

# EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES & **INSPIRING CHANGE FOR RIVERS**



© Thames21

Clearing the Fulham foreshore

# ANNUAL REVIEW 2016-2017





© John Sutton

Clearing wet wipes at The Big Count, April 2017



© Thames21

Tackling Himalayan Balsam in Lewisham



© John Sutton

Educating children at the Welsh Harp



© Justine Trickett

Enjoying the launch of London Rivers Week



© Thames21

Litter on the foreshore

## OUR PURPOSE

We are the voice for London's waterways. Thousands of Thames21 volunteers protect and champion the capital's water network, which is vital for nature and people in one of the most densely populated cities in Europe. We work hand in hand with communities to deliver tangible, sustainable improvements to rivers, streams, canals and ponds for environmental, social and community benefit.

# CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

Thames21 has embraced huge opportunities in the last year. We have led as a voice and champion for rivers highlighting the environmental issues they face. We have welcomed chances to work with others to progress innovative solutions for rivers. We have continued to expand our activity in local communities, such as increasing education sessions for schools and groups at the charity's Environmental Education Centre on the Welsh Harp Reservoir.

Across London and across the country, Thames21 has both spearheaded and joined forces with others on calls for action to tackle the escalation in plastic pollution contaminating our rivers and seas.

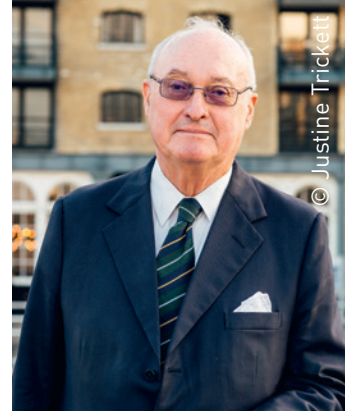
**Thames21 has been a physical presence on river foreshores and banks for 20 years; better than most, the charity can tell the story of plastic litter exploiting rivers as a conduit from the land to the world's oceans. With our feet quite literally in the river, we have told the story - and people are listening.**

We welcomed exciting new initiatives to test and develop new ways of protecting rivers and of increasing public engagement. The INTCATCH project, led by Brunel University, involves Thames21 in a partnership across seven European countries to develop and test the potential to make remote-controlled water quality monitoring boats and decision-making software widely available.

Media agency MEC UK worked with Thames21 to launch the Thames Pulse, an award-winning light installation on Sea Containers House on the Thames in Central London. Its changing light display reflects the variation in water quality daily, in response to data received from Environment Agency probes in the river. Through this imaginative support for the charity's work, many more people are thinking and talking about the health of the River Thames.

The charity's increasing impact and exciting work is due to a committed Board of Trustees, enthusiastic staff team and volunteers, as well as to the funders, supporters and partners who enabled it all to happen, and I take this opportunity to thank them all.

MICHAEL HAMILTON  
Chairman of the Trustees



© Justine Trickett

Michael Hamilton  
Chairman of the Trustees



© Justine Trickett

Debbie Leach  
Chief Executive



# ENGAGING COMMUNITIES AND VOLUNTEERS

Urban rivers are unique in that their very existence is under pressure from the civilisation and development that surrounds them. We believe, however, that connecting people with rivers is the greatest way we can improve both the well-being of urban communities and the well-being of urban rivers. This marriage of people and rivers is at the heart of our mission.

By involving communities, we are enabling people to reconnect to nature. We are fostering a greater sense of well-being and community cohesion, which is also crucial when advocating for social and political change.

Removing litter from waterways, with the help of volunteers, has been a key part of our work for 20 years. Now, we also give communities an increasing number of opportunities to carry out research, environmental enhancements, to be trained as clean-up leaders and to form or be part of groups which look after specific areas of London, to improve waterways for the benefit of wildlife and enjoyment of people.

**34,924** people were directly engaged in Thames21 programmes and activities on rivers and in communities.

**7,942** volunteers cleaned rivers and made other environmental improvements at **522** events.

**89** river improvement events were carried out by Thames21's Badged Groups - trained, independent local networks.



Assessing the damage caused by wet wipes, at the Big Count, April 2017

## MOTIVATING COMMUNITIES

Thames21 is working closely with Harrow Council to identify opportunities to restore Stanmore Marsh, Queensbury Park and Headstone Manor for people and wildlife as well as to reduce flooding.

Engaging people to care about two sites in Harrow - Stanmore Marsh and Queensbury Park - was a big part of the year.

We set up new volunteer groups at both locations to help care for the sites for the longer-term, then trained people with the skills to look after them.

The Friends of Queensbury Park now hosts regular meetings and practical events and a Stanmore Marsh steering group has been established.

Stanmore Marsh, once dried up and neglected, was regenerated in a partnership project between Thames21, Harrow Council, Thames Water and the Greater London Authority.

It created new footpaths and wetland which now provides more than 3,000m<sup>3</sup> of additional flood water storage. The project also restored several hundred metres of smaller watercourses.

We also improved the skills of teachers at schools in the area to use these spaces for outdoor education.

As part of the education work, raingardens are now installed at Whitchurch and St Bernadett's primary schools, where they provide a living resource for teaching about the urban watercycle.

Motivating people to be interested in our work to improve habitats for wildlife was behind the Love the Lea programme's online poll to decide the locations for five new reedbeds on the Lea Navigation. A total of nearly 700 people voted and these reedbeds, planted by our volunteers in the spring and summer, now offer refuge and habitat for wildlife.



Educating children at Stanmore Marsh



Planting bulbs at Stanmore Marsh

## THE WIDER PICTURE

Thames21 aims to continually unite with other organisations and provide opportunities for professionals to hear about the benefits of river restoration and the problems affecting our waterways, in order to improve them for wildlife and as amenity spaces.

By chairing the Catchment Partnerships in London group we contribute to a collaborative dialogue with communities and other NGOs to address the issues faced by rivers. We lead seven of the 12 catchment partnerships across London.

We hosted a conference at City Hall to highlight the benefits of using Sustainable Drainage Systems, also known as Rainscapes, to help reduce the impacts of flood risk.

Addressing the issues surrounding plastic in rivers was the focus of a Marine and Riverine Plastic Pollution Workshop held at the City of London Corporation in March. Jointly hosted with the University of Leeds, it was attended by 34 professionals from a range of academic institutions and NGOs. It was aimed at co-ordinating and facilitating better working relationships between these groups on aquatic litter.



# IMPROVING RIVERS

Rivers are wonderful spaces to retreat to for a slice of tranquillity away from the hustle and bustle of modern living, but many urban rivers are suffering the effects of human development. Rivers in London are subject to extensive landscaping alterations and pollution. By creating new habitats, tackling invasive species and shining a light on water quality, we are helping to place healthy rivers at the heart of community life.

## CREATING NEW WILDLIFE HABITAT

Providing and maintaining habitats where wildlife can thrive is paramount to establishing healthy, interconnected river ecosystems.

The network of rivers across London has huge potential to provide an environment where wildlife can flourish throughout the city.

Planting reedbeds is one way to improve urban rivers. They not only help to clean polluted water but provide essential habitat for a wide variety of nature, such as fish and birds.

A total of 1,000 metres of floating reedbeds have now been planted along the Lea Navigation by our Community Reedbeds programme on the River Lea, with volunteers helping to put in 259 metres during the last year.

Many of those volunteers went on training sessions to learn to look after these floating ecosystems for the longer term.

Reedbeds are also part of the solution to enhance

wildlife spaces as part of the Thamesmead Canal Improvement Project, which drew heavily on volunteers to bring wildlife back to a very urbanised area.

Other remedies included stabilising riverbanks that are eroding by using willow-made borders along the river at Footscray Meadows and planting trees in the Thamesmead's parks and streets. All this was on top of our core activities of leading regular clean ups to remove rubbish and invasive species.

Volunteers on the Fray's River and River Pinn undertook plant and land management at two wildlife ponds in Hillingdon, installing monitoring boards at special areas where particular wildlife can flourish, at Philpots Farm and Hillingdon House Farm.

At Little Britain Lakes, silted river gravels were restored along 250 metres of river to help fisheries, while rubbish and Floating Pennywort was tackled at Fasnidge Park, Rockingham Rec and Ickenham Park Wood.



Volunteers plant the reedbeds



Installing the reedbeds

## CLEARING PLASTICS AND OTHER LITTER; TACKLING INVASIVE SPECIES



Working with the PLA to clean the Thames foreshore

By enabling volunteers to come together and care about their local waterway, we are fostering community cohesion and taking big strides towards lasting environmental change for London's rivers.

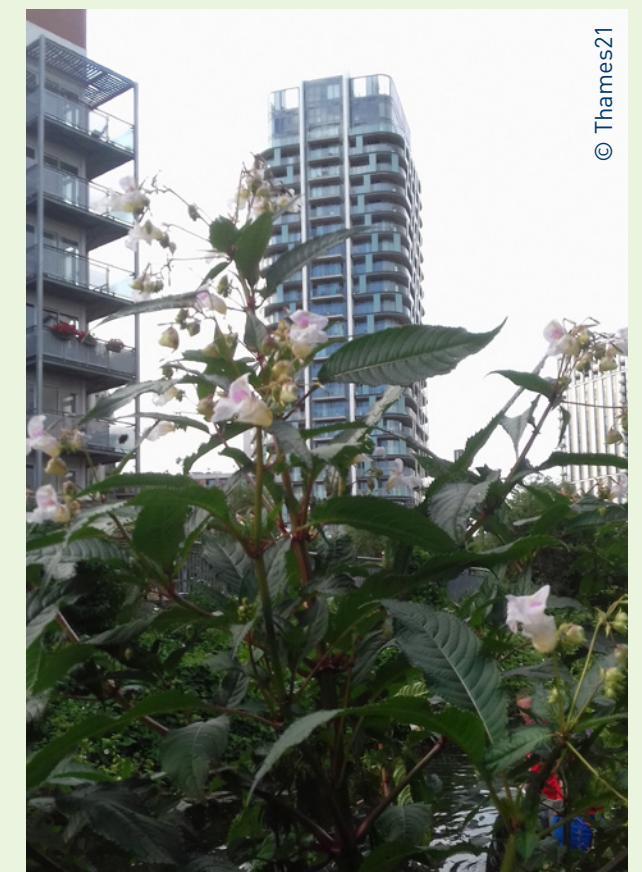
We worked with the Port of London Authority's Driftwood team to remove 221 tonnes of debris from the tidal Thames foreshore. Items removed included: 13 tyres, 81 shopping trolleys, 2 cars, 2 motorbikes, 6 wrecks, 6 scooters, 44 large pieces of wood and 2 cycle hire bikes. The volume of rubbish we cleaned from rivers and waterways across London came to a total of 216 cubic metres, equivalent to 9,815 bin-liners.

Meanwhile we focused on removing invasive species from our waterways to ensure more natural and diverse range of vegetation can flourish as part of a healthy river ecosystem.

Volunteers help us tackle the spread of such plants and are a vital part of our work as we educate people about the benefits of removing non-native plant species.

In the annual 3 Rivers Clean Up on the Ravensbourne Catchment, 3,500 Himalayan balsam and 71 giant hogweed plants were removed in this intensive three-week blitz on the rivers Ravensbourne, Pool and Quaggy. This summer partnership project is organised by Thames21 with community groups, schools and local authorities across Lewisham, Greenwich and Bromley.

Elsewhere, a 1.5km stretch of the River Pinn was cleared of Himalayan balsam in just one day, thanks to community volunteers. National Invasive Species Week was used as an opportunity to educate the public about these plants species, using recognition cards.



Tackling Himalayan Balsam in Lewisham

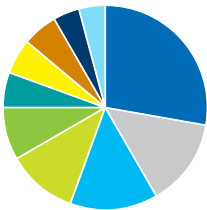


# UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE THROUGH RESEARCH

While we know rivers are suffering from pollution, gathering evidence of the exact problems they face is crucial in defining the next steps to take in order to bring about healthy and abundant ecosystems for our rivers and the wildlife they support.

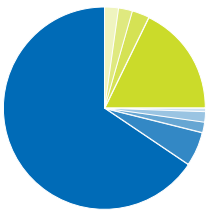
We engage volunteers with our data collection from the Thames and its tributaries. Through our Thames River Watch project, we offer Londoners the chance to really understand the type of litter impacting the Thames as citizen scientists and document the scale of the problem.

Thanks to surveys conducted by 123 citizen scientists, we now have quantifiable data that shows a very worrying picture of the state of the Thames. Food-related packaging is the most common litter type found on London's foreshores, representing almost two out of three identifiable pieces of rubbish, while analysis of single-use plastic bottles washed up in the river shows that almost half (47%) had been bought for still water.



**The top 10 types of litter quantified by Thames River Watch are:**

Food wrappers <b>20%</b>	Polystyrene cups <b>4%</b>
Cotton bud sticks <b>10%</b>	Plastic cups <b>4%</b>
Drink bottles & their tops <b>10%</b>	Unidentified synthetic foam <b>4%</b>
Takeaway containers <b>8%</b>	Cutlery/straws/lollipop sticks/stirrers <b>3%</b>
Unidentified plastic greater than 2.5cm <b>6%</b>	Wet wipes <b>3%</b>



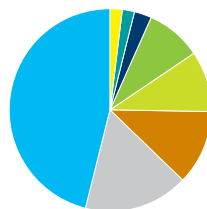
**Products represent only 25% of litter, with the remainder all packaging**

## PACKAGING

Food related <b>65%</b>
Non Food related <b>6%</b>
Smoking related <b>2%</b>
Domestic <b>2%</b>
Other <b>1%</b>

## PRODUCTS

Toiletries/medical <b>18%</b>
Domestic <b>3%</b>
Smoking related <b>2%</b>
Construction related <b>2%</b>



**Bottle types found in the Thames (as % of total)**

Still water <b>47%</b>	Fruit drinks <b>8%</b>
Unknown <b>17%</b>	Flavoured water <b>3%</b>
Cola <b>12%</b>	Sparkling water <b>2%</b>
Sports drink <b>10%</b>	Lemonade <b>2%</b>

## UPSCALING OUR RESEARCH FOR THE BENEFIT OF RIVERS

We laid the groundwork for a number of innovative water quality and management projects. These include new wetlands; a project called INTCATCH that will mix technology with boats to improve water quality monitoring; and a project to empower communities with software usually reserved for experts to help improve water quality. A Natural Flood Management programme, to divert flood water away from properties, was also prepared for the Salmon's Brook.



Preparing INTCATCH boats

## COUNTING THE COST AT OUR BIG COUNTS

Twice a year, our Thames River Watch project organises count events to document the volume of plastic bottles and wet wipes blighting the River Thames. Attracting lots of media and public attention, The Big Counts are ideal for raising the red flag on how modern day life is affecting our most precious natural resource, right in the heart of London.

More than 2,500 single-use plastic bottles were recorded at 11 'floating litter hotspot' sites on the Thames foreshore on just one day in September 2016. The event helped highlight the importance of choosing reusable bottles as part of the #OneLess

campaign in conjunction with the Zoological Society of London.

Just six months later in April 2017, in under three hours more than 4,500 wet wipes were found on a patch of the Thames foreshore no bigger than 154 metres square. The number found was unprecedented in the charity's history. This shocking revelation shines a spotlight on the UK's reliance on wet wipes but lack of awareness that they contain plastic which cannot break down. It also helped to educate people on how wet wipes enter our river via the sewage system and encouraged people to cease flushing them.



The Big Bottle Count



The Big Wet Wipe Count

## TACKLING WATER QUALITY POLLUTION

Identifying, monitoring and analysing water quality is vital to combatting pollution caused by road run-off, misconnected drains and other issues, to improve the health of rivers. Five samples were taken and analysed once a month for a year from Sustainable Drainage Systems, known as SuDS, which we created at Firs Farm and Pymmes Park.

The results, published in a joint report: Improvements in water quality by integrated constructed wetlands co-authored by Thames21 and the London Borough of Enfield, highlight how effective SuDS can be at cutting pollution in our waterways.

Other techniques to determine the health of rivers include riverfly monitoring. On the River Ravensbourne, 300 people collected, identified and counted macroinvertebrates, which are sensitive to pollution and therefore help indicate the health of the water.



Riverfly monitoring





# TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Inspiring people to look after waterways starts early and it starts with education. By empowering youngsters with knowledge of the problems rivers face and how they can be part of the solution, we are contributing to a sustainable future for all rivers.

Meanwhile, adults are inspired to reconnect with rivers by getting involved with our training programme that will equip them with the skills they need to improve their local waterway.

**19,361** people took part in our education and training programmes.

## EMPOWERING PEOPLE THROUGH TRAINING

Making a lasting difference to the wildlife and habitats in waterways across London is increasingly important to our volunteers and for our mission. Our accredited training programme gives them the perfect opportunity to train to lead their own activities and make lasting change in their communities.

While the two-day Leading a Waterway Clean-up course continues to form the basis of our training programme, it has developed in several ways. The course, which leads to a recognised qualification, now offers volunteers other modules, such as how to tackle non-native invasive species which harm riverbanks and vegetation management, which gives people the chance to improve the diversity of wildlife and make positive improvements to habits.

During the year, we trained 371 volunteers, creating a potential army of new leaders determined to clear up or improve habitats in their local stretch of river. Modules have become tailored to local needs and integrated into Thames21 projects to secure the programme's long-term future.



Removing invasive species safely



Teaching others to lead their own clean-ups



Investigating the pond at the Welsh Harp Centre

## OUTDOOR LEARNING

With education a vital tool to inspiring change, our Welsh Harp Environmental Education Centre, in Brent, provides schools the chance to give pupils a hands-on experience of the wild side.

71 schools or home education groups booked our curriculum-linked sessions, meaning 5,736 of our youngest citizens were taught that water is vital to all life and educated about how to look after it as well as about the other habitats in the 5.5 hectares of woodlands.

Many repeat bookings show that our programme has become well established since we took over running the centre in January 2016.

Out of term time, the centre runs holiday activities, giving families and other groups the chance to learn how to explore and care for wildlife, too.

The centre also offers venue hire and community volunteering activities, with a 'Friends of' group meeting monthly, enabling us to complete key site maintenance and woodland enhancements, as we improve the site for education.



Exploring science in a lesson at the Welsh Harp Centre

## JUNIOR RIVER CHAMPIONS

Children in our urbanised capital are increasingly disconnected from nature. The London City Airport Project, delivered by our Thames River Watch programme, taught 491 primary school pupils in East London about the problems faced by our iconic river. Through a combination of a classroom sessions, a visit to the tidal Thames foreshore and a supported task, pupils were inspired to become Junior River Champions and empowered to become environmentally responsible citizens now and in the future.





# COMMUNICATING OUR MESSAGE

Quadrupling our media mentions in 2017 is a real coup for Thames21 as we increasingly seek to be recognised as a thought-leader in the environmental field.

We uncover and tell the important stories that matter for the good of our rivers and, thanks to the increasingly focused media gaze on environmental issues, we are effectively delivering messages that educate the public on matters affecting the health of our waterways, inspire behaviour change and build awareness of Thames21 and what we stand for.

We amplified our message through traditional media channels but also told our stories through digital outlets such as Facebook, Twitter and our website. Engaging with our online community is an ever-pressing priority and is the reason behind upgrading our website so that it is secure and mobile friendly.

**75.2 million** – the number of people we shared our message with via the press in 2017 equivalent to £1.2 million in free advertising.

## INSPIRING A LOVE OF LONDON'S RIVERS

London Rivers Week is now an established mainstay of the capital's calendar with unique events enticing people to connect with their local river and acting as a platform to discuss the challenges urban rivers face.

In just its second year, the awareness week upped its game by theming the week 'Health & Well-Being' and putting on events such as Nordic walking, yoga and river wading.

Following a successful pilot, the 2017 awareness week encouraged more than 860 people to explore the rivers on their doorstep while others shared their 'Tales from the Riverbank' about wildlife, history and their connection with rivers. It gained a staggering media reach of 9.6 million and singer Cerys Matthews dedicated an entire show to the campaign on BBC6 Music.

London Rivers Week, a collaborative effort by Thames21 and the London Rivers Restoration Group, also showcases many river restoration initiatives that are improving access to and the biodiversity of London's rivers. To educate developers of the benefits of including river restorations in their projects, a seminar titled Why Restore Rivers was held at City Hall and hosted by Chair of the London Assembly's Environment Committee, Leonie Cooper.



Launching London Rivers Week at Ladywell Fields

## AMPLIFYING OUR VOICE

We were proudly interviewed for **Sky's Ocean Rescue Campaign** at Hammersmith Bridge, to talk about the plight of plastic in London's rivers and how it ends up in the world's seas. The interview with Chief Executive Debbie Leach was featured in the broadcast company's film A Plastic Tide, aired in January 2017. We worked closely with Sky during their year-long journalistic campaign and continue to do so now that the campaign has been extended.

We also contributed to the Daily Mail's **Take Back Your Bottles** Campaign, which added fuel to the national debate for a Deposit Return Scheme. Thames21 released its official position supporting the case for a **Deposit Return Scheme** after a review of Thames River Watch data, which shows

that 10% of items found on the foreshore are single-use plastic bottles.

We continued to partner with the Port of London Authority, the Thames Litter Forum and Tideway on the **Cleaner Thames Campaign** to help turn the tide on rubbish entering the Thames.

We also collaborated with marketing agency MEC UK to highlight the health of the River Thames and urge people to volunteer with us through an art project on Sea Containers House on the South Bank. The **Thames Pulse** light displays show, on a daily basis, whether the health of the river is declining or improving compared to the previous day's reading.



Captivating Sky TV's reporter for their Ocean Rescue Campaign

## CAMPAIGNING FOR SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

Championing the health of London's rivers is integral to Thames21's core mission and we do this by leading on and lending support to a number of campaigns. We are hugely encouraged by environmental campaigns launched by media outlets during this period, as this not only strengthens and aligns our voices, but fosters broader discussion and prioritises impactful solutions to be found and enforced.

## INTEREST IN OUR ONLINE ACTIVITIES CONTINUED TO GROW:



Website visitor numbers for 2016-17 were **87,022**, an increase from **58,850** the previous year.



Twitter followers rose to **6,685** (from **5,339**)

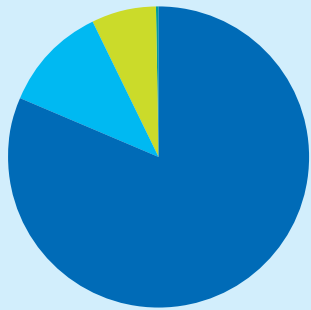


Facebook followers rose to **2,583** (from **2,025**).



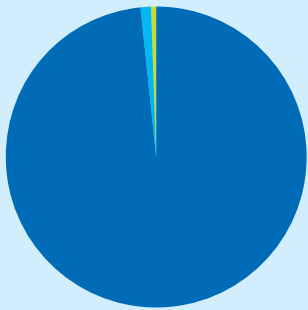
# OUR INCOME AND WHERE WE SPENT IT

## INCOME £2,311,209



Grants restricted	£1,737,806
Donations	£358,714
Gifts in kind	£213,031
Investment Income	£1,658
<b>Total</b>	<b>£2,311,209</b>

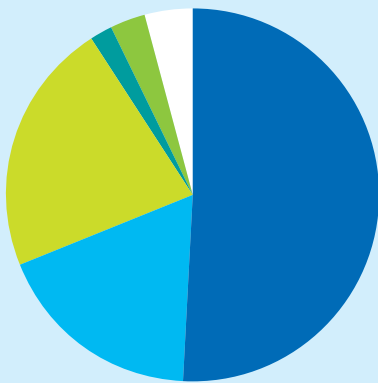
## EXPENDITURE £2,294,697



Charitable Activities	£2,253,611
Generating voluntary income	£25,721
Governance	£15,365
<b>Total</b>	<b>£2,294,697</b>

## INCOME % FOR THE YEAR BY SOURCE

Companies	51%
Trusts	18%
Public (including statutory)	22%
Europe	2%
Education services (WHEEC)	3%
Sundry donations & Membership	4%



Enabling others to fulfil their outdoor campaigns

## WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR FUNDERS (OVER £1,000)

- Accenture
- Appnexus INC
- Bana London branch
- Bank Of England
- Bloomberg
- Carlson Wagonlit
- City Bridge Trust
- Clifford Chance
- CLSH Management
- Cory Environmental Trust
- CS Securities
- Dong Energy
- Environment Agency
- EU Horizon 2020
- Euston Film Productions Ltd
- Firmenich Uk
- Flo JV
- Forsters
- G AND IBA Rtn Funds
- Glaxo Smithkline (GSK)
- Goldman Sachs
- Greater London Authority
- Groundwork London
- Groundwork UK
- Harney & Sons
- Heathrow Community Fund
- Hogan Lovells
- HSBC
- Intuit Ltd
- John Lyons Charity
- London Borough of Lewisham
- London Borough of Enfield
- London Borough of Waltham Forest
- London Borough of Bexley
- London Borough of Hounslow
- London Borough of Wandsworth
- London Legacy Development Corporation (LLDC)
- London Aquarium
- London City Airport
- Merrill Lynch Euro
- Mosaic
- Northern Trust
- Oaktree Capital Management
- Oliver Goldsmith primary school
- Helen and Geoffrey De Freitas Trust
- Rope Ltd
- Royal Bank of Canada
- Telepath
- Thames Rivers Trust
- Thames Water
- Thames Water Community Investment Fund
- Thames Water Utilities
- The Blackstone Group
- The Financial Conduct Authority
- The Ocean Conservancy
- Tideway
- Toshiba Europe
- Tower Hill Trust
- Trainline.com
- Treasury Wine Estates
- Vmware UK
- WBC Creditors
- Wild Trout Trust
- William Morris
- Workday
- Zoological Society of London

## TRUSTEES

- Michael Hamilton (Chairman)
- Howard Davison
- Alistair Gale
- Charles Green
- Celia Hensman MBE
- Richard McIlwain
- Louise Moore
- Robin Mortimer
- Nicholas Tennant
- Peter Gerstrom
- Martin Baggs
- Ann Pembroke
- John Barker
- Francis Carnworth
- Company Secretary Anthony Denton

The charity changed its accounting year end from March 31, to June 30, meaning that the statistics in this annual review account for 15 months against the previous 12.



# ENRICH YOUR TEAM



We work hand-in-hand with companies to bring about lasting and meaningful change for urban rivers. Our nature-led Corporate Enrichment Days get teams outside, working together for the good of our waterways. Our team building experiences enable employees to form lasting connections with their colleagues and reconnect with themselves too.

In the last financial year, as many as 2,046 people took part in nearly 90 corporate enrichment activities. From litter collection to vegetation management and river enhancement work, more than 50 companies championed a sustainable future for London's rivers. Funds raised contribute to our community work meaning a company partaking in our Corporate Enrichment Days continues to make a difference well-beyond the time they spend with us.

## INVEST IN YOUR TEAM

Book a tailored Corporate Enrichment Day with us by contacting our Fundraising Manager on **07734 871 731** or **frances.thurgood@thames21.org.uk**

More information about our Corporate Programme is available at **[thames21.org.uk/corporate-volunteering](https://thames21.org.uk/corporate-volunteering)**

## NOT SURE ABOUT THE HANDS-ON APPROACH?

Please get in touch to discover the type of projects you can support with a financial contribution or gift in kind.



Helping companies make a difference in the environment

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