proj 3.2	Re-design the tree-planting along the Barge Walk to create groups of large deciduous trees between the path and the Park (where not in conflict with the nature conservation value of existing grasslands), eliminating diseased elm suckers and small-scale ornamental planting.	Hist. Royal Palaces
Proj 3.3	Re-design benches along the Barge Walk to fit the 17th century character of the waterfront.	Hist. Royal Palaces
Proj 3.4	Plant trees around the Coach House to reduce its impact on the river.	Hist. Royal Palaces Private landowner
Proj 3.5	Replace The Wilderness concrete panel fence with a less intrusive design.	Hist. Royal Palaces Private landowner
Proj 3.6	Reduce the impact of the riverside and Raven's Ait restaurants with darker paint, smaller signs and more native trees, particularly replacing the ragged exotics on the southern end of the island.	RBKuT Private landowner
Proj 3.7	Repair the Queen's Promenade railings, steps and seats. Supplement the dying trees with young planes (to relate to the trees across the road and the river) and replace ageing shrubs to retain the roadside screen. Announce the access points from the road pavement to the Promenade, allowing brief glimpses from the Portsmouth Road to the river.	RBKuT: UD 11, 32
Proj 3.8	Plant plane trees along the length of the Portsmouth Road to help to reduce the impact of recent developments.	RBKuT: UD 11
Proj 3.9	Plant trees on the raised parking area behind the Thames Sailing Club and make a pedestrian link from the Queen's Promenade, through the electrical sub-station area and the car park to Seething Wells.	RBKuT: UD 11, 32 Private landowner
Proj 3.10	Link the public open spaces along the Surrey bank through the Seething Wells frontage and between the Queen's Promenade and Seething Wells.	RBKuT: UD 32 Thames Water

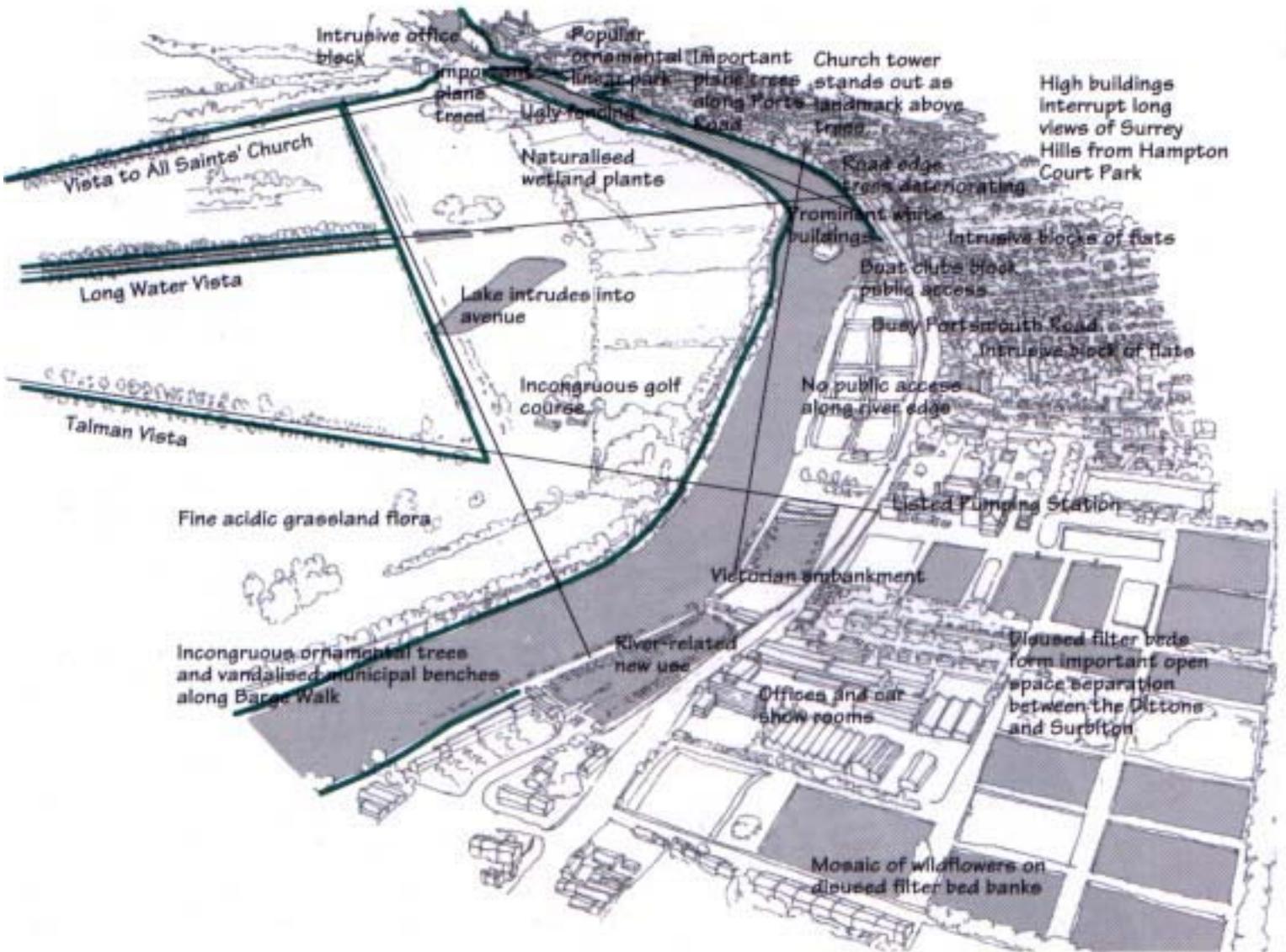
## Management Proposals

	<i>Management</i>	<i>Initiative</i>
Mng 3.1	Prevent scrub from growing up between the towpath and the water's edge along the Barge Walk and manage the trees to create more structural diversity.	Hist. Royal Palaces
Mng 3.2	Continue excellent grassland management of Hampton Court Park and Paddocks.	Hist. Royal Palaces
Mng 3.3	Continue the grassland management of the banks of Seething Wells Reservoirs.	Thames Water
Mng 3.4	Maintain the plant communities on the Seething Wells river wall.	Thames Water



# LANDSCAPE CHARACTER REACH

## 3. Portsmouth Road



— Vista lines  
 — Public paths



ANALYSIS