

A photograph of three people participating in a river cleanup on a rocky bank. A young girl in a black jacket and blue jeans is walking towards the water, carrying a white bag. A man in a blue jacket and black boots is standing in the shallow water, and another person in a grey jacket is standing on the rocks. In the background, the River Thames flows past a bridge, with St. Paul's Cathedral and other city buildings visible under a clear blue sky.

CHAMPIONING THE RIVER
2016-2021 FIVE YEAR PLAN



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Thames21 is an environmental charity putting healthy rivers at the heart of community life. Through environmental improvements, education, research and advocacy efforts, we inspire and influence effective and lasting change by working hand-in-hand with communities to deliver tangible and measurable improvements for urban rivers.



A note from the Chairman, Michael Hamilton

Thames21 prides itself on being a voice and protector of rivers in the UK and, in particular, in London. This unswerving commitment will continue to enhance the organisation's standing as a credible and convincing champion of sustainable rivers over the coming five years.

As Thames21 moves into its next exciting chapter, it is adopting an increasingly strategic approach. To meet environmental needs and community demand, the charity will focus on a more equal delivery of charitable programmes and contract delivery services. Achieving this balance will not only improve the charity's financial stability but new opportunities that will serve to meet the charity's vision and mission in the long-term.

As a strong believer of working in partnership, I greatly welcome the decision by Thames21 to partner more and more with other sectors. This collaborative and transparent approach is paramount to achieving greater things for our rivers and I look forward to witnessing the many successes from these joint ventures in the coming years.



A message from the Chief Executive, Debbie Leach

The next five years promise to be some of the most exciting yet challenging times during Thames21's history. Climate change, a growing population and the heightened demand on the UK's rivers is unprecedented and so our five year plan seeks to respond to these challenges.

Thames21 will become increasingly vocal as we champion rivers and ensure their importance and value is at the forefront of key agendas. We will use our expertise and energy, plus our strong connection to local communities, to increase the long-term sustainability of urban rivers. We will play our part to ensure there is effective community and sustainable economic development and progress in our towns and cities without damaging water environments.

We will work to become ever more pioneering in our approach – investigating, testing, working in partnership and spreading news and information to others on the most effective approaches and techniques to improve and manage river and water environments.

And we will champion rivers and build direct connections between people and rivers that are: safe, clean and vibrant with wildlife.

We welcome you to join us on this journey of sustainability for our rivers.

OUR VISION, MISSION AND CORE VALUES

Our vision is to put healthy rivers at the heart of community life

We will achieve this goal through a robust mission and core values that steer every action we take as a charity.

We aim to deliver and inspire tangible and measurable improvements to our rivers by working hand-in-hand with communities and stakeholders.

We are bringing about effective and lasting change through education that empowers, environmental enhancements that transform, pioneering research that influences and advocacy that energises.

Our values lie at the heart of everything we strive to achieve. They are the guiding principles of every effort we undertake and mould the way our dedicated team responds to the challenges of connecting communities with their rivers.

Our core values centre on:

Aspiring for excellence – we want to provide cleaner water environments for people to access easily. We are doing this by carefully planning our efforts and ensuring our every output has as much impact as possible.

Delivering practical solutions – offering pragmatic, deliverable solutions to the issues faced by urban rivers which will be effective and long lasting.

Adopting a flexible and reactive approach – we believe the strength of an organisation lies in its ability to bend and respond. By seeking and listening to the advice and experience of others, we are more in tune with what success looks like and are able to react quickly when new opportunities arise that will help achieve our vision.

Nurturing ideas – by actively encouraging innovation and ideas, we are building a team of capable, creative thinkers who can problem-solve as issues arise. This same team is also responsible for bringing fresh ideas to the table which will bring about key steps towards achieving our goal.

Being the friendly face – we are recognised in neighbourhoods as the people putting rivers back at the heart of their community. Our team is therefore not only chosen for expertise in their field, but also for a welcoming approach with whoever they communicate and work with.

Partnering – we know that to achieve our overall goal, partnerships are essential. Whether we are working with governmental bodies, NGOs, community groups or individuals, we recognise sharing our expertise makes us stronger and bolsters our collective vision to improve the UK's interconnected river network. No single organisation can deliver a sustainable future for our rivers – we must, like rivers, work in unison as everything is connected.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RIVERS

Healthy rivers are vital to all of us; we rely on them to meet our basic human need for water. These ancient transport networks are the veins that run through our towns, cities and countryside – offering a wealth of meaning. They supply the water in our taps and in some instances, help generate electricity. Every day they feed our industrial, commercial and agricultural activities. They fuel our modern life. Sadly though, our modern, urban lifestyles include increased crime, stress, sedentary lifestyles and feelings of isolation. Rivers provide a natural focus to help address these issues and bring people together.

With an ever-growing global population that is set to tip 8 billion people by 2025, the demand for clean water and connected, considerate communities will inevitably rise. This means our rivers need to be as healthy as possible in order to not only support our economies, but all life that depends on water for survival.

By respecting the natural way rivers work, the potential benefits to trade, tourism, business and even the housing premiums that they generate is huge. Yet the point here is that while we can remain focused on the economic outputs of healthy rivers, we shouldn't overlook perhaps some of the most important benefits rivers offer. Even rivers in the heart of the most densely-built urban areas can provide inspiring opportunities for mental and physical well-being. They can be destinations for leisure and relaxation, as well as havens for the mind and soul. People gravitate towards rivers because they are places of beauty that refresh our spirits, provide peace and serenity, bring a sense of adventure, possibilities and journeys.

Today, there is a new focus on restoring their health in a holistic and sustainable way. This means looking at the entire life of a river – from its source to its mouth and beyond. With an increased sway towards a catchment-based approach to safeguarding our rivers for the future, we are helping to bring synergy between people, business and nature. By recognising that urban rivers are just as much a part of a larger catchment, we can deliver improvements upstream that benefit downstream to help solve those many modern day issues.

The Climate Change Challenge

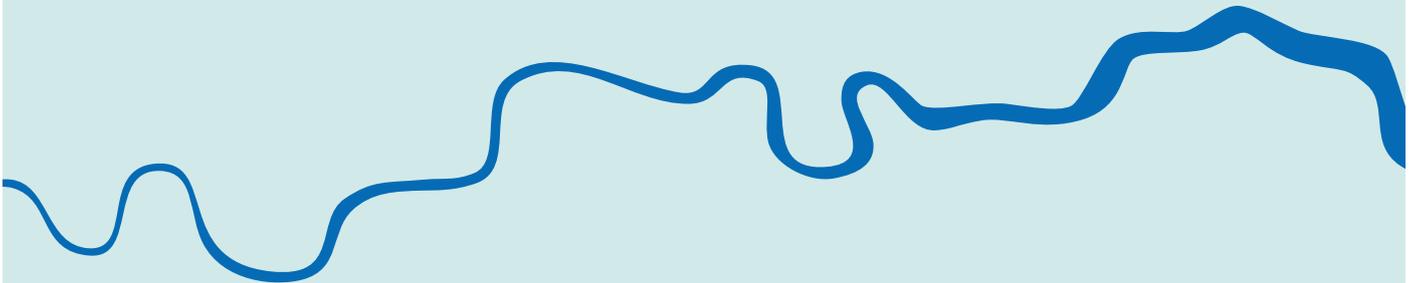
Climate change is a reality which is now clear to all. Nowhere is it more apparent than on our rivers. Climate change is causing both greater periods of drought and greater periods of heavy rainfall. Times when the water in our rivers is too over-stretched to provide sufficient for our taps are likely to increase; as is the number of occasions when the volume of water is overwhelming; causing flooding and damaging transport routes.

The harm caused by pollution in our rivers is escalating. During drought, pollutants become concentrated and the damage they cause, more severe. During heavy rainfall, pollutants from road surfaces and sewage outfalls are washed in greater quantities into rivers.

Climate challenges like these are real but they are not insurmountable. Solutions to mitigate the impacts are also creating opportunities to clean and return nature to rivers like never before. The time is right to reconnect communities with their rivers.

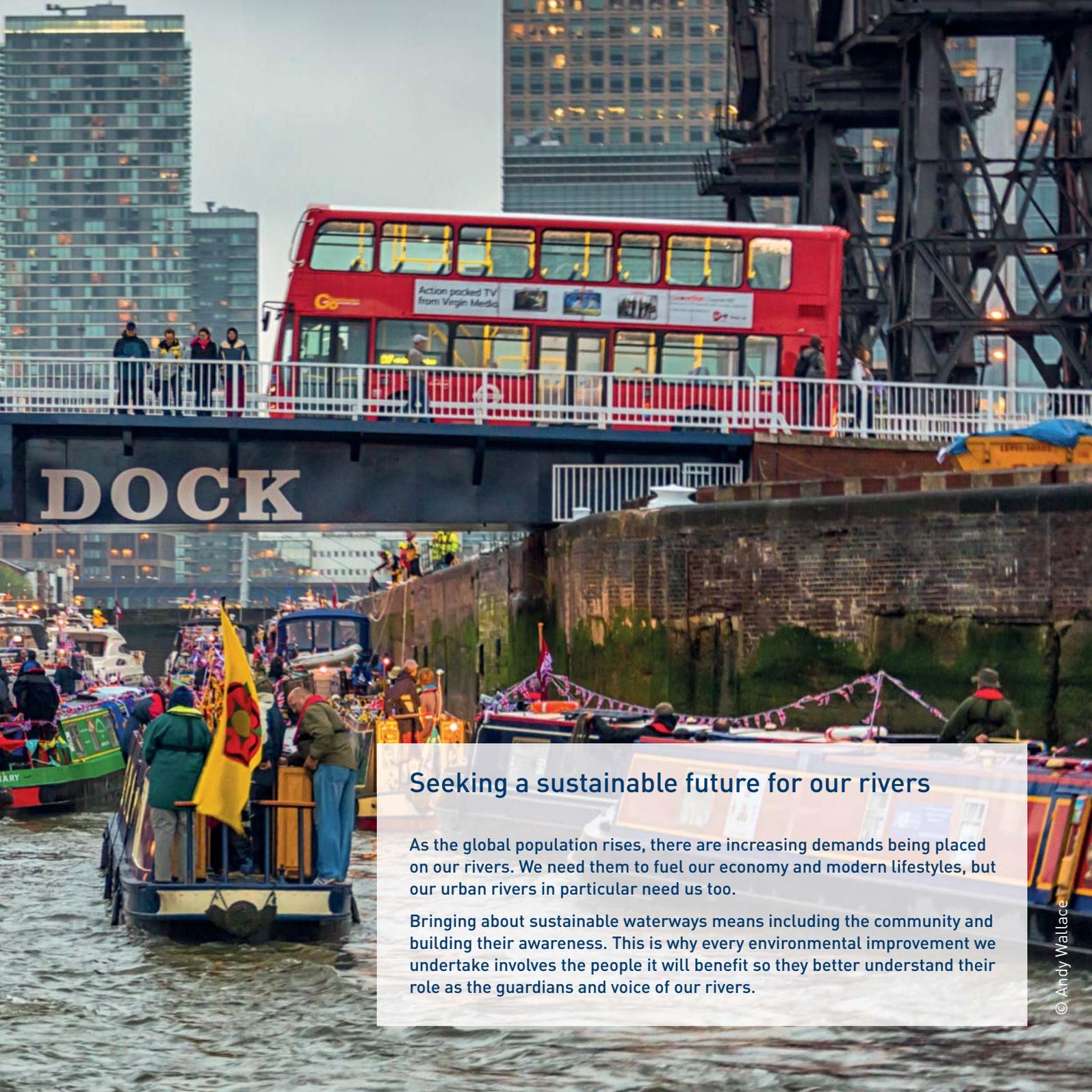
Thames21 is already responding to these challenges and will continue to do so over the next five years and beyond.

Through our work with communities, strategic bodies and public and private organisations, we will continue raising awareness of what can be done to prepare for our changing world; and will work hand in hand with communities on sustainable physical improvements to not only reduce and mitigate climate change impacts, but to transform rivers for the better.





WEST INDIA



Seeking a sustainable future for our rivers

As the global population rises, there are increasing demands being placed on our rivers. We need them to fuel our economy and modern lifestyles, but our urban rivers in particular need us too.

Bringing about sustainable waterways means including the community and building their awareness. This is why every environmental improvement we undertake involves the people it will benefit so they better understand their role as the guardians and voice of our rivers.

Improve the river and water environments of Greater London and other priority river locations

Urban rivers in the capital and the Thames River Basin have been heavily altered through development, and so have the catchments which drain into them. Their ecological health has been damaged by physical alterations, such as culverting, or through pollution and rubbish from surrounding areas. These changes have made our rivers dirty and ugly in places and separated them from their surrounding communities.

To address this we will focus our attentions and efforts on:

- **Restoring rivers** – restore natural river processes, recreate river features and landscapes to increase biodiversity, help reduce flood risk and reconnect communities with these rivers. Work in partnership with others to increase opportunities for this work.
- **Installing Rainscapes/Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS)** – to improve water quality and biodiversity, reduce flood risk and increase wellbeing in urban areas.
- **Creating wetlands** – including reedbeds, wet woodlands and grasslands to reduce water pollution and increase biodiversity.
- **Improving access to rivers** – projects such as paths, practical conservation, interpretation boards as well as awareness so that people can easily find and reach their local river and green space.
- **Tackling river pollution from misconnected drains** – work with communities and other partners to map the scale of the problem and take action to help solve it.
- **Progressing river improvement plans** – involve stakeholders, including communities, in local Catchment Partnerships to prioritise local river needs in order to achieve clean, healthy rivers, in accordance with Water Framework Directive objectives.



Over the next five years we will:

- Complete Action Plans for 50 new rainscapes (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) and wetlands and directly inspire 50 new rainscapes through advocacy, training and partnership working
- Produce 2 river restoration plans each year on 7 River Catchments hosted by Thames21 in and around London
- Deliver 4 river restoration schemes each year (including reedbeds)
- Deliver 10 rainscapes
- Increase reedbed coverage by 10% in the Lee Navigation
- Become an established Voice and Activist for river restoration in London
- Map London's Lost Rivers in at least 5 boroughs, providing opportunities for daylighting and restoration, and work with at least 2 boroughs annually to help deliver projects



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Rainscapes and wetlands are vital to the future sustainability of our waterways. They are part of the solution towards managing flood risk and improving water quality since they filter pollutants from entering our beautiful rivers while providing a more natural way for excessive rainfall to rejoin the river.

“What is surprising is how these sometimes small, sometimes big transformations can really capture the interest of the local community. Establishing more across London is imperative and the best part is, they can come in any shape and size!”

Ben Fenton, Fixing Broken Rivers Project Manager

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Planned projects

Wildlife on the Move: London's rivers provide an essential route for wildlife, connecting species and their habitat around the capital. However, much more needs to be understood about how the city's rivers are used in this way and what is required to protect and facilitate these movements. Thames21 plans to develop and implement a five year strategy to enable Water Voles to colonise the whole Lower Lea from Walthamstow Marshes and monitor how they disperse through the river catchment.

Budget required: £40k pa for 5 years

Sustainable River partnerships: Thames21 plans to develop partnerships with two local authorities per year through Catchment Partnerships, providing long-term improvement and care for urban rivers to benefit communities and wildlife. Multi-year projects would restore rivers and wetlands and reduce flood risk, improve water quality and river habitats – integrating and championing local community involvement including education, participation in project planning, helping to deliver, valuing and managing the results.

Budgets required: ranging between £20k and 500k

Sustain water environments by harnessing the commitment and enthusiasm of local community volunteers for long-term improvement

As well as large scale improvements, it is also essential to tackle ongoing neglect that can alienate communities, reduce access to nature and recreational opportunities, and prevent wildlife from flourishing. We plan to expand Thames21 programmes which involve local people directly in caring for London's waterways, increasing and maintaining their sense of community ownership, pride and wellbeing.

To address this we will focus our attentions and efforts on:

- **Clearing litter and rubbish** - support and empower local people to remove litter from rivers and the surrounding areas to protect and enhance attractive local spaces.
- **Combating fly-tipping** – support local people to take practical action to clear debris, report fly-tipping and distribute information on best practice for rubbish disposal.
- **Tackling invasive species** - give communities training and information to identify and record Invasive Non Native Species. Work with local people to prevent their spread through robust biosecurity measures and to coordinate safe removal.
- **Sustaining river banks and beds** – empower volunteers to maintain and improve river corridors to support a diverse mosaic of habitats and sustain natural processes.
- **Facilitating volunteer groups** – continue supporting Thames21 local groups to tackle clean-ups, fly-tipping, invasive species and river restoration, through event support, advice, and training. Broker relationships between the community, NGOs and statutory partners.
- **Inspiring and supporting more independent volunteer groups** – encourage new Thames21 badged groups empowered to work more independently by providing training, ongoing support, equipment, health and safety guidance and fundraising advice.





Over the next five years we will:

- Engage 50,000 volunteers in transforming river environments
- Clear at least 1,000 cubic metres of litter from our rivers

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Volunteers are the life-blood of some of the most impactful grassroots benefits for the environment. It is without doubt that people must be invested in if we are to effect genuine and lasting change for our waterways. Giving power back to communities by offering them the skills and support they need to be the real guardians of our rivers can only be a good thing and who knows where those good intentions will lead?

Molly Gadenz, Training Officer

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Planned projects

Working with communities: Thames21 has learned that the best, most effective and sustainable river programmes are those developed hand in hand with local communities, reflecting local interests and concerns. Thames21 plans to develop further local programmes around rivers and areas including:- the Lower River Lea, River Brent, the Ravensbourne, the Roding, Beam and Ingrebourne, and the River Thames - from non-tidal locations to the West, to Thurrock in the East including the Mardyke, and out to Convey Island and Southend.

Budget required: Various from £30k to £150k

Helping Tackle Flooding: Involving communities in solutions, reducing risk – Thames21 will recruit, train, organise and support Citizen Science volunteers to calibrate flood risk models through film and photography of flood incidents at measuring and monitoring points, and will help engage local authorities in solutions. Ongoing

work for volunteers will include helping to manage local flood risk by improving water storage and flow on rivers and monitor for new issues such stream blockages, etc.

Budget required: £80k pa

Thames River Watch goes large: This effective volunteer programme sees Londoners testing and monitoring the health of the River Thames – gathering together valuable new evidence on the issues and challenges it faces, from pollution to plastic litter. We plan to expand the work further from Greenwich out to Gravesend, and establish new Community Hubs at key pollution areas along the river. Schools, businesses, community and recreational groups will work together to test, survey and clean their local stretch of Thames. The data generated by each Community Hub will be interpreted and publicised, recognising volunteer commitment and influencing the behaviour of Londoners.

Expansion budget required: £80k pa

Increase and improve volunteering opportunities and practical engagement on river and water environments

In large and complex urban areas – with many localities undergoing rapid development; newly arrived or transient populations; and with our multi-faceted and multi-cultural communities - there is a greater need to build a sense of belonging, a sense of place and to bring communities together to build the strong social environments that enable our natural and water environments to thrive. This community involvement can be both inspired by rivers and enable their long term sustainability.

To address this we will focus our attentions and efforts on:

- **Creating a vibrant and growing volunteer community** - which increases the impact of Thames21 on our rivers through greater numbers of volunteers. To ensure the sustainability of this involvement Thames21 will work closely with communities to identify local issues and develop projects to address them.
- **Providing volunteer training, mentoring and development** – to create long-term commitment, involvement and ownership, Thames21 will offer hands on experience through training that is bespoke for the water environment. We will mentor and support volunteers through training thereby enabling and encouraging volunteers to look after and be part of the future plans for their waterway.
- **Diversifying and broadening our audience** – to ensure that Thames21 is fully representative of the diverse population, volunteers will be engaged in issues that are relevant to them in their neighbourhood through conversation, consultation and developing projects hand in hand with local groups.
- **Expanding volunteer roles** – work with our volunteers to identify and support new ways in which expertise and energies can be used to benefit both the charity and the volunteer.
- **Providing a voice and a network** – Thames21 will be able to champion the range of issues related to healthy waterways through establishing a supported and trained network of volunteer river advocates.
- **Ensuring inclusive opportunities for all** – amend and adjust our activities to ensure that the opportunities that we provide do not exclude anyone through increased dialogue with those not yet participating.
- **Providing pathways to employment** – opportunities to learn both informal and technical skills that strengthen personal development and provide valuable experience.



- **Encouraging teambuilding** – enable people to work together to achieve shared river improvement objectives, strengthening relationships and building work and life skills.
- **Building community cohesion** – use activities to engage often diverse volunteers. Run a wide range of practical activities that bring together a diverse community with one common purpose and goal.
- **Creating opportunities for action** – empower communities, neighbourhoods and individuals to be part of the solution and get involved in addressing the challenges faced by our rivers.

Over the next five years we will:

- Directly engage 225,000 people with Thames21's work and activities
- Engage 10,000 people with rivers through cultural activities including art and music



Volunteers are the backbone of our work – they help us to achieve greater and greater things.

The best part is, our volunteers enjoy getting hands-on and involved, which is perfect for us because we know that the more the community is engaged, the more likely we are to leave behind a sustainable future for our waterways.

Luke Damerum, Non-Tidal Thames Project Officer



Planned projects

Steps and Stairs: Building on 20 years' experience in organising community volunteering on the Thames foreshore, Thames21 now plans to involve local people in reclaiming and monitoring safe access points on the tidal Thames. A small number of key access points will be improved to facilitate foreshore visits. The project will link to learning about London's history as a port and its relationship to a tidal estuary, understanding flood risk and to identify safe sites where foreshore access can be encouraged.

Budget required: £100k pa for 3 years

River Access for All: This has been developed from Thames21's ongoing work to clear overgrown waterways, improve signage and opportunities for people to reach and connect with rivers. Access will be improved for wheelchair and buggy users, allowing everyone to protect rivers, creating increased community cohesion and well-being. Thames21 will work to ensure that the national path on both sides of the river is fully established eastward of Woolwich - building partnerships with local authorities, businesses and

communities, forging new links with the river and helping to maintain a clear pathway from Source to Sea.

Budget required: £70k pa for 5 years

Waterway Champions: The project engages young people aged 16-25 in practical activities to improve their local river, providing meaningful opportunities to contribute to life in their community. This will form partnerships with organisations working with young people, support Thames21 regional officers to deliver youth volunteering activities and encourage intergenerational volunteering. Training, mentoring and support will improve young people's skills, experience and employment prospects.

Budget required: £82k pa

Well-being through Waterways: This project gathers widespread evidence on how environmental volunteering can improve physical and mental health and uses it to design specific activities to maximise these benefits. This project will be piloted on one river before being expanded across the charity's work and programmes.

Budget required: £50k for 2 years

Inspiring a love of rivers through education

“In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.”

These wise words of Senegalese Forestry Engineer Baba Dioum underpin every activity we invite the community to join. We share understanding of our rivers with people so that their love and interest in caring for these blue corridors can grow, flourish and become part of a sustainable future for our waterways.





Widen opportunities for understanding and learning about our rivers and the issues that are affecting them

Rivers, canals, lakes and ponds provide vital open spaces in the crowded city for people to connect with nature. To ensure that waterways are better understood and valued Thames21 will aim to increase opportunities for practical experiential learning for young people and adults that meet formal curriculum linked objectives and informal learning to improve knowledge, celebrate sites of importance and increase understanding and enjoyment.

To address this we will focus our attentions and efforts on:

- **Building more links with schools and formal education** – increase formal curriculum linked learning opportunities both in schools and on site. Increase teachers' skills and confidence to help them use their local waterway as a venue for learning outside the classroom.
- **Arranging community discovery days** – allow families and other members of the community to learn more about their local waterway and highlight the problems they face, the improvements people can help implement and to celebrate them.
- **Promoting Citizen Science** – provide training, support and organisation for local people to collect and pool scientifically meaningful data, share that data widely and use it to influence future river improvement work.
- **Progressing and develop further our accredited training** – Deliver high quality training that meets nationally recognised standards, that recognises trainees' achievements and gives local people the skills and knowledge they need to contribute to the long-term improvement and maintenance of waterways.
- **Developing arts, cultural and heritage projects** – explore and celebrate the heritage and history of our waterways and the cultural influence that they continue to have, engaging London communities further with their local rivers.



Over the next five years we will:

- Engage more than 25,000 schoolchildren with valuing our rivers and understanding the environmental challenges they face



Planned projects

Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre, Brent:

At the start of 2016 Thames21 re-opened the much-loved Centre to enable increasing numbers of local schoolchildren to benefit from outdoor education sessions at the centre adjacent to the Welsh Harp Reservoir. Through work with schools, the charity aims to inspire young people to learn, develop new skills and build their confidence, as well as to discover and value the natural world around them.

Education Centre Development: The charity plans to build on the successful education sessions for schools to establish a wider programme of activities for all members of the community at the Welsh Harp; including activities

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Learning outside of the classroom is such a fantastic way for youngsters to build their knowledge and understanding of the natural world around them. By offering experiential learning in the great outdoors while also linking our teaching to the curriculum, we are nurturing the environmental guardians of tomorrow's world. What I love most about my job is seeing the real excitement and enthusiasm from children in the topic and seeing those cogs whirring as they really grasp how wonderful our natural world is and how they have such a big role to play in protecting it.

Edel Fingleton, Love the Lea Education Officer

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for young people during school holidays, training and educational events for people of all ages at weekends and evenings, outdoor activities to encourage health and well-being, and training and supporting a new 'Friends' Group. The programme will establish the Welsh Harp as the 'go-to' centre in west London for information and learning about waterways and the Brent River Catchment.

Budget required: £130k pa for 2 years

Learning for All: Young people with disabilities should have full opportunity to benefit from the Education Centre's activities, experience and learn about London's natural environment. We plan to investigate barriers to participation and identify the solutions needed to develop and deliver effective, inclusive programmes at the Centre.

Budget required for one year study: £70k

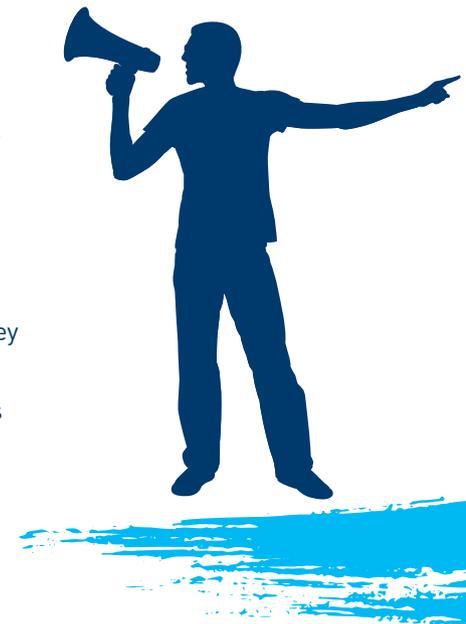
Actively champion rivers across the country by campaigning for social, environmental and political change

Large and complex urban areas face many challenges and priorities. It is therefore essential that there is a voice for our rivers to ensure that their importance, the value and benefits they bring and the need to protect them is given the priority it deserves.

The charity will both lead and work in partnership with others to raise awareness, understanding and support from the public and decision-makers for our rivers and for solutions to the issues that affect them.

To address this we will focus our attentions and efforts on:

- **Increasing public awareness of water pollution** – inspiring action on what can be done to address it.
- **Raising awareness of sewage** - increase understanding, support and public involvement in plans to tackle sewage and other pollution in the River Thames and its tributaries.
- **Reducing the plastic litter contaminating our rivers** - improve public education and inspire changes in behaviour.
- **Raising awareness of disposable packaging** – highlighting the harm caused to rivers by such packaging and outlining how this might be reduced.
- **Addressing the discharge into rivers of misconnected domestic drains** - engage and involve the public and decision-makers.
- **Further developing communications and messaging** - to ensure that the charity makes best use of its direct experience and practical delivery on and around rivers to spread key issues.
- **Embedding Thames21 messages and campaigns within all the charity's activities** - this includes our charitable programme delivery, corporate challenge events and any other dealings with both the public and decision makers.
- **Reviewing the charity's brand and image** - to ensure that the charity's purpose and work is communicated as effectively as possible.



Over the next five years we will:

- Ensure that tackling the issue of litter in water environments has a clear identity and prominence in new national strategies. Work with partners to produce effective implementation plans.
- Actively engage 3000 people to participate in walks and talks with experts in their neighbourhood as part of London Rivers Week
- Enable, facilitate and inspire wider river restoration throughout London by becoming an established Voice and Activist for river restoration
- Map London's Lost Rivers in at least 5 boroughs; providing opportunities for daylighting and restoration



I really love sharing the amazing stories that form part and parcel of Thames21's work. I'm proud of our track record in empowering people with messages of hope and clear calls to action and I think we act as an important bridge between the communities we work with and our key private and public partners. Through listening to communities and people who care on the ground, we can crowd-source information and solutions, championing them to key decision-makers.

Kirsten Downer, Communications Officer



Planned projects

London Rivers Week: Launched in June 2016, this pilot project inspiring Londoners to discover their local river was a huge success, reaching more than a million people. Sponsorship would allow this new initiative to grow, provide more opportunities and reach out to the wider public. Our target is for 3,000 people to attend a London Rivers Week event by 2021 and to make many millions more increasingly aware of their local river.

Budget required: £10k

Food packaging campaign: Data from the Thames River Watch programme has shown that food packaging is responsible for 74% of litter in the Thames. This campaign will raise awareness of this issue, engage communities, businesses and government in agreeing solutions (such as better litter disposal and recycling) and look at changes to how we design, make and sell products – focusing back to the impact that litter has on our rivers, communities and wildlife.

Budget required: £20k

The Unflushables: The project will communicate a message of river guardianship to help people understand the pressures on the river network from London's growing population, and how they can help. Whilst the Tideway Tunnel will bring huge environmental improvement to the tidal Thames, other issues remain. Blockages that occur in London's sewage system lead to pollution discharging into the tributaries and then into the Thames. Building on a successful pilot, 'unflushable' products, fats, wet wipes, oils and greases will be depicted as 'super villains' and blockage 'hotspots' will be targeted through community engagement.

Budget required: £90k

Advocacy for Water Environments: Thames21 will join with other NGOs championing water environments to monitor UK law and push for improvements to our water policy, its implementation and enforcement as the UK makes plans to withdraw from the EU. We should be prepared to use this momentous change as a chance for a positive catalyst to build better policy and enforcement for our rivers in the future.

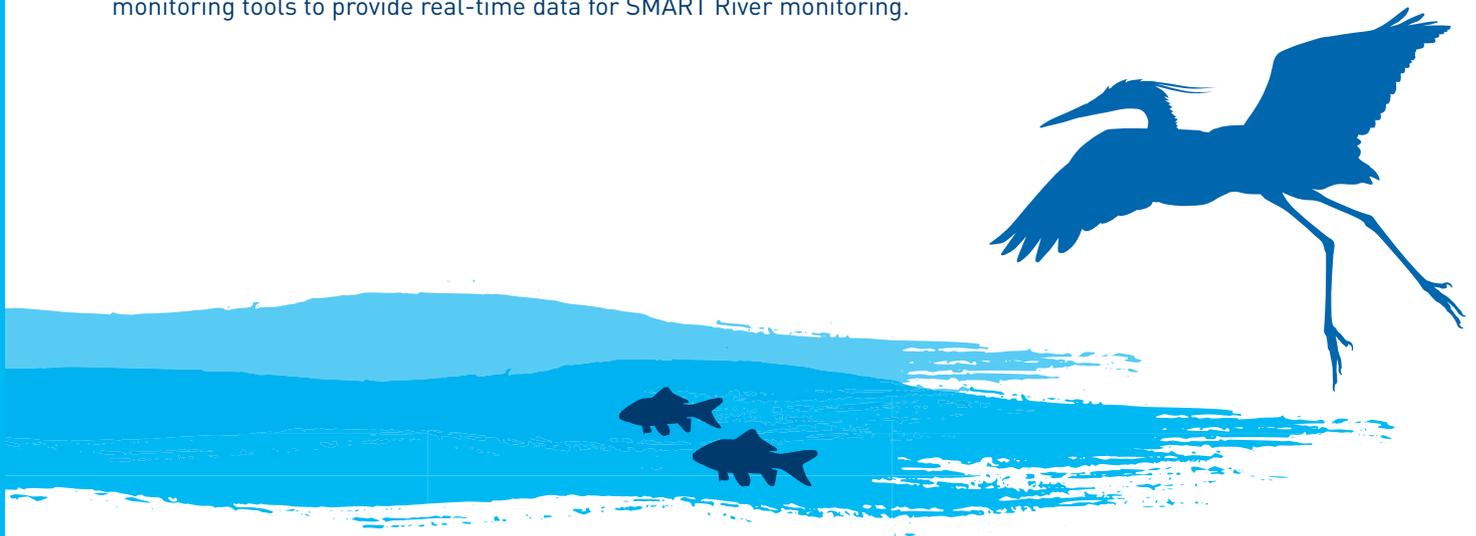
Budget required: £20K

Advance research and evidence for ever greater river improvement and community benefit, working both nationally and internationally

The complexity of rivers, their catchments and the people who use them is vast. In order to deliver a better river for the creatures which they contain (or could contain) and for people who live near them, it is vital to understand them better, what affects them and the best solutions.

To address this we will focus our attentions and efforts on:

- **Expanding research both ourselves and in association with others** – our partner organisations include universities, government departments, local governments, community groups, individuals and charity partners. We will identify research needs and projects required to deliver better rivers for wildlife and the community.
- **Contributing data to a European-wide analysis of water quality in tributary rivers** – this will be done through INTCATCH, a project with Brunel University which uses remote controlled boats to monitor water quality. With information uploaded to the cloud, this multinational project aims to develop the practical use of innovative, user-friendly water monitoring tools to provide real-time data for SMART River monitoring.



Over the next five years we will:

- Increase the River Thames litter evidence base by 20% each year through expanding citizen science foreshore surveys
- Commence litter surveying on five tributary rivers across London in partnership with local groups
- Produce evidence on the sources and pathways of microplastics into the riverine environments through research partnerships



Better understanding the health of our river network is crucial if we are to find meaningful solutions that mitigate many of the issues urban rivers face. Exciting times are afoot at Thames21 as we begin a European-wide research programme using remote controlled boats that will attain water quality samples from some of the most difficult to reach stretches of water. These samples will help us build a greater picture of the health of London's rivers.

Nathalie Gilbert, INTCATCH Project Manager



Planned projects

Research to be delivered through academic partnerships:

Resolving River Plastics: Despite increasing evidence of the damage caused by aquatic plastic litter to wildlife, habitats and recreational spaces in river and marine environments, there is not enough understanding of the most effective interventions, based on evidence. Research projects are now required to show the sources, flows and pathways of plastic litter into and along rivers and to provide the evidence needed to lobby for change.

Budgets required: various

Microplastics: While solutions for engineered microplastics can be sought with the product manufacturers, there is

an urgent need to understand better the mechanisms of fragmentation of macroplastics to secondary microplastics, as well as where and when this fragmentation occurs and its source materials.

Budgets required: various

Community Modelling: Working with partner organisations, the project will develop a mechanism which will help community and resident groups to engage with technical data sets currently used by specialists for decision making. Proposed data sets which will be used include:-

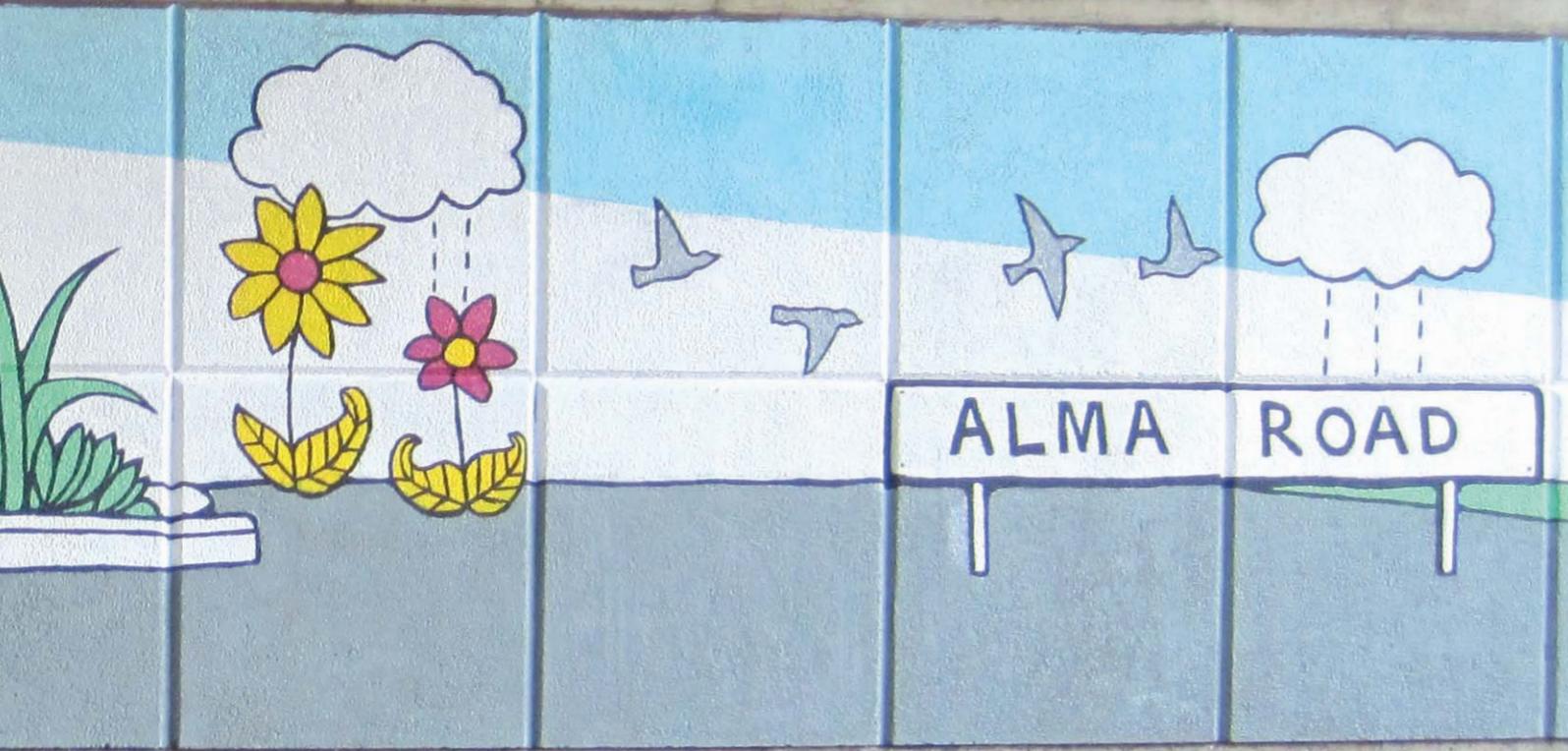
Year 1 – Water Quality in the London Lea Catchment

Year 2 – Thamesmead Regenerate

Year 3-5 plus – Expansion into further regeneration areas

Budget required: £60k pa





Reducing flood risk, improving communities

Rain gardens are a simple yet effective way to help reduce flood risk in urban areas. Planted with hardy, yet often colourful vegetation that can withstand temporary flooding, rain gardens are well designed for heavy rainfall. They also help to improve water quality by filtering pollutants, such as oil and petrol, from road run-off.

This mural was created to celebrate a series of rain gardens installed in Alma Road, Enfield, which now help to prevent polluted water from entering the River Lea.

Our History

Contrary to urban myth, the '21' in Thames21 has nothing to do with the number of rivers in London. What it relates to is the blueprint for achieving sustainability in the 21st Century, Agenda 21. This groundbreaking template was adopted around the world following the high profile United Nations Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and, back in London, the connection between Agenda 21 and the capital's great river was made. London's development boom had brought increased litter to the river. This issue and a series of serendipitous events formed the spring lines of what was to become Thames21.

Small groups of people living near the river began going down to their local patch of foreshore to remove the increasing amounts of litter they noticed, but these community actions were ad hoc and fragmented. Meanwhile, a Keep Britain Tidy employee had looked out of his window, noticed the litter on the Thames, and sent off a funding application which proposed removing litter from the river for the first time.

This led to the trial of a small research project to see if these informal grassroots cleaning efforts could be expanded, joined up and properly supported. In 1994, ThamesClean was launched to do just that, bringing together key partners including the Port of London Authority, the Environment Agency, Thames Water and the Corporation of London.

The initiative sparked widespread interest and soon expanded across London, along Thames tributaries and canals, bringing in British Waterways. Then in 2004, it became an independent registered charity and was renamed Thames21. While clean-ups remain the backbone of our efforts for community engagement and involvement, our focus has widened. We now research the sources of the pollution, find ways to reduce it and, in parallel, campaign and educate to prevent it from entering our rivers in the first place.

Today Thames21's work to improve urban rivers in London and beyond extends far beyond the reach of the iconic River Thames. To find out how our efforts are helping to improve the global health of waterways and people, read our 'What We Do' section on our website.

How to follow the Thames21 journey

Keep in touch with us!



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