

Bringing London's waterways to life

Annual Review 2011/2012





Our Purpose

Thames21 is the voice for London's waterways. We work hand in hand with communities to improve rivers, canals and ponds for social and environmental benefit through educational, practical and awareness-raising projects and activities. Our army of volunteers enhance, protect and fight for a 400-mile network of waterways across the capital which provides vital habitat for wildlife and much-needed green space in one of the most densely populated cities in Europe.

Thames21 works actively on issues facing urban water environments, including: litter, pollution, invasive non-native species and biodiversity loss.

From the Chairman's statement

"The year was a challenging, eventful but satisfying one for Thames21. Despite an on-going battle for the funds needed for the charity's work as the economic recession bit for a further successive year, Thames21 saw increasing numbers of people become convinced of the value of rivers, canals and ponds - not only as fundamental to life, but as fundamental to our quality of life.

More than ever before, people became involved in practical activities on waterways in neighbourhoods throughout the year, and across the capital and beyond. In East London the Big Waterways Clean Up 2012 was launched in February, bringing together local communities in volunteering activities to clean and green the network of waterways surrounding the Olympic Park ready for the Games.

The variety of regular tasks undertaken by our volunteers also expanded noticeably during the year. Volunteers tackled a widening range of invasive weed species clogging London's rivers, they restored neglected reedbeds, they planted waterside wildflower meadows, they donned waders and installed improvements to both river-beds and river-banks to benefit fish and other wildlife, they carried out water quality testing to monitor for pollution... the list goes on. The issue of litter and rubbish dumped into rivers continues to generate public outrage and calls for action, however once they become involved our volunteers seize on the many opportunities that exist to help.

A new initiative to improve the health of the River Thames means that communities can also play a meaningful role in long term planning. In January, work began to develop a new Thames Catchment Plan, co-hosted by Thames21 and the Thames Estuary Partnership and funded by Defra. The Plan will bring together the huge variety of stakeholders in the Tidal Thames to produce a realistic, practical and beneficial plan for the river which reflects its needs and the needs of its communities.

The charity also enabled more independent action by volunteers with the launch of a new Training Programme. It aims to build a new extended Thames21 family, inspiring and empowering wider groups, organisations and individuals with the skills and confidence they need to organise and lead their own waterway volunteering activities, while still benefiting from on-going support from Thames21's experienced officers. We are delighted at how successful this programme is already proving to be, and look forward to its continuing planned development and increasingly important role in the charity's work.

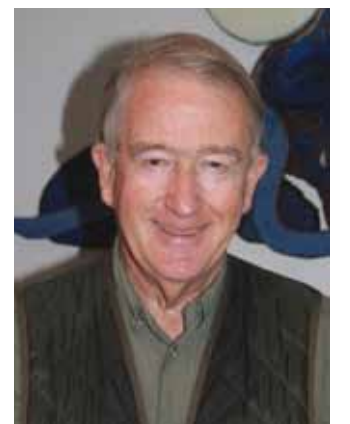
The year also saw Thames21 use its public voice to great effect, raising awareness of dangerous and disgusting levels of pollution entering the River Thames through sewage overflows and pressing for fast delivery of government plans to address this through construction of the Thames Tunnel. Thames21 also spoke out regularly about the devastating cocktail of pollutants seeping into the River Lea for which partnership solutions will be vital.

Once again, I would like to congratulate Debbie Leach and her team on their remarkable achievements in co-ordinating and running such a large programme, all carried out with good humour and enthusiasm. Their achievements are remarkable and increasingly widely appreciated."

Francis Carnwath CBE
Chairman



Debbie Leach
Chief Executive



Francis Carnwath CBE
Chairman

Rubbish motivation

Our ever-growing plastic legacy lurks in our rivers and oceans. Here, plastic does not decompose, but breaks down into ever smaller pieces which are more easily ingested by wildlife and can lead to injury, death and toxins in the foodchain. However, the all too common site of a waterway or waterside strewn with litter is often the spark needed for community action.



Weeding out river invaders

This year, Thames21 volunteers removed swathes of the damaging Himalayan balsam, floating pennywort, giant hogweed, Himalayan blackberry and Japanese knotweed from the capital's river systems, allowing native species a chance to thrive and giving biodiversity a boost.

700 volunteers got stuck in for the annual 3RiversCleanUp in South East London and removed 14.5 cubic metres of Himalayan Balsam from the Pool, the Quaggy and the Ravensbourne Rivers.

Invasive non-native species (INNS) are those which have been imported or spread to the UK from other parts of the world and have since become a problem. INNS are now recognised as a leading cause of biodiversity loss world-wide, and several species of plants pose a particular threat to UK rivers. Thankfully, some of these can be safely and easily tackled with the help of volunteers.



A volunteer's perspective

Raymond Brewster (left), committed community ambassador and volunteer, was spurred into action to help his local Grand Union Canal in Hillingdon be more than a dumping ground for litter and anti-social behaviour.

"I absolutely love being able to look out the window and see the canal boats, the ducks, the swans and all the other wildlife, but I was upset to see that the canal was being used as a rendezvous for street drinking and a rubbish dump.

"I find it important to take an active role in my community simply because I live here. I want to live in clean and tidy surroundings, and that takes constant effort. You can either choose to look away or you can get involved.

Volunteering with Thames21 gives me an immense sense of satisfaction and it makes me feel very positive about the future of the area in which I live."



Catching the drift

While volunteers do a great job collecting the waste stranded on the Thames foreshore, many larger items - from traffic cones to shopping trolleys and even motor cars do not reach the shore. The Port of London Authority tackle the larger objects, removing a massive 500 tonnes of litter this year, including trees, motorbikes, shopping trolleys and even small wrecks, with the help various specialist PLA salvage and driftwood craft. The PLA also supplies all of our foreshore clean-ups with a 'litter cage' to be filled by volunteers and taken away at high tide.

Campaigning for cleaner rivers

Thames21 is committed to improving the health of East London's River Lea through the 'Love the Lea' campaign. Further proof of the deep set and profound pollution in the river was revealed this year through regular water quality tests along the Lea carried out by University College London for the charity. Samples were taken at four sites in East London between Bromley by Bow and Hackney, and four in North East London between Homerton and Tottenham Hale.

The campaign then set about spreading awareness of the multiple causes of this pollution: household misconnections, road run off and sewage overflows, through community engagement, information stalls and forging strong links with local 'friends of' groups. Love the Lea planned to go on to empower local people to reduce pressure on their river through: water quality testing training, practical events and a joint call for comprehensive and collaborative action through green drainage systems, rain gardens and proper misconnection information and regulation.



Did you know?

Regular water quality tests carried out by University College London for Thames21 have shown the River Lea to be critically polluted.

Faecal coliform levels from sewage pollution at all 8 sites were regularly many times greater than acceptable international limits. The European Commission requires 'Blue Flag' beaches to have a maximum of 2,000 Colony Forming Units per 100 ml of water. The average for the tested sites ranges between 5,000 and 60,000 CFU/100ml. Phosphate levels exceeded the Environment Agency's 'bad' rating of 1mg per litre, and in the summer, dissolved oxygen levels fell to lows of 2mg per 100ml of water, below those needed to support a sustainable fish population.

Working hand in hand with communities

Thames21's unique community-focused approach to waterway improvement is a recipe for long-lasting environmental and social benefit. The charity delivered 21 major community projects this year, each based on a participatory approach to canal and river improvements. Local projects are tailored to suit the needs of different communities and specific issues, but all have a focus on direct involvement.

This year:

- **Thames21 ran 487 public waterway volunteering events**
- **13,776 volunteers got stuck in to improve their waterways**
- **Volunteers gave up 30,000 hours of their time**

Improving biodiversity

Biodiversity loss is a major threat to the environment and our way of life across the world. Thames21 works with its many volunteers and partners to actively improve the biodiversity of London's waterways through the below projects:

Green Walls

Life is being breathed into the River Thames' hard flood defence walls in central London with an innovative pilot project. It is hoped that vertical 'Green Walls' could boost the ecological value of the river habitat in places where more traditional bank restoration is not possible.

Chiswick Eyot

Chiswick Eyot is a small island in the River Thames in West London at great risk due to invasive non-native species, such as Himalayan balsam and Chinese mitten crabs. We are working with volunteers to stabilise the badly eroded inner banks of the island with the Old Chiswick Protection Society to encourage native re-vegetation and prevent further decay of the island.

Cody Dock Reedbeds

Reedbeds help improve water quality and provide vital habitat for wildlife, and are recognised as a priority habitat in London. The Cody Dock Reedbed is LB Newham's largest example, though in December 2010, it was at as at risk of disappearing altogether. Disaster was averted with the key support of local volunteers, and a programme of restorative events saw the reedbed in near full health by March 2012.

A volunteer's perspective

IT trading manager Reg Hemstock (on right) was a driving force behind the success of the reedbed's restoration. He remains an active volunteer and a key part of Thames21's Event Support Team.

"There was a fantastic sense of achievement through turning around Cody Dock Reedbed. It was just great to be a part of it.

"I love the shared experiences of volunteering – you meet like-minded people and there is just a great energy when you work together to give something back to the community."



Environment Minister Richard Benyon launched the Big Waterways Clean Up 2012 in February with the support of a range of partner organisations. The project would seek to engage mass numbers of volunteers in transforming London's waterways ahead of the Games, and to create a lasting legacy for the city's waterways and communities. The London 2012 Games provided the perfect opportunity to galvanise Londoners to volunteer to improve the city's waterways.



Minister for Environment and Fisheries, Richard Benyon launched the Big Waterways Clean Up 2012 on a frosty day in February on the Lea Navigation:

"Rivers are a much loved part of where we live and the Big Waterways Clean Up is an excellent example of how communities can turn their local environment into an area they can be proud of."



Big Waterways Clean Up 2012

Volunteering for everyone

Thames21 continued to work with a wide range of marginalised groups in practical, outdoor activities this year despite significant budget cuts. The charity specifically worked with people with mental health issues, recognising the unique benefits of practical outdoor activities for health and wellbeing, and with people with learning disabilities, with a focus on sensory experiences.

The therapeutic benefits of waterways are well known, and in urban environments, rivers and canals can offer gentle respite from the city's busy streets. Thames21 has found that safe and accessible river-based activities can offer enormous benefit to people of all backgrounds, ages and abilities.

A volunteer's perspective

Shuttle Riverkeeper Volunteer Duncan Devine (here on the River Shuttle with project coordinator Joanne Bradley) who has epilepsy and mild learning difficulties, has found a vocation in conservation with Thames21 and is an all-weather volunteer for the charity. He is a committed ambassador for the environment as well as for others with disabilities, championing the benefits of green living for people and nature.

"I see myself as an ambassador; I think it is important that people know about what nature can bring to them. When I'm outside working, I can switch off. I enjoy all of the events on the river - it brings a smile to my face knowing that our work has been acknowledged.

"To get a job done, you need to begin with being able to stay positive; keep a positive frame of mind and try to ignore the elements."



© Derek Hope

"Thames21 had a huge impact on our GCSE students as part of the citizenship work, and it showed clearly in their assessments - In my own classes, out of the 12 students who chose Thames21, 7 achieved A*, 3 As and 2 a B grade, all much higher than the grades for the other topics. I believe that this was largely due to the inspirational and supportive approach of the Thames21 team."

Becky Davidson, teacher, Central Foundation Girls' School

Inspiring the next generation

Thames21 held 83 education sessions this year, with 1567 children from 46 different schools across London taking part. Activities included: bird watching, litter-picking, river dipping, water quality testing, nature walks and surveys, bulb planting, tree planting, vegetation management, mini raft-building and pond habitat enhancement. Schools also took part in the 'Stickleback in Schools' project, which involved students helping to raise young stickleback fish, and finally releasing them into the wild to encourage understanding and engagement with the natural world.

Older students, such as GCSE pupils at Central Foundation Girls' School, took part in citizenship-based environmental learning through film-making to promote awareness of waterway issues and the importance of protecting them.

Inspiring the next generation to care for and appreciate our natural environment is essential to a sustainable future, and a key challenge in urban London. Thames21 is committed to working with school groups and young people in practical, outdoor learning sessions.

"I am very impressed with Thames21's approach to inclusive volunteering. You can make a visible difference."

Daniel Rutland, leader of the Southall Canalkeepers, a dedicated group of volunteers with learning disabilities in West London.



A community approach to river management

In 2012, Thames21 was invited by Defra, the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission to co-lead an innovative River Thames improvement initiative offering communities a meaningful chance to help shape its future. Your Tidal Thames, co-hosted by Thames21 and the Thames Estuary Partnership, would seek to develop a realistic and practical improvement plan for the river hand in hand with the community. This project was one of 25 key pilot projects launched around the country in January to trial this community-based approach.



'Possibly the most rewarding outcome of Your Tidal Thames is giving those not normally heard the chance to share their experiences of their favourite river, and feel a part of the catchment's community.'

Lawrence Beale Collins, Urban Rivers in Context

Empowering volunteers for community action

In June 2011, Thames21 started a new Training and Monitoring programme to enable wider community action on London's waterways. The programme, funded by City Bridge Trust would use Thames21's expertise to empower, equip and support individuals and groups to carry out their own safe and engaging waterway improvement activities.



A volunteer's perspective

Nic Shore joined Thames21 in 2011 and after completing our new accredited training programme, became a committed member of the Event Support Team and a familiar face at our volunteering events across London.

"Volunteering with Thames21 is an on-going learning process, and through the training course I feel more confident about the skills and knowledge I have gained. You get to know the staff and volunteers - you meet all kinds of people and you go to places you have never been before. I am terminally curious, so exploring all the tributaries and rivers in London is fantastic.

It's also great to feel part of something to help my, albeit adopted, city. You get a great real sense of community, which I had never felt before."

Corporate team challenges

Thames21 continued to provide bespoke events for corporate volunteers, generating valuable income to support the charity's work with disadvantaged communities in some of the most deprived areas of London. Our corporate events feature a wide range of different activities that provide an enjoyable and rewarding day for those taking part, who also see first-hand the issues that are facing urban waterways.



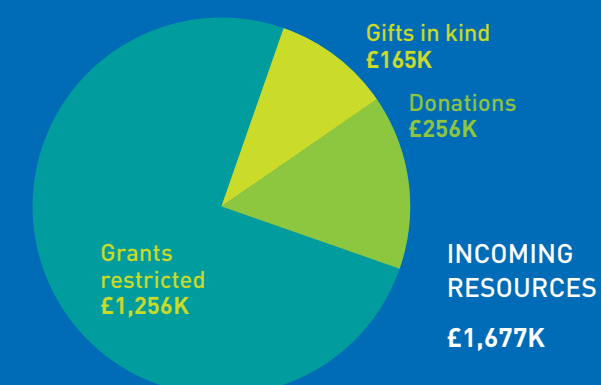
Responsible angling

Thames21's long-running Catch21 project continued to inspire young people to take to their local waterway through responsible angling. Free angling coaching sessions were held through the summer, with 332 young people taking part. Two new borough teams were set up and are in development for the London Youth Games, and the project helped set the groundwork for a new angling club at Beckton Lake in Newham.

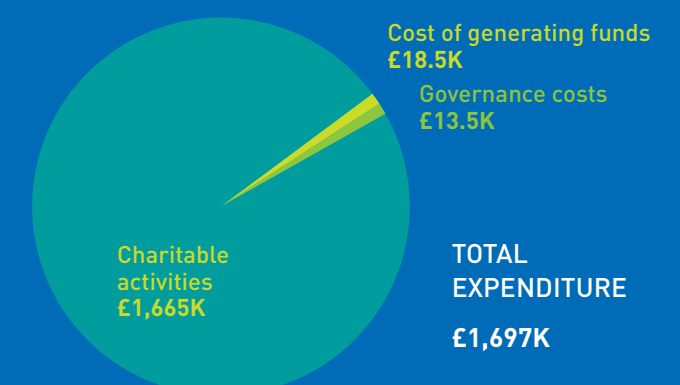


Our income and where we spent it

INCOME



EXPENDITURE



With special thanks to our funders.

Big Lottery	Goldman Sachs	Merton Youth Justice Service
Bloomberg	Green Grants	Morgan Stanley
BNY Mellon	Harney Teas	Old Mutual
British Waterways	Heathrow Community Awards	Olympic Park Legacy Co.
Brown Foreman	Heritage Lottery Fund	PepisCo
Bywaters	Hillingdon Community Trust	PIMCO
Canary Wharf Group	HSBC	PLA
Charlie Porter	ING	PPL
City Bridge Trust	Johnson Controls	Ricoh
City of London	JP Morgan	Royal Docks Trust
Coca Cola	Laing O'Rourke	Standard Chartered
Cory Environmental Trust	LB Bexley	Steel Charitable Trust
Credit Suisse	LB Brent	Team Gallions
DEFRA	LB Bromley	Thames River Capital
Disney	LB Lewisham	Thames Water
DP World	LB Merton	The Challenge
Earthwatch	LB Tower Hamlets	The Crown Estate
Ecominds	LB Wandsworth	United St Saviours
Environment Agency	LOCOG (Keep Britain Tidy)	vInspired
Give Them a Sporting Chance	Lottery Awards for All	Waterways Trust
GlaxoSmithKline	M&G	

Trustees

Francis Carnwath CBE (Chairman)

Deputy John Barker OBE

Anthony Denton

Howard Davidson

Richard Everitt

Michael Hamilton

Celia Hensman MBE

Alistair Gale

Louise Moore

Charles Porter

Richard Rutter

Clare Sandels

Anne Wadsworth

Matthew Watts

Thames21's 2011/2012 Annual Review is kindly supported by



DP WORLD

Thames21 | Walbrook Wharf | 78-83 Upper Thames Street | LONDON | EC4R 3TD | T: 020 7248 7171

info@thames21.org.uk | www.thames21.org.uk



Facebook.com/thames21



@Thames21

Registered charity number 1103997

