

Your Tidal Thames Strategy Group Meeting Summary 6 December 2012, UCL, London

This is a summary report based on the laptop recordings undertaken during the meeting with the permission of the Strategy Group. 'Project Team' refers to Your Tidal Thames (referred to hereafter as YTT) project members – Thames Estuary Partnership, Thames21 and the Environment Agency Catchment Coordinator. 'Participants' refers to Strategy Group members present at the 6 December meeting.

1.0 Update on YTT

The project team gave a brief presentation reminding people of what the team has done since the beginning of the project in January 2012 to this point (e.g. starting point; desk research; engagement); detailing a summary of the context for the catchment plan: the other plans and strategies which it needs to take account of (as summarised in the Final Report) and the conclusions which have been drawn by the project team from this review i.e. policy is in place, but not implemented everywhere, every time. Powerpoint slides are available online for all presentations from the meeting.

1.1 Participants expressed concern over the lack of engagement from the commercial river users sector. The project team clarified that the term 'commercial river users sector' included all river operators, commercial fishermen and riverside businesses. The project team assured the group that efforts had been made to engage with this sector but responses had not been forthcoming. Examples of avenues explored for engagement with commercial stakeholders included:

- Organisations like The Cross River Partnership, who work with businesses and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) to identify sustainable development opportunities.
- The Port of London Authority (PLA) sent out engagement literature to river operators on behalf of the project.
- All operators are listed on the Thames Estuary Partnership (TEP) database and had been contacted along with all other stakeholders in May 2012.

1.2. Participants suggested that the environment has become a regulatory burden for many in the commercial river users sector. The commercial river users sector has already been through EU habitat regulations and suddenly found themselves having to comply with designations they didn't think would affect them.

Perception commonly is that by “steering clear” of engagement they will not be affected and would rather wait for the implications of any environmentally driven project to become clear before they will comment and engage.

- 1.3. Participants suggested that partnerships and negotiations are the missing link and in order to establish these, a specific approach must be developed. The relevance and benefits of engaging with environmental projects must be highlighted e.g. show commercial operators that when water quality is improved there will be more people on the river, which will benefit their businesses. When advantages are evident, and there is good publicity to be had, the commercial river users sector will engage.
- 1.4. The project team agreed to liaise with the PLA, if further funding is made available, to devise a suitable engagement strategy for the commercial river users sector going forward.

2.0 Priority Issues

The project team gave a presentation on the major themes arising out of the YTT engagement and the process by which the team had tried to prioritise those issues, suggested solutions and project ideas. Powerpoint slides are available online for all presentations from the meeting. Participants discussed the prioritisation of project ideas included in the final YTT report.

- 2.1. The Strategy Group felt that the key themes arising from the pilot engagement were “entirely logical and expected”.

Education and Public Perception

- 2.2. The project team had highlighted that education was not considered by regulatory or funding bodies to directly deliver WFD. One participant pointed out that although education would not bring about direct benefits or results, the aims of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) are predicated on sustainable water management. This, in turn, is built on good science and behavioural change therefore good education on any level would bring direct WFD benefits but over the longer term.
- 2.3. Participants were concerned that there is currently no system to measure changes in public perception and therefore behavioural change. For example, we

can measure how much habitat we create but we cannot yet measure how this changes people's perceptions of the river.

Funding cuts and the need for local coordinators

- 2.4. Participants expressed concerns that funding cuts to Local Councils would lead to the loss of local coordinators within the river strategies whose efforts were vital in bringing about visible local changes, funding into Local Authorities and as a result increase revenues for local businesses e.g. Thames Strategy Kew to Chelsea Coordinator within Hammersmith Council is due to run out of funding in March 2013.
- 2.5. There were concerns that YTT was going to be just another strategy document. It has become clear that Defra are looking towards landscape-scale approaches which join-up local organisations. However, translating this into real local changes that local communities can see the worth of and get involved is the local resource issue. One participant highlighted the need for the local coordination via gateway organisations such as TSKC and Thames Landscape Strategy who are already embedded in the local community to focus on local schemes and therefore get things achieved on the ground.
- 2.6. Participants felt that a key service missing was facilitation and partnerships to bring together those to facilitate and to break the process of implementing a project down for those people wanting to bring about the change. The organisations in the Strategy Group are all large, in size or perception, and can make the process easier e.g. provide clear guidance on which consents are needed and advice on practicalities of projects. The project team suggested that the YTT could act as a "one-stop-shop" for those with a project idea and provide this missing service in conjunction with other organisations along the tidal Thames.
- 2.7. The project team suggested a map of the work of local communities and organisations at their reach of the river would help to facilitate this 'one stop shop' service and integrate the need to account for both the local level and the big scale landscape view of the whole tidal reach.

Prioritisation process and criteria

- 2.8. Participants expressed concerns that priority issues are not always feasible and there needed to be a 'first cut' process by which unfeasible projects were filtered out.

- 2.9. There were concerns that the Environment Agency (EA) had been identified as the lead authority for most project ideas within the project ideas table. The project team clarified that all the project ideas arising out of the engagement work had been 'sanity checked' in an internal EA meeting which had fed back to the project team what data, knowledge and activity was known about the area in which the project idea was located and would ultimately be involved in most projects that went forward. Other lead organisations had not yet been identified as there had not been time between the closing of stakeholder engagement and the production of the table to have these kind of in depth discussions and find the right organisations before the meeting. It was felt the title of the column was misleading and therefore would be changed from "*Lead Organisation*" to "*Current Knowledge of the Project*". In addition, in the absence of funding for local organisations, the project ideas would stay with the EA.
- 2.10. The project team clarified that the EA would publish investigations results and data completed for the estuary in 2013. The WFD deadline for completion of investigations was December 2012. This has meant that detailed data about the failures and the possible solutions on the tidal Thames has not been available. This has been for all types of water bodies across the WFD, though there is a better understanding of the causes of failures on fresh and ground water bodies than in TraC water bodies. Participants queried whether this EA research would be linked to WFD stakeholder engagement and the YTT project. The project team clarified that the two will inform each other and are not separate entities.
- 2.11. Participants felt that there was not enough data or time to devise a robust prioritisation process and criteria that they were comfortable with. They queried what Defra had specifically requested the pilots deliver. The project team clarified that Defra want to see how pilot projects can deliver actions, not just discussion and ideas. The project team suggested that the prioritisation process should not be seen as the prioritisation of ideas, but the prioritisation for the delivery of ideas and a clear commitment from stakeholders to work collaboratively to deliver WFD targets.
- 2.12. Participants asked if the project would receive a "black mark" if it did not identify project ideas. The project team reiterated that the project is a pilot. Defra are looking to YTT and other pilot projects to develop a methodology to deliver WFD targets.
- 2.13. To deliver this methodology, participants suggested that projects could be prioritised according to their scale of influence. This would consider the number of partners. It presumes that projects with good support from a number of

partners are more deliverable – if lots of people are sat around a table agreeing then its influence becomes bigger. Some participants expressed concerns that this approach might prevent new ideas being turned into projects as they do not have the same backing and that project shouldn't be based on scale of influence.

2.14. The discussion continued suggesting that a range of criterion should be devised and any project idea rated on its merit and how well it met this range e.g. how well it meets statutory regulations, local need, active involvement of local groups and communities, multiple benefits, practicality and river basin priorities (see Table 1). A matrix of criteria needs to be developed but participants felt that they were a long way off from getting this right. Once the criteria have been jointly agreed by all members of the Strategy Group and the matrix tested each project idea could be rated according to the cumulative criterion. This would help prioritise funding. YTT can then 'endorse' project ideas that meet criteria. **The project team and all participants agreed that any prioritisation process must be open and transparent and include all relevant partners.** A consortium of organisations approach was suggested as a way forward to achieve this and avoid creating another overarching plan for the whole river.

2.15. Participants suggest that the report should replace the list of potential projects with some high level criteria for identifying future projects. Projects listed in the current draft report were a list of ideas from consultation. Consultation is incomplete, so by extension the list of ideas is not complete. The project team agreed to amend what is currently called "projects" to a list of "ideas from consultation". A revised table of ideas was circulated on 12 December with a deadline for comments of 17 December.

In summary, participants and the project team mutually agreed that no projects would be prioritised at this time, some high level criteria, as discussed, would be included in the final report and the suggested amendments made to the table of project ideas to be reviewed by participants before submission.

Topic	Question
Geographical scale	What area of the river and RBD will the project benefit?
Time scale	How long will the project take to implement?
	How long will the project take to produce benefits for the river?
	How long will the benefits to the river last?
	Will the project help keep people engaged in the YTT Catchment Plan?
Collaborative	How many partners are involved in the project?

working	Does the project have local community support?
	Does the project deliver a solution to the themes raised by the YTT engagement?
	Does the project deliver aims of existing plans or strategies?
Feasibility	Does the project have permissions from the relevant authorities, or has consideration been given to the requirements of consents?
	Is the project evidence based?
	Does the project balance ecology, economy and social values?
Funding	Does the project currently have funding sources identified? None Potential funding sources identified Part funding secured Full funding secured?
Development Stage	What stage of development is the project currently at? Conceptual Designed Approved Currently being implemented
WFD objectives	Does the project meet WFD objectives – directly, indirectly or not at all?
Multiple benefits	Does the project deliver benefits beyond WFD?*
River Basin Priority	Does the project deliver a solution to an issue which is a priority for the RBD?
Repeatable	Could the project be repeated within the estuary?
Monitoring	Does the project proposal incorporate monitoring of the project?

Table 1. Questions that should be considered when ideas for possible projects are being evaluated for inclusion in the Your Tidal Thames project

3.0 Future of YTT and the Strategy Group

The project team detailed a recent letter from Defra which outlined what they would like to see happen for the pilot projects after 2012 and the realities of future funding. Defra would not be able to provide any more funding before the end of the financial year in April 2013. For the interim period, Defra had requested that Environment Agency local teams to consider how to maintain and enhance the value of current catchment pilots taking account of local budget pressures, learning to date and the need to continue with wider adoption from 2013. Offers may include financial and/or technical support but the EA would need a proposal and clear support from the whole Strategy Group for interim funding. Participants went on to discuss what

they would like to see happen for YTT, their role and proposed activities of the project team for early 2013 to advise this proposal.

- 3.1. The project team stated that it would like the Strategy Group to reconvene regardless of the funding situation. The Thames Estuary Partnership and Thames21 are not going to disappear and arranging another meeting is not a problem. Participants expressed concerns that there might not be much purpose in the group meeting again if there has not been a significant advance in the project. However, some participants suggested that the group meet again to review and discuss the EA investigations data when it is released.
- 3.2. Questions were also raised over what would happen if the project had to take a hiatus given a lack of funding. The project team explained that the project would stay “live” and would continue to look at local projects and how they fit into the YTT.
- 3.3. Participants were worried that without funding for projects on the ground there would be little point in the project moving forward. The project team explained that there is always potential for funding. Keeping the group going keeps the endorsement for other projects alive and this is exactly what Defra wants to see.
- 3.4. The project team explained that a proposal to the EA explaining what YTT will do between now and March, if given additional funding, would be written as a draft interim proposal.
- 3.5. The participants clarified that they would like to see the project continue as significant gaps in engagement needed to be filled – both geographical and sectoral especially with commercial users; prioritisation process and criteria needed to be developed and they could see the merit in meeting at least once more to discuss and review the EA investigations data. Future bids for YTT should include funded staff for other river strategies to help move forward with the consortium approach beyond March 2013.

4.0 The Way Forward

- The Strategy Group continues to exist
- When EA investigations results come through, the SG should consider them by email or meet for discussion
- When Defra produces the report on the pilots, it will be circulated to all Strategy Group members by email and responses can be made by email or discussion

- Thames21 and TEP will work up a proposal for 3 months interim funding for YTT
- Thames Strategy Kew to Chelsea, Thames Landscape Strategy, Thames21 and TEP will discuss closer working in the short/long term
 - Maybe draft a joint proposal for the consortium approach beyond March 2013
- The Strategy Group would like to do/see additional stakeholder engagement on:
 - Commercial river users sector
 - Geographical gaps
 - Activities and timescales are dependent on finding resources/funding