



Introduction to Your Tidal Thames *A pilot project in 2012*



Project background

Your Tidal Thames is a joint project between Thames21 and Thames Estuary Partnership (TEP). The project covers the tidal area of the River Thames – from Teddington Lock near Richmond-upon-Thames downstream to Haven Point on the north bank of the Thames Estuary in Essex and Warden Point on the south bank in Kent. Within this area the project aims to create a community approach to river management. At the end of 2012 the project will produce a ‘catchment plan’ which will address issues that are vital for the sustainability and vibrancy of the Thames. The plan will aim to make some initial recommendations for long-term improvements in the water quality and ecological health of the river.

Your Tidal Thames is being funded by Defra and the Environment Agency and is part of the ‘catchment-based’ approach to working with individuals and organisations that can make a difference to the health of England’s water environments. It is 1 of 25 pilot river catchments across England that have been selected to test out this community approach to river improvements, before it is expanded across the country. The ‘catchment-based’ approach aims to deliver and raise awareness of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and what this means for our rivers, estuaries and coastal waters

At present the status of the tidal Thames has been classified by the Environment Agency as ‘moderate’ under WFD - the aim is that the river should have ‘good chemical status’ and ‘good ecological potential’ by 2027. For more information on how ‘chemical status’ and ‘ecological potential’ are assessed refer to Annex A of the Thames River Basin District Management Plan - <http://publications.environment-agency.gov.uk/PDF/GETH0910BSWB-E-E.pdf>. For more information on the current status of the tidal Thames please refer to the Initial Summary document sent with this introduction.

Progress to date

Thames21 and Thames Estuary Partnership have been working on the Your Tidal Thames project since January 2012. Since the start of the project we have:

- Gathered information on the tidal Thames from the Environment Agency - including the current status of the river and reasons for its failure to meet good ecological potential and chemical status by 2015 under the Water Framework Directive.
- Discussed and initiated what we feel is an appropriate engagement strategy for the tidal Thames – details of this are outlined below.
- Produced documents, printed promotional materials and online media for the project which will be used in the engagement process.
- Begun engagement by contacting all individuals and organisations on Thames21’s and Thames Estuary Partnership’s databases to make them aware of the Your Tidal Thames project and inviting them to get involved by contributing their views.

- Set up this meeting on 27th June to invite individuals from key organisations along the tidal Thames to discuss the idea of setting up a 'strategy group' – potential roles of this group are outlined below and this will form part of the discussion at the meeting.

Engagement strategy

The tidal Thames from Teddington to the project boundary in the outer estuary is a 70 mile stretch of river, running through England's most densely populated city and is subject to a wide range of environmental pressures. Our challenge through the Your Tidal Thames project is by the end of 2012 to develop a draft plan which will give those connected with, or who care about, the river an opportunity to get involved and to have a say in the improvement of the tidal Thames. Achieving this over an area as large as the tidal Thames where there are so many diverse communities and river users is a challenge!

Many of the other 25 pilot catchments have formed catchment groups, made up of individuals from communities and organisations within the catchment. These catchment groups meet face to face and are responsible for the formation of the catchment plan. We do not feel that this approach would work on the tidal Thames – the area is too large and there are too many people who have an interest and stake in the river. The tidal Thames is a dynamic river and we felt that our engagement strategy needed to reflect this.

The approach that we are taking is to engage widely across the tidal Thames area. Rather than trying to bring people together in one place at one time we are taking our engagement out to the tidal Thames community. To do this we have developed a catchment plan template which forms the basis of the plan which will be completed at the end of this year. The template is available upon request and we hope to soon have it publically available on our websites. We are inviting individuals and organisations to input their views directly into the plan. The plan will be updated each month with the input that we have received so that people can read others' comments and see how the plan is developing. All views sent to us will be included in the final plan but there will be a process of prioritising issues and solutions so that the final plan makes realistic recommendations for action to improve the tidal Thames. Any issues or actions raised through the engagement process which need further investigation will be included in an annex.

Our mechanisms for engaging people in our catchment plan template and gathering their views on the tidal Thames are:

- Pop-up workshops – these will mainly target local individuals from the local community, although anyone is welcome to attend a pop-up workshop. They will be run alongside existing events such as Thames21 volunteer days and will 'pop-up' at many different locations across London.
- One to one meetings – these will mainly target organisations and groups who have an interest in the tidal Thames. We will be directly making contact with organisations and going to meet with them individually.
- Online engagement – this is wide reaching to both individuals and organisations. We have already used the Thames21 and Thames Estuary Partnership databases to

contact individuals and organisations to make them aware of the project. We also have information on both charity's websites and we will be using social media such as Facebook and Twitter to attract further interest to the project and invite people to give their views.

Strategy Group

As mentioned above we plan for there to be a process of prioritising issues and solutions raised through the engagement process. This is necessary so that the final catchment plan makes realistic recommendations for action to improve the tidal Thames. We would like a strategy group to form which will be involved in this process. We also hope that the strategy group will find opportunities to work together to deliver actions that improve the tidal Thames, and create a network of organisations for future engagement and practical work past the life of this pilot project. Through these actions the strategy group will help to shape the plan produced at the end of 2012.

We feel that each member of the strategy group should fulfill one of these three criteria:

- Expert technical knowledge of the tidal Thames e.g. regulatory
- Expert ecological knowledge
- Good recreational knowledge and an ability to reach into communities

A list of organisations and individuals who have been invited to attend on 27th June and who we believe fulfill this criteria is provided at the end of this document.

The formation of a strategy group and how it will fulfill its role in the Your Tidal Thames project will be discussed on 27th June. We will be asking you to tell us:

- If you already know that you would, or would not, like to be part of a Strategy Group
- If you aren't yet sure if you would like to be part of a Strategy Group, what do you need to know in order to make a decision?
- On the 27th we will also discuss together how the group might work. This will include:
 - what will be the group's relationship to the material and views gathered through the engagement process?
 - what decision-making power will the group have in relation to the catchment plan?
 - how will the group take decisions?
 - how will membership be decided?
 - and any other questions that are raised on the day.
- Looking at the mix of organisations that are interested in being on the group, are there are gaps we need to fill? Or sectors which need to agree among themselves who will sit on the group?

By the end of the meeting on the 27th we hope to have a decision about whether a strategy group will be formed, what the specific role of this group will be, who will be part of the group and how the group will operate – for example will it meet face to face or virtually.

Catchment Plan

This community approach to river improvement and the production of a draft 'catchment plan' by the end of 2012 is a pilot project. The final content of the catchment plan will be built up through our engagement process and the prioritisation that follows. We have thought through what we consider the catchment plan will include and what it will not include – these thoughts are summarized in the table below.

The Your Tidal Thames Pilot Catchment Plan...	
...will	...will not
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● be a summary of what the Thames is like at the moment ● include a summary of issues, solutions and actions for the whole tidal Thames as identified through the engagement process ● for some locations give specific details about issues, solutions and actions ● detail newly agreed action, including collaboration between organisations ● provide details of others' plans and activities which are already in place and have been committed to ● record the engagement done to develop the plan ● contain a plan for further engagement ● describe and summarise the scope to work together in the future ● include a shared vision for the tidal Thames as developed and agreed by stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● be a definitive management plan ● include comprehensive, geographically detailed information about issues, solutions and actions for the whole tidal Thames ● be just research ● be confined to obviously Water Framework Directive related issues and actions (although this is the targeted remit of this pilot) as the useful information gathered could be applicable to other local projects where suitable.

We recognise that achieving engagement in and production of a draft catchment plan for the whole of the tidal Thames within a year is a very ambitious project. The content of the final draft catchment plan will depend on how many people we are able to engage with and what their views on the river are. We do not anticipate that the plan produced at the end of 2012 will be a comprehensive and definitive plan for the tidal Thames. We hope that this year will be the start of a longer process to develop a plan for the tidal Thames which is owned by the whole tidal Thames community, which outlines actions needed to improve the river and contains commitments from organisations and local communities to make these actions a reality.

Organisations and individuals invited to attend on 27th June to discuss a catchment based approach to improving the tidal Thames and the possibility of forming a Strategy Group

Anglers

Association of Thames Yacht Clubs

Aquatic Consultant

Environment Agency

Environmental Communications Expert

Essex County Council

Essex Wildlife Trust

Greater London Authority

Kent County Council

Kent Wildlife Trust

Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

London Wildlife Trust

Port of London Authority

Port of London Health Authority

River Thames Society

RSPB

Royal Yachting Association

Thames Estuary Partnership

Thames21

Thames River Restoration Trust

Thames Water