

THAMES21's COP26 MANIFESTO

Rivers are crucial in our response to the climate emergency. They are a vital tool if we are to tackle more extreme, accelerated and intense periods of drought and flood and manage their impact on people and wildlife.

Rivers are stark indicators of the impacts of climate change. The changing state of our rivers directly, visually and conclusively provides evidence of the climate emergency.

Thames21 is an environmental NGO for rivers that develops and delivers direct, practical action at local level in London and in the Thames River Basin whilst collaborating and sharing experiences across much wider geographies. Thames21 is committed to COP26 goals.

OUR PLEDGES

We will highlight the clear evidence of climate change in our rivers to push for faster action towards global net zero emissions by mid-century

In the UK we see increased winter flooding and summer flash floods. Usual summer flows are vanishing or dwindling through drought. Rising sea levels are increasing risk of storm surges.

Thames21's professional experts and committed volunteers are an ongoing presence on the network of rivers in urban communities and in more rural landscapes whilst delivering practical initiatives that improve and protect rivers. Thames21 works directly, regularly and over time along the River Thames and its tributaries and we can substantiate that:-

- river wildlife is being destroyed both by increasingly concentrated pollution as water levels reduce and water flows slow during drought and by additional prolonged pollution from sewage overflows during intense rainfall;
- communities are at growing risk of flood as modifications to rivers mean their natural capacity to process storm water after heavy rainfall is reduced;
- chalk streams are drying up and disappearing during increasing periods of drought; low flows in the upper River Thames are increasingly apparent;
- plastic waste is accumulating in our rivers, mostly created directly from fossil fuels and frequently discarded after single use to contaminate the natural environment.



We will help to protect communities, natural habitats, wildlife and ecosystems and increase their resilience

Thames21 will educate, support and empower people and communities to act, advocate for and participate in decision-making around their rivers and river landscapes.

Thames21 will step up delivery of nature-based solutions to protect communities, wildlife and the environment, including integrated constructed wetlands and natural flood management schemes. We will deliver river restoration projects and improve the connection between rivers and their natural landscapes such as through tree planting programmes. We will develop robust science-based evidence around the issues and the effectiveness of solutions.

We will work to increase collaboration between governments, businesses and communities

Thames21 will work in close partnership with NGOs, government, the private sector, communities and individuals to tackle the results of a changing climate which we can see every day on the network of rivers throughout the natural environment. Thames21 believes that collaborative working is key to achieving progress at scale. We are delivering a catchment-based approach through river catchment action plans and project partnerships. We will build on this to increase and strengthen collaborative action, taking a catchment-wide, inclusive approach to finding innovative solutions.

As a trusted not-for-profit partner that works across sectors Thames21 will contribute actively to brokering effective, practical partnerships to achieve shared goals.

Thames21 will help governments and businesses to deliver their net-zero plans.

We will build on our expertise to enable financial investment to be translated effectively into practical action

Thames21 will tailor growth and development to deliver practical solutions in river catchments that enable the most effective and efficient use of finance specifically towards increasing resilience to the climate emergency.

We will reduce our own emissions

Thames21 will track and report emissions created as a result of our own activities and take steps to reduce them, for example by stream-lining systems of transporting river improvement equipment to multiple sites. We will carefully audit water usage in our activities and identify where it can be reduced.



OUR CALL TO ACTION

Rivers are crucial to delivering COP26 goals of protecting communities, natural habitats, wildlife and ecosystems. Despite this, action on rivers is currently too fragmented, disconnected and small scale across the globe to deliver success. Thames21 is calling for:-

- Swift, decisive and global action on rivers should be agreed as a priority so they can better absorb the impacts of climate change.
- Effective mechanisms must be put in place to achieve joined-up, information-sharing and international collaborations that tackle global heating impacts through rivers.
- A practical system of 'river twinning' could be established to share best practice and facilitate close partnership working across the globe.
- Finance and incentivising mechanisms must be upscaled to enable cross sectoral partnerships required to achieve action on rivers at the necessary scale.
- Communities affected by the climate emergency must be engaged into the mitigation and adaptation decision-making process, particularly in marginalised communities.