



THAMES21

Five Year Plan

2023 - 2028



Foreword

A healthy and clean river is joyous and energising, it gladdens our hearts and restores our souls. It is abundant with nature and flourishing wildlife. It empowers, enables and protects human activity and achievement. A healthy river builds community. Urban and rural populations consistently gather, grow and prosper around a healthy river.

This is our vision of how every river should be. But most of our rivers are not healthy. At the present time, they are not able to protect us and the natural environment from the climate emergency that is now upon us. Thames21 has therefore developed a new Five Year Plan. We are proposing an ambitious programme to our partners, funders and communities to help put things right for rivers - to provide genuine solutions that make a tangible, measurable difference to the critical challenges that affect them.

London will be the continuing focus of Thames21's most intense activity, however we will also work increasingly across the network of rivers and communities in the Thames Basin wherever we are needed. We will share experience and learn from other groups and organisations both nationally and internationally.

From Thames21's earliest beginnings, practical action has been at the heart of our charity. In the early 1990s, it was rubbish accumulating in the tidal Thames that caused public concern. Volunteers tried to clear it away, but the scale of the challenge was huge. Keep Britain Tidy, with funding from the newly-formed Environment Agency, tested out a strategic approach to support and upscale community response. The result was Thamesclean - a partnership that brought together community energies with the

practical involvement and support of the Port of London Authority, Keep Britain Tidy, the Environment Agency, Thames Water and the City of London Corporation. Community volunteers worked hand in hand with the PLA's Driftwood team to clean up the Thames foreshore. It was hugely successful, river clean-up activity spread onto the tributaries that flow into the Thames. Today, thanks to many years of volunteer clean-ups, the larger waste items that had littered the Thames foreshore are long gone. However, the river network is inundated by single-use plastic litter.

Working closely and directly on rivers made other serious issues all too apparent. It revealed an urbanised, channelised and degraded river landscape across London with growing pollution issues that was in many cases devoid of wildlife, community or economic value. It was clear that robust action would be crucial to create a healthy, sustainable relationship between rivers and human activity and development.

Thamesclean developed in response. It became Thames21. The new name reflected Agenda 21, the blueprint for sustainable development that had emerged from the UN's Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Today, Agenda 21 has evolved to become the UN's Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs). Thames21 has strengthened its commitment to deliver on them for rivers. We have developed our technical expertise and increasingly sophisticated partnership working with communities and stakeholders across public, private and third sectors. Thames21 is now a multi-faceted environmental NGO for rivers with innovative programmes across the Thames River Basin from Oxford in the west to Canvey Island in the east. We are driven not just by the seriousness of the challenges that rivers face, but by an energy and optimism that solutions can be found and delivered.

These solutions are now pressing. We must all act now, and act together, to protect our communities, wildlife and key economic centre from the impacts of the climate emergency. We will do this through our rivers.



Debbie Leach,
CEO of Thames21

www.thames21.org.uk

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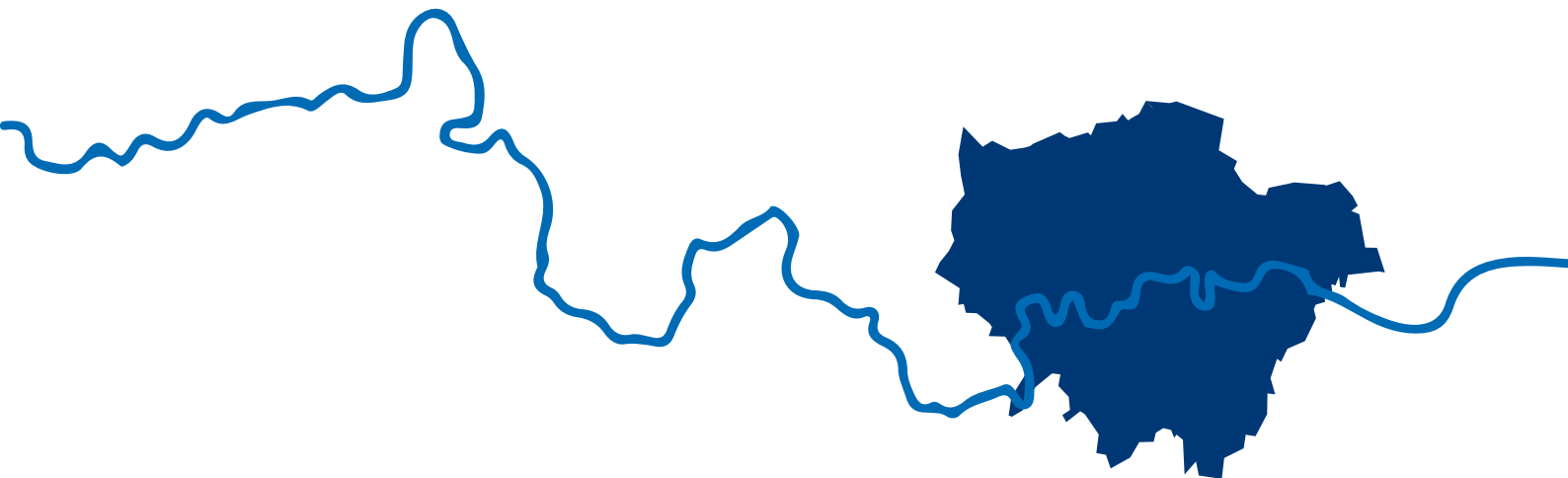
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The Next Five Years

For more than 20 years, environmental charity Thames21 has been committed to transforming the River Thames and its tributaries. Today, the work has never been more important.

The climate emergency will affect all of us and tackling its impact necessitates a new and bigger focus on our river networks. Thames21 plans to ramp up our work in response. Over the next five years, our charity will deliver increasingly resilient and healthy rivers and landscapes that are closer to their natural state with an abundance of fish and wildlife, empowering and working with people to bring multiple benefits to the natural environment, to individuals and to our communities.

Thames 21's Vision of a Healthy River

Our vision begins with the River Thames and its tributaries and the communities that use and benefit from them. We have a clear vision of a healthy and sustainable river which:-

- Is resilient to the effects of climate change at catchment, river and community levels
- Has clean water, sustainable flows and plentiful wildlife
- Is connected to an ecologically healthy landscape
- Is well understood by the people it supports and championed and protected by communities
- Contributes positively to our economy through ecosystems services and natural capital.

This vision of a healthy river and the work that we do are closely aligned to several of the wider aspects of sustainability. Thames21 supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 and sets out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere. We are committed to helping to deliver these SDGs and the ones we focus on include:



Our Core Values

Thames21's core values below make up the foundation of our culture and guide our colleagues' interactions – with our river stakeholders, partners, communities and with each other.

- Achievement
- Collaboration
- Fairness
- Passion
- Innovation

Thames21 believes that partnership working across all sectors is key to achieving transformative change at the scale and ambition that is required to meet this vision. To meet Thames21's vision of a healthy river we have set three priority areas for the next five years.



Key Priority Areas

Our areas of focus are intrinsically interlinked and interdependent. They work together to achieve our vision.

Priority Focus One: **Tackling the Climate Emergency through creating climate-resilient rivers and communities**

Rivers are on the frontlines of climate change – the changing state of our rivers directly, visually and compellingly provides evidence of the climate emergency.

Climate change is making extreme weather more frequent. The increased frequency of severe weather events such as heat waves, droughts and prolonged or heavy rainfall make London and the communities of the Thames Basin more vulnerable.

These trends are already well under way. Water temperature and sea levels continue to rise above historic baselines in the Tidal Thames.

More frequent droughts and shifting patterns of rainfall are reducing flows in rivers and aquifer levels, damaging river health. There is also less water in our rivers and aquifers to meet the current demand from our taps, let alone sustain growing populations in south-

east England. In contrast, more intense rainfall will increase the risk of flash floods and overflowing rivers, which will devastate local communities.

A healthy river catchment will help build resilience to climate change across the whole landscape.

Thames21 tackles the effects of the climate emergency head-on, working with partners and communities to adapt our rivers, catchments and communities to be more resilient.

The scale of the challenges facing the Thames Basin may seem daunting, but by connecting the work of statutory organisations, the third sector, and businesses and communities to confront the climate emergency together, we can adapt our catchments and empower society to take action on the ground and become more resilient.

How We Will Achieve This

Thames21 will therefore seek effective, innovative approaches and work collaboratively to: -

- Gather evidence and increase understanding of the impacts of climate change on rivers to drive resilience, mitigation and adaptation strategies.
- Develop and deliver nature-based strategies and solutions that help tackle these impacts for healthy, resilient rivers and catchments.
- Influence flood risk programmes to increase collaboration with communities and deliver multiple benefits for rivers.
- Respond to increasing water usage by helping communities to reduce water consumption and work with partners to reduce abstraction* to ensure healthy flows are restored in rivers.
- Seek opportunities to integrate carbon sequestration in our work, helping to slow and reduce climate change and deliver multiple benefits.
- Inspire people to become climate and environmental champions for rivers through our educational and engagement programmes and empower them to act.
- Set 2028 targets to reduce Thames21's carbon and ecological footprint, including our use of water.
- Work with others to share best practice and increase action to create resilient rivers and communities.



Water abstraction:

Water abstraction is the process of extracting water from any natural source, such as a lake, aquifer or river. It is carried out to deliver our water supply.

The Nature Emergency

The steady decline of nature is inextricably linked to the climate emergency. Climate change is driving nature's decline. We are dependent on the natural world, but we are currently damaging it so profoundly that many of its natural systems are now on the verge of breakdown. We cannot solve the climate crisis without tackling the nature crisis – nature's recovery is vital for tackling climate change. Thriving habitats can safely lock up vast amounts of carbon, while providing other vital benefits that help us adapt, such as flood prevention, healthy river flows, clean water, improved biodiversity and health and wellbeing.

Priority Focus Two: Tackling the Nature Emergency by supporting healthy, varied wildlife populations in rivers and catchments

We are facing a nature crisis both in the UK and globally. Research has revealed that the UK has lost more than half of its biodiversity since the Industrial Revolution and is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world¹. Halting the decline of biodiversity is pivotal to addressing climate change, which is why the Nature Emergency is one of our key priority areas of focus.

Rivers are crucial players in the natural world. They are critical to life on earth - they are powerful agents for sustaining and restoring wildlife and communities, ensuring that each can thrive. However, freshwater ecosystems are the fastest declining habitat on earth². Internationally, freshwater species have declined by 88% since 1970³. In UK waters, even though the Thames has made a remarkable recovery since it was declared biologically dead in the 1950s, its ecosystem is under threat from pollution such as sewage effluent and river obstacles.⁴ The European eel, for example, remains critically endangered and those eels that migrate up our rivers are currently blighted by a range of in-river obstacles, such as weirs, that prevent them from dispersing further upstream⁵.

In some of the areas where Thames21 works, rivers are among the most degraded in the country. This degradation is caused by sewage, urban, industrial, and agricultural pollution, physical modification to river habitats, water abstraction, spread of invasive species and land use changes in river catchments. Tackling these issues means these rivers also have the greatest potential for change and ecological recovery.

Thames21 works across the landscape to improve river health. The current outlook is that, despite some success stories, the health of the UK's rivers within their landscapes is declining.



1 <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/data/biodiversity-indicators.html>
 2 <https://twin-cities.umn.edu/news-events/biodiversity-survey-reveals-more-species-are-threatened-extinction-previously-thought>
 3 https://www.fint.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/lpr_2020___deep_dive_into_freshwater___spreads_embargo_10_09_20_1.pdf



How We Will Achieve This

Thames21 aims to bring our rivers back to health. We will:

- Work in partnership with all sectors, including the plastic supply chain, to tackle pollution and waste, such as that from sewage systems, and lobby for change.
- Restore and create wetlands that improve water quality and restore biodiversity and benefit communities.
- Remove physical modifications such as concrete channels and weirs to restore our rivers' ecological processes to enable biodiversity and fish populations to recover.
- In partnership, tackle diffuse pollution from cities including road run-off pollution.
- Support communities to evidence damage to river health and use this to drive solutions.
- Engage with communities and our partners to tackle invasive non-native species that damage ecosystems.
- Support farmers and landowners to help them improve their businesses and restore our rivers.
- Enable communities to have greater influence on how their rivers are restored and support local people to take practical action to help make these improvements.
- Restore river habitats, wetlands and surrounding landscapes.
- Expand programmes which contribute to biodiversity net gain and ecological recovery of our rivers.
- Bring awareness to the public of the vital role that rivers play in the natural environment and in providing adequate and clean water for people.

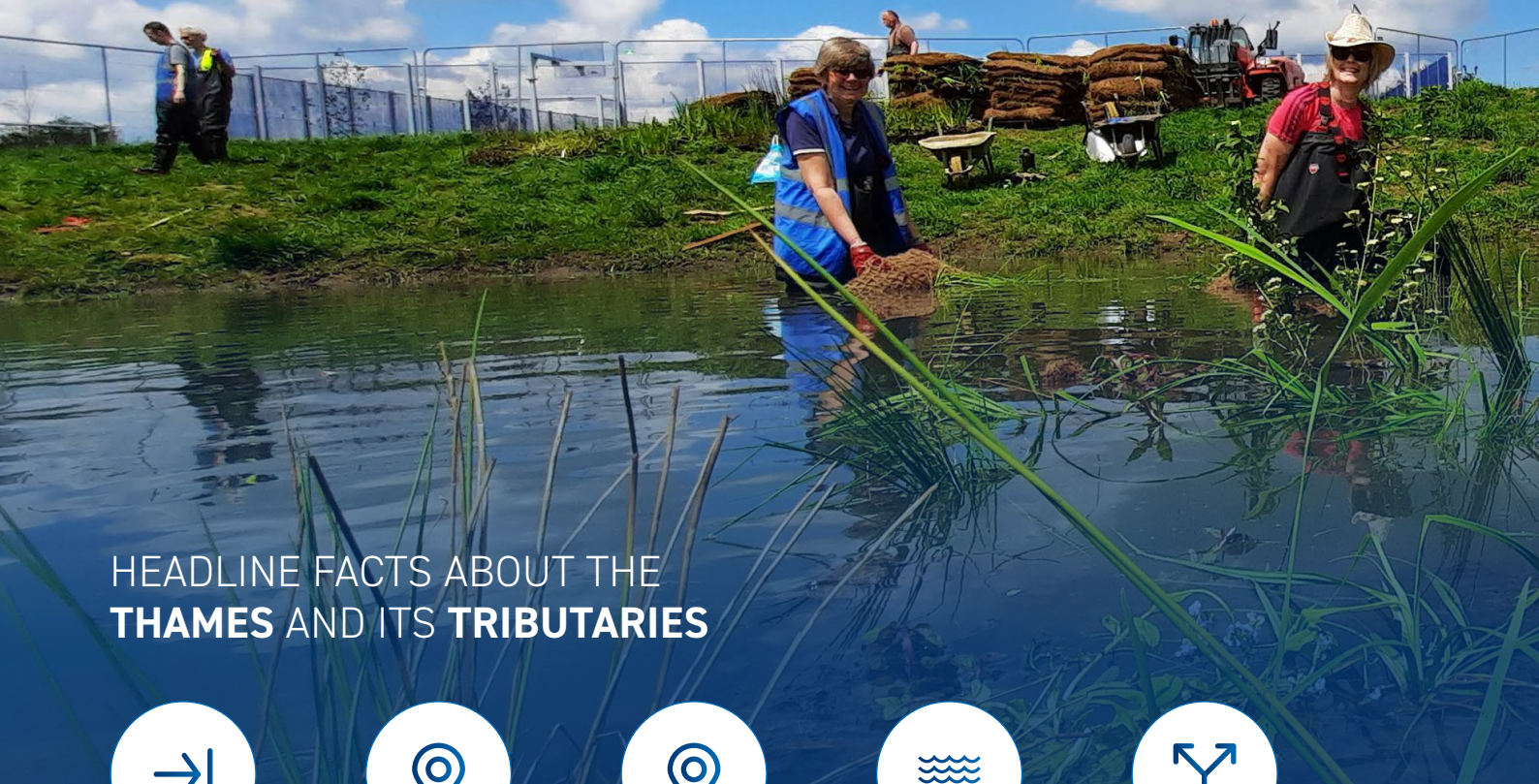
Thames21 will tackle these challenges by using natural processes to drive the restoration of our rivers and catchments. Removing weirs, reconnecting flood plains and appropriately installing natural materials, such as wood in rivers, are examples of action that will help restore natural river functions.

Furthermore, the charity will work with stakeholders, such as farmers and local authorities, to harness the power of nature to restore our catchments and prevent pollution reaching our rivers through the use of techniques such as constructed wetlands, which will also provide a biodiversity boost.

We recognise that Thames21 alone cannot restore the health of the rivers in the Thames Basin. Therefore, we will build more evidence on what is causing damage to river health and use this data to support and work together with other river stakeholders to help tackle the crisis. In addition to this, we will also lobby for change at local, city, Thames Basin and national levels to drive better policy, practice and behaviour.

4 M.J. Whelan, C. Linstead, F. Worrall, S.J. Ormerod, I. Durance, A.C. Johnson, D. Johnson, M. Owen, E. Wiik, N.J.K. Howden, T.P. Burt, A. Boxall, C.D. Brown, D.M. Oliver, D. Tickner, "Is water quality in British rivers "better than at any time since the end of the Industrial Revolution"?, Science of The Total Environment, Volume 843,2022, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2022.157014>.

5 <https://www.thames21.org.uk/2022/03/eel-project-highlights-the-value-of-citizen-science/>



HEADLINE FACTS ABOUT THE THAMES AND ITS TRIBUTARIES



The River Thames is **215 miles long**



Its source is generally recognised to be at **Trewsbury Mead, Gloucestershire** in the Cotswolds.



It ends between **Whitstable, Kent,** and **Foulness Point, Essex.**



The Tidal Thames is home to **115 different species of fish** and **92 species of birds.**



38 main tributaries feed the Thames between its source and Teddington.



Priority Focus Three: **Tackling the Social Emergency by working to improve the health and wellbeing of people and communities**

Modern life has become increasingly stressful. We are disconnected from each other and from the natural world as urban living has grown and populations have become more fluid. Traditional support systems such as extended families have reduced over time.

In crowded cities where access to nature is limited, healthy rivers in healthy landscapes can be essential for healthy people and communities. Research shows that regular access to blue/green spaces reduces stress, maintains health and wellbeing, helps people to be more active and supports children's learning and development. Volunteering reduces social isolation and builds connectedness and confidence. The higher the quality



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

DEBBIE LEACH, CEO OF THAMES21

of the freely accessible natural environment the greater this impact will be. Not only does Thames21 bring the community together to mitigate climate change impact through its activities, but it also works to bring social benefits to communities. Thames21 challenges low levels of public access, appreciation, enjoyment, and stewardship of rivers to create a more resilient city and healthier, more resilient communities.

How We Will Achieve This

Thames21 will work to ensure increasing community benefits from rivers. We will:

- Provide opportunities for active participation that improves physical and mental health in communities.
- Improve free access to good quality rivers for the community where it's most needed.
- Empower communities and support them to advocate and act for their rivers.
- Carry out targeted engagement of communities to ensure project participants are representative of the surrounding area.
- Gather evidence of social impact to inform best practice and influence partners to target their work more effectively.
- Provide training and skills development to encourage local stewardship.
- Support advocacy for more sustainable lifestyles and the connection between healthy rivers and environment for water supply, sustainability, biodiversity, climate and wellbeing.
- Provide formal and informal learning opportunities that increase awareness of the vital role that rivers play in the natural environment and in providing adequate and clean water for people.



What We Need To Do Over The Five Years

Over the next five years, Thames21 is committed to delivering actions that makes tangible, measurable progress towards achieving Thames21's vision of healthy rivers and landscapes. We will work to deliver the results detailed below.

Delivering Results for Healthy Rivers

Below are Thames21's objectives towards improved river health, including rivers with :- cleaner water; plentiful and continual good flows; more natural morphology (the physical structure of the river) and habitat; which reduce our contribution to climate change and

increase our resilience to its impacts; and which are well-monitored and evidenced to identify issues and solutions.

We also have objectives for rivers that are consistently maintained and protected; increasingly accessible,

provide a neighbourhood asset and integrate positively into active communities; are well understood by communities that are empowered to champion and take action to protect them and contribute positively to our economy.

By 2028 we will deliver the following objectives annually.



Create integrated constructed wetlands

2



Provide chalk stream restoration

2km



Launch natural flood management schemes

10



Ease, pass or remove fish barriers

2



Plant trees

30,000



Improve river habitat (restoration, Inns etc)

15km



Work with farmers to reduce pollution, abstraction, flood risk for their and the rivers' benefit

20



Support sustainable drainage projects

10



Develop evidence around catchment (and sub-catchment) scale issues and provide solutions

5 (10)



Identify and quantify pollution with a view to enabling resolutions

30



Increase the number and variety of catchment scale monitoring programmes running

5



Support projects with statutory organisations that deliver flood resilience in communities through a co-design approach

5



Measure the organisation's carbon and water footprints and reduce it by

30%



Provide information, across a variety of communication channels, so every Londoner can find their nearest river. Give guidance to households to cut down on water usage and encourage water companies to reduce leaks from water infrastructure.



Increase the number and variety of new River Action Groups led by Thames21 qualified trainees

5



Expand the number of volunteers actively involved in learning, maintenance and river improvement projects

12,000



Boost the support we provide to the network of River Action Groups to carry out independent activities on rivers

50



Initiate community consultation and planning events to shape project plans and co-design future activities

30



Engage school pupils in curriculum linked river-focused learning activities

3,500



Carry out volunteering projects that focus on recruiting new volunteers from underrepresented groups

5



Deliver projects with the aim to improve health and wellbeing outcomes of volunteers taking part

5



Ensure that representation of participants is monitored and projects will include specific targets to ensure they better reflect the communities they work with



Deliver training courses to improve skills and understanding of local communities

10



Create new routes into employment in the charity and environmental sector for youth and underrepresented groups

Our Approach

Thames21 is a collaborative organisation dedicated to protecting and improving rivers and landscapes for the benefit of people and wildlife. The charity hosts and works with multiple catchment partnerships and is part of the Rivers Trust movement. Healthy rivers need involvement and action across all sectors and stakeholders throughout the landscapes from which their waters rise.

Long-term, sustainable improvement of rivers is central to Thames21's vision and we seek to achieve this by integrating physical river improvements with community and cross-sectoral involvement, ownership and education.

Working in Partnership

Thames21 works in partnership with communities and stakeholders to protect, restore and improve rivers throughout London and beyond to

build long-term climate resilience and biodiversity.

Working in partnership with others is critical to success as no single organisation or intervention can deliver a healthy river. Thames21 will take an adaptive partnership approach where we will work to complement partners' strengths and use our expertise to catalyse action, increase impacts and enhance results.



Where others have a lead responsibility, Thames21 is able to assist with practical delivery and provide specific expertise towards achieving the most effective project outcomes. Thames21 currently (co)hosts nine catchment partnerships in the Thames Basin, as well as chairing the Catchment Partnerships in London Group (CPiL). Catchment partnerships are a critical mechanism to help improve rivers and catchments - they bring organisations together across all sectors and ensure local communities have an equal voice in how rivers and catchments are restored (see appendix for more details).

Thames21 commits to coordinating successful, impactful partnerships which drive the restoration of our rivers and catchments according to their specific needs. Where required, Thames21 will work with our partners to support other catchment hosts to drive actions within their hosted areas. This includes

expanding our work to include more rural areas and supporting farmers to restore rivers and their surrounding catchments.

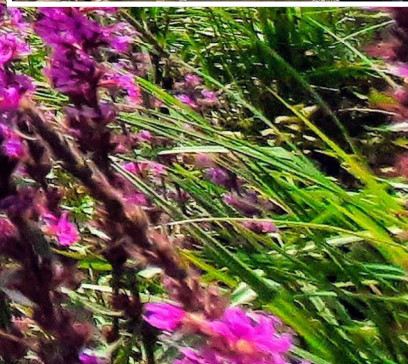
We will continue to work in collaboration with communities, government, local authorities, water companies and other stakeholders to improve river and catchment health.

Newer areas of work will include more rural areas, such as engaging directly with farmers to identify actions and opportunities to tackle agricultural pollution in our rivers.

Developing Advocacy

Thames21's grassroots experience on one of the most high-profile river

systems in the world places the charity in an effective position to push for policy, systemic and social change based on practical evidence and direct knowledge. Over the next five years, the charity will increasingly help to progress the agenda for change through focussed advocacy at national, regional, London and local levels. Through its communications, employees and partnerships, Thames21 will help to foster discussion and debate. The messages we deliver, based on our experience working in and around rivers, will educate the public and decision makers on the issues that affect river health and inspire behaviour change. Water is complex. So, we will use simple language that everyone can understand to get key messages across to them.



Where We Will Work



Transforming urban rivers:

Thames21's work began on London's rivers including the tidal Thames and its many tributaries, all heavily affected by litter and pollution. Over time, rivers have been lost, buried or hidden away. As well as this, ecologically vibrant river systems have become degraded over centuries of urban and industrial development. Thames21's work began with tackling litter and plastic pollution and has developed to enable and deliver ecological healthy and resilient rivers. However, there is much more to do, and this will be a priority area of focus for the next five years.



Tackling more rural rivers in the Thames Basin:

As the waters in the Thames Basin are interconnected, Thames21 has increased its geographic coverage along the river from Oxford in the west to Canvey Island in the east. We intend to work in partnership with other rivers trusts, local authorities, NGOs and groups whilst completing the gaps where rivers and communities lack support.

Thames21 is uniquely placed within the Thames catchment to focus on the whole catchment in collaboration with other rivers trusts and partners within the Thames Basin. The charity has the experience, integrity, structure, and the knowledge and skills to deliver restorative action. It also has the expertise to advise on mechanisms and approaches to delivery at grassroots-level as well as to operate at a wider geographical scale.

Increasing our impact nationally and internationally:

The environmental and climate challenges faced by the rivers of the Thames Basin are reflected around the UK and around the world. Thames21 can learn from others and has much to share. Thames21 plans to develop its role both as a thought leader and to provide practical leadership enabling others to act, as well as continually learning and increasing our own effectiveness.

We plan to develop, deliver and showcase innovative and sector-leading work on rivers and with communities by strengthening both our community presence and networks as well as national and international networks.



How We Will Work

Thames21 will grow its base of volunteers and supporters who can act and advocate for their rivers at the local and national levels. Thames21 will support people and communities to build long-term relationships with their rivers and river landscapes as well as with Thames21.

Our volunteers come from wide-ranging backgrounds, but we realise that we can do more to increase diversity and representation from local communities. Therefore, Thames21 intends to engage more fully with all communities in the areas in which we operate, and to reflect their diversity more fully throughout our organisation. Work has begun to listen to the communities that Thames21 serves, to understand barriers that may be preventing all our communities from engaging and benefiting from our rivers as well as from the full range of volunteering and other opportunities at Thames21. The conclusions of the study will be used to develop new programmes and to open up more opportunities for all throughout all the charity's work.

Developing and delivering Thames21's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy is a priority for the next five years. Thames21 believes that at every level the charity's employees should better reflect the diversity of the communities the charity serves. Board-level and staff groups are working to establish what the future Thames21 looks and feels like, and to create a road map to get there.

The EDI strategy will focus on:

- Establishing effective, long-term systems;
- Actively promoting and improving equalities throughout the organisation, from the Board of Trustees to the staff team to our volunteers; and
- Providing equality of opportunity in our recruitment to allow the best candidate to succeed.



Developing Capacity

Thames21 plans to invest in and develop the charity's core function to support the charity's ability to deliver more for rivers and communities; and to develop the income streams that will enable this investment.



Building Organisational Resilience

In order to deliver its aims, Thames21 will develop its organisational structure and invest in training and developing its staff. The charity will strengthen its business resilience through development and use of its customer relationship management (CRM) database, as well as by developing sustainable and diverse sources of funding and finance.

Financing Our Work

Thames21 will build on its areas of strength in fundraising and diversify its income streams. The charity will:

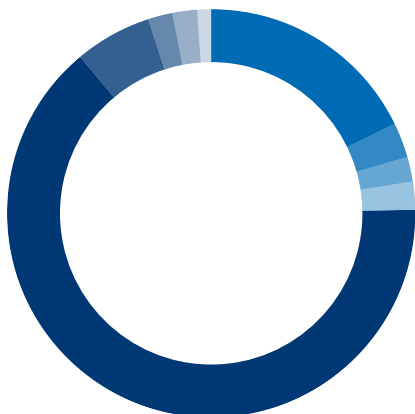
- Expand its fundraising team to enable it to deliver its Five Year Plan.
- Increase funding of its regenerative work from the private sector, helping corporates to meet targets in sustainability, water stewardship, and employee engagement.
- Expand funding from Trusts & Foundations and public sources.
- Harness statutory funding to deliver on government policy on rivers, the natural environment and climate resilience.
- Establish a philanthropic culture and cultivate major gifts.
- Establish individual giving and legacies from supporters.
- Develop commercial and consultancy services.
- Increase its ability to harness emerging mechanisms and markets in green finance.
- Develop innovative green financing models with partners, which will connect funding for mandatory uplift in Biodiversity Net Gain on rivers with delivery of key ecosystem services such as flood risk reduction, climate resilience, and health and wellbeing.
- Build strong cases for funding across its areas of work including climate resilience, water stress, flood mitigation, biodiversity, active citizenship, health, wellbeing, and inclusion.
- Maintain a strong level of reserves to underpin the charity's planned growth.



Appendix

Five years of achievement - In 2015-2020, Thames21 expanded its activities and impacts.

- Thames21 ran **more than 36,000 volunteering opportunities** to transform rivers, whilst also enhancing lives and building communities.
- **Volunteering opportunities became integrated** across the range of Thames21 programmes and activities. Volunteers became citizen scientists to provide crucial data on river health; cleared tonnes of plastic and litter out of rivers, planted new wetlands, installed natural flood management features such as leaky dams and planted trees, and formed their own river action groups.
- **More than 100,000 people in communities were directly engaged** with their local river and Thames21's work through a range of activities to encourage people to understand and value their local rivers, building a sense of ownership and local pride. Public engagement events ranged from river discovery walks to river dipping events, canoe paddles and community forums.
- **Education and connecting children and young people with the natural environmental and its key challenges** from biodiversity to climate change was a major area of expansion, with almost **44,000 taking part in Thames21 education** programmes and activities.
- **Thames21's programme of practical river improvements included the construction of integrated wetlands** with another 113 hectares added to the Salmons Brook wetlands and new wetlands delivered in partnership with Enfield and Haringey Councils including Firs Farm, Pymmes Park, Alma Rd, Grovelands Park, Bury Lodge and four systems along Priory Rd in Haringey. In South London, there was work on integrated wetlands at Chinbrook Meadows and Thames21 worked in partnership with Enfield Council and the Rivers Trust on new wetlands at Broomfield Park.
- **New reed beds** were installed at many sites to renaturalise the previously hard engineered canal and to increase its resilience to pollution events. Thames21 created **more than 3,000 metres of new reed bed on the River Lea**, with many sites chosen by public vote. A comprehensive reed bed opportunity strategy was provided for Thamesmead where this approach continues to develop.
- **Natural Flood Management (NFM)** became a major area of work at Thames21. An initial project investigated how six at-risk London communities could be protected from floods, developed NFM projects to protect them and installed NFM monitoring stations at key locations. In response to a greater awareness of the risk of flood to London, Thames21 is now delivering a range of NFM interventions, and this work will continue to expand.
- Thames21's **innovative work to evidence the impact of nature-based solutions** included a year-long programme of regular water quality testing at Integrated Constructed Wetlands (ICW) projects at Firs Farm and Pymmes Park. This led us to produce a co-authored report with Enfield Council entitled 'Improvements in water quality by integrated constructed wetlands', which highlighted how ICW can reduce pollution effectively.
- Thames21 led the sector in **data analysis of road run-off** in a partnership project to identify London roads which pollute rivers most heavily. This work will help local and London authorities to plan nature-based solutions to tackle pollution before it reaches rivers, and produced a model that can be used in other cities.
- **More than 1,000 tonnes of rubbish and litter** were removed from the Thames alone by volunteers. Over time, Thames21's volunteers have removed much of the heavy industrial waste in the Thames and most of the rubbish that enters the river is now single-use plastic.
- Thames21 continues to **develop and deliver innovative and sector-leading solutions**. Examples include the Community Modelling project which supported local community volunteers to walk river catchments to identify potential sites for new constructed wetlands and, using computer modelling, to predict the water quality improvement to the river that would be delivered by each site.



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

Packaging

- Food related **65%**
- Non-food related..... **6%**
- Smoking related **2%**
- Domestic **2%**
- Other..... **1%**

Products

- Toiletries/Medical **17%**
- Domestic **3%**
- Smoking related **2%**
- Construction related..... **2%**

- Thames21’s award-winning programme, **Thames River Watch, provided crucial data on plastic pollution in rivers (see chart above).**

From 2015, the project delivered robust surveys and monitoring by trained volunteer citizen scientists on environmental issues facing the river. The programme focused increasingly on single-use plastic, encompassing wet wipes accumulating on the riverbed, single-use plastic water bottles, and food packaging. Evidence emerging from the programme was used by Thames21, the national media, government and others to highlight the challenge of single-use plastic in the natural environment and to press for change and to help provide the case for the judicial review for the Thames Tideway Tunnel.

- **More than 800 new volunteer River Action Leaders** were trained and supported by Thames21’s nationally-accredited Training Programme to lead others locally in caring for their river.

- **Thames21 empowered individuals and communities**, equipping them with the encouragement, technical skills and confidence to inspire others, create new local **River Action Groups**, and to get hands-on with activities to improve their local river. River Action Groups are developed locally to meet local needs, with Thames21’s

support. Super-groups include the Lower Regents Coalition, which runs canal-side litter-picks, installs floating reed beds, and creates wildflower meadows; and the turbo-charged Grays Beachcombers Group which collects, counts and catalogues plastic bottles on the Thames foreshore from Rainham to Southend.

- **River Action Groups involved more than 7,000 volunteers** in cleaning and improving the rivers in their neighbourhood over the last five years.
- Thames21 developed **a range of new nationally accredited courses** to help volunteers to look after their rivers over the long term, for example, teaching them to use a new NFM app, to design and install NFM features, and to use technical MoRPh river survey techniques.
- **Thames21 increased the number of Catchment Partnerships it hosts**, now hosting nine in total from the South Chilterns to South Essex and Canvey Island. New development management work supported by local authorities was introduced to help Catchment Partnerships achieve their potential to transform rivers.
- The Catchment Partnerships in London Group (CPI), established and chaired by Thames21, continued

to collaborate in building a **‘voice for London’s rivers’**. The group works together to tackle London-wide issues and provides information on projects and plans throughout London.

- Thames21 runs, with CPI, the highly successful **London Rivers Week** to connect the public to their local stretch of river and promote the benefits of river restoration in London. **Inspiring river restoration projects** are highlighted to encourage increased investment in this vital work.
- River restoration sits at the heart of what we do. In the last year, Thames21 has delivered river restorations to 3.5km of waterways. This work included restoring 900m of the River Cray (a chalk stream, that flows from Orpington to Dartford), which resulted in a 9% increase in its Biodiversity Net Gain indicators.
- Thames21 **raised awareness** of the challenges faced by the Thames and its tributaries through multiple media channels. Thames21 has featured in, for example, *BBC News*, *BBC Panorama*, *Sky*, *the Evening Standard*, *the Financial Times*, *Vice*, and *in Down to Earth*, a Netflix documentary featuring Zac Efron. In 2019, Thames21 reached an audience of 93 million people via mainstream media.

Who We Are

Thames21 is an independent environmental charity (Registered Number 1103997) established in 2005. It is a member of the Rivers Trust movement.



www.thames21.org.uk



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