

The Case for Additional Investment to Improve and Prevent the Deterioration of the WFD status of London's Rivers

Working on London's rivers is uniquely challenging due to the scale and complexity of the capital's urban environment. With over 8.6 million people, London has the largest population of any city in the EU. The capital's 13,600 million km of roads support over 26 million road trips daily leading to significant pressures from urban diffuse pollution. In a growing city, set to be home to 10 million people by 2030, with a changing climate in the most water stressed part of the country, a catchment based approach must be taken at an appropriate scale to secure a resilient future for London's rivers.

The Catchment Partnerships in London (CPiL) group consists of representatives from a range of 'Operational Catchment' Partnerships on rivers comprising the London 'Management Catchment' (Lower Lee, Crane, Hogsmill, Wandle, Beverley Brook, Ravensbourne, Brent and Marsh Dykes) as well as other rivers with a part of their catchment in the Greater London conurbation, e.g. the Tidal Thames, Cray, Roding and Ingreborne.

The Operational Catchment scale is an appropriate one to deal with the complex issues at hand and the many partners involved. However, there are times when these catchments may encounter similar issues and so the CPiL group, which meets quarterly, brings members of the Operational Catchment Partnerships together to share knowledge and expertise, identify common challenges and work towards common solutions. In addition it facilitates a joined up approach to tackle London-wide issues and provide a mechanism for organisations operating at a London-wide, or broader, scale to engage with catchment issues.

The CPiL group supports the current approach taken by Defra and the Environment Agency, that catchments in London are administered at an 'Operational Catchment' scale (effectively sub-catchments) and not amalgamated into a single 'Management Catchment'. The group would like to highlight the need for a higher level of funding to support catchment partnership and restoration activities due to the unique circumstances of the London area. However, requirement for extra funding does not imply that it will become disproportionately expensive to administer sub-catchment based partnerships and to implement measures to improve or prevent deterioration of the WFD status of London's rivers; cost effective measures have already been demonstrated.

The scale and complexity of the issues which need to be addressed to improve, or prevent the deterioration of, the WFD status of London rivers, means that implementing appropriate measures on a single London waterbody can be as, or more, complicated than dealing with an entire rural catchment. Not only is there a high population and numerous other interested parties who need to be involved, but there is also a complex planning and administrative system within which WFD plans and projects must sit.

The extreme complexity of riparian ownership (involving potentially thousands of individual properties on a single catchment with riparian rights or ownership) means that even securing permissions for projects can be both disproportionately complex and expensive. London's rivers also provide a resource for multiple user interests which adds to the complexity, and any project being

developed must consult with and consider the needs of a wide range of user groups. Once permissions have been granted actual project delivery can be extremely complicated with associated elevated costs, due to the complexity of the urban infrastructure, e.g. an exceptionally high density of the utility network which is often inadequately mapped. Despite these constraints, progress has been made on tackling complex issues, including urban diffuse pollution, via the application of innovative techniques and approaches.

The high population densities of even small London catchments mean that some very significant socioeconomic benefits can be realised by the enhancement of relatively small water bodies. These benefits are derived from the very high use rate (e.g. through local parks and informal recreation) associated with rivers frequently flowing through public open space. In addition, they are often biodiversity hotspots and corridors for species conduit and a number are also chalk streams, of international conservation significance.

In summary, the complexity of dealing with the urban situation combined with the high population and numbers of interested parties involved, together with the significant socioeconomic benefits derived mean that London's rivers are worthy of additional investment.

Bella Davies (SERT) on behalf of the Catchment Partnerships in London, 20/03/15.