

THE RIVER THAMES AND ITS TRIBUTARIES

9. INTRODUCTION

- 9.1. A significant, characteristic and important environmental asset of the Borough is its various rivers and reservoirs. They make a fundamental contribution to the landscape quality of the Borough and also provide unique recreational opportunities. Together with the Borough's open areas and conservation areas, the rivers and to some extent reservoirs, form an essential element of the quality of life for the Borough's residents.
- 9.2. The Thames is the largest river and forms the northern boundary of the Borough. It creates an outstanding visual environment, the preservation and enhancement of which is essential to both local and national interests. The River also provides a wide range of recreational opportunities, used by both Borough residents and visitors. Additionally, the Thames is used as a transport artery. The movement of bulk materials is sometimes preferable by river but this traffic has reduced considerably over the years. Tributaries such as the River Mole, River Wey and the Wey Navigation are also of significance and similar policy considerations apply. Finally the Borough's reservoirs and wet gravel workings also hold considerable potential to fulfil important environmental and recreational functions.

POLICY CONTEXT

- 9.3. The policy context for this chapter comprises Government guidance in the form of Supplementary Regional Planning Guidance for the River Thames (RPG9B) issued in 1997 together with PPG17 "Sport and Recreation" (September 1991) and PPG21 "Tourism" (November 1992). At the county level the SSP'94 provides general guidance. The historical, cultural and landscape importance of the stretch at Molesey is also recognised by its inclusion in the "Thames Landscape Strategy - Hampton to Kew" adopted by various riparian local authorities and national agencies. Finally the Council, in recognising the importance of its riparian environment, has also formulated its policies in accordance with those of the relevant agencies responsible for the management and preservation of these water related resources.

AIMS

- 9.4. The main aims of Council policy are, therefore: -
- (i) to protect and whenever appropriate enhance the visual character of the Thames and other Waterways;
 - (ii) to recognise and respect the national importance of the River Thames;
 - (iii) to protect and enhance historic buildings, sites, structures, landscapes, skylines and views of importance, which contribute to the riverside location;
 - (iv) to promote wider public access to the riverside;
 - (v) to encourage greater recreational use;
 - (vi) to conserve and where possible enhance the ecology of the Thames and tributaries;

- (vii) to encourage and harness the transport potential of the Thames and tributaries; and
- (viii) to restrict development in areas liable to flood.

PROTECTION OF RIVERSIDE VIEWS AND FEATURES

RTT1 PROPOSALS FOR DEVELOPMENT SHOULD MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE THE UNIQUE CHARACTER OF THE RIVER THAMES AND ITS TRIBUTARIES INCLUDING SIGNIFICANT VIEWS, VISTAS AND KEY LANDMARKS ALONG AND CONSPICUOUS FROM THE BANKS.

9.5. In accordance with the RPG9B the Council will continue to protect and enhance the visual character of the River Thames and its tributaries. When considering proposals for development beside or conspicuous from the Thames, not only will the effect along the length of the riverbank be noted, but the relationship with the opposite riverbank and vistas extending beyond the river corridors will also be taken into account. This approach is essential in the vicinity of Hampton Court Palace and its associated parkland, but it is also important when other riverside buildings, spaces and key landmarks are involved. Regard should be had to Policy ENV27 on strategic views and landmarks in the Environment Chapter. Additionally the Council has adopted that part of the Thames Landscape Strategy relating to Elmbridge as Supplementary Planning Guidance and will work in partnership with the other local authorities and national agencies concerned to implement the policies and proposals of the Strategy.

DEVELOPMENT WITHIN OR CONSPICUOUS FROM THE THAMES POLICY

AREA

RTT2 DEVELOPMENT WITHIN OR CONSPICUOUS FROM THE THAMES POLICY AREA, AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THAT:

- (i) **IT MAKES THE BEST USE OF THE RIVERSIDE LOCATION;**
- (ii) **THE IMPACT OF ITS DESIGN, CHARACTER AND SCALE ON THE SITE AND SKYLINE, LONG DISTANCE AND LOCAL VIEWS IS ACCEPTABLE;**
- (iii) **IT PROTECTS, CONSERVES AND, WHERE APPROPRIATE, ENHANCES THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE RIVER;**
- (iv) **IT HAS AN ACCEPTABLE IMPACT UPON PUBLIC ACCESS TO AND ALONG THE RIVER; AND**
- (v) **IT ENSURES THE RETENTION OF BUILDINGS, FEATURES AND LAND WHICH MAKE AN IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE VISUAL AND/ OR HISTORIC CHARACTER OF THE RIVER.**

9.6 The Thames Policy Area has been defined on the Proposals Map in accordance with government advice contained in the RPG9B. The Thames is one of the great natural assets of Elmbridge. It is essential to protect this asset, to raise general awareness of the importance of the River and improve the quality of the environment. In particular, the Thames provides an important and much sought after setting for development. However, riverside development must be carefully designed in terms

of its scale, quality and relationship to other buildings, open land and the River itself. Good quality design and development appropriate to the river setting can make a major contribution to the built environment. This is particularly important alongside the Thames because of its high visibility from the opposite bank, from bridges and from the River itself. The Thames Policy Area also extends to a short section of the River Wey and Wey Navigation within Elmbridge where the aims and aspirations of the Environmental Strategy of the River Wey and Godalming Navigations produced by the National Trust in July 1997 will be adopted and pursued.

LOSS OF RIVERSIDE USES AND FEATURES

RTT3 THE COUNCIL WILL RESIST THE LOSS OF RIVERSIDE USES AND FEATURES WHICH MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO THE SPECIAL CHARACTER OF THE THAMES AND ITS TRIBUTARIES. PARTICULAR ATTENTION WILL BE PAID TO THE RETENTION OF BOATHOUSES, BRIDGES, LOCK HOUSES, SLIPWAYS AND OTHER ARTEFACTS RELATING TO THE WORKING RIVERSIDE ENVIRONMENT. IN EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES, WHERE A DEVELOPMENT INVOLVING SUCH A LOSS IS PERMITTED, AN EQUIVALENT REPLACEMENT SHOULD BE PROVIDED WITHIN CLOSE PROXIMITY.

9.7. Part of the character of the Thames and its tributaries can be attributed to the bridges, boathouses, lock houses and other various buildings or artefacts to be found on the riverside. The Council recognises the importance of retaining such features and associated land uses and sites for direct river related use such as boat building and repair, boat hire and foot ferries, and will resist the loss of features which make a contribution to the character of the riverside areas.

RIVERSIDE DEVELOPMENT

RTT4 THE COUNCIL WILL GIVE CAREFUL CONSIDERATION TO RIVERSIDE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS TO ENSURE THAT THE ENVIRONMENT AND CHARACTER OF THE RIVER IS PROTECTED AND THAT THE BEST USE IS MADE OF SUCH A RIVERSIDE LOCATION.

9.8. The type and form of use and activity proposed on the Borough's riverside land will be given careful consideration. Inappropriate development may damage the views to or from the riverside, and introduce uses that are not suitable for such locations, or that do not make the most of the unique opportunities. Uses that are particularly suited to the riverside include leisure, tourism or those related to education, provided that they do not impair local amenity and they comply with the other policies of this Plan. In this respect, proposals for office and other commercial development, except on existing employment sites, will be considered as being counter to the intentions of the Council to enhance the leisure emphasis of these locations of such historical, architectural and aesthetic interest. Particularly unattractive land uses such as car parking or certain sorts of open storage, will be avoided by the waterside wherever possible. Temporary uses will also not normally be permitted as they seldom have the investment levels to provide the level of landscaping necessary to make the appearance acceptable. The Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance entitled "Waterside Development" contains further advice on appropriate riverside development.

LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT WITHIN AREAS LIABLE TO FLOOD

RTT5 NEW DEVELOPMENT, THE INTENSIFICATION AND/OR EXTENSION OF EXISTING DEVELOPMENT OR LAND RAISING IN AREAS AT RISK FROM FLOODING, AS SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP, WILL BE REFUSED IF THE PROPOSAL WOULD MATERIALLY IMPEDE THE FLOW OF FLOOD WATER, INCREASE THE RISK OF FLOODING ELSEWHERE OR REDUCE THE CAPACITY OF THE AVAILABLE WASHLAND. WHERE DEVELOPMENT IS PERMITTED IN SUCH AREAS, APPROPRIATE FLOOD PROTECTION AND MITIGATION MEASURES, INCLUDING FLOODPLAIN RESTORATION, WILL NORMALLY BE REQUIRED AS PART OF THE DEVELOPMENT.

PROPOSALS, WHICH WOULD RESULT IN AN INCREASED FLOOD RISK IN AREAS ELSEWHERE DUE TO ADDITIONAL SURFACE RUNOFF, WILL NOT BE PERMITTED UNLESS ADEQUATE FLOOD COMPENSATION SCHEMES ARE PROVIDED.

- 9.9. The Borough has several areas liable to flood which are shown on the Proposals Map. The former National Rivers Authority has reduced this problem in the River Mole Flood Plain by undertaking a comprehensive flood alleviation scheme. However this is not possible on all stretches of the Borough's rivers where there is a threat of flooding. Consequently development will be limited to uses which would not be seriously affected by occasional flooding. However, instances may arise where limited development could be possible within the riverside areas of Wheatley's Ait, Beasley's Ait and Felix Lane, Shepperton. Green Belt Policy GRB27 and the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance entitled "Riverside Residences Within Areas Liable to Flood" give further advice. The guidance of the Environment Agency will be sought on these matters.
- 9.10. New development or redevelopment can exacerbate the problems of flooding, erosion and pollution in areas downstream through an increase in run-off from additional impermeable surfaces, such as roofs and paved surfaces. Equally land raising or built development can reduce water flow in an area causing it to backup, which may result in increased flood risk upstream. Therefore, careful siting and design of new development and appropriate flood protection and mitigation measures including floodplain restoration will normally be required by the Council in consultation with the Environment Agency. Wherever feasible, surface water from development within, or outside, the floodplain should be disposed of as close to the source as possible. Where risks are identified, appropriate flood attenuation facilities or mitigation measures (described as "flood compensation schemes" in Policy RTT5) may be a pre-requisite for new development. In order to ensure that such schemes are sustainable, consideration will be given to the use of "soft engineering" structures such as swales, detention ponds, infiltration basins and porous surfaces.
- 9.11. The Environment Agency is considering producing a floodplain management plan for the section of the River Thames between Datchet in Berkshire and Walton Bridge in Surrey. This Plan will be developed with the local community and relevant organisations and will include a strategy for managing land use and development in the floodplain and flood risk. It is important that further flood alleviation works take into account the Council's policies towards improving the riverside environment and that wherever possible increased public access is achieved. The Council will liaise with the Environment Agency and other agencies where appropriate, to ensure that the design of flood alleviation works is sensitive to the riverside setting, and to negotiate increased public access. In addition, a series of Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPs) have been prepared by the

Environment Agency for all Thames and its tributaries. The relevant plans are the Lower Thames LEAP published in July 1999, the Wey LEAP and Mole LEAP published in February 1999. All LEAPs will be reviewed annually by the Environment Agency.

LAND ADJACENT TO THE RIVER THAMES

RTT6 A STRIP OF LAND WILL BE RETAINED FREE FROM DEVELOPMENT ADJACENT TO THE RIVER THAMES. THE AVERAGE WIDTH OF LAND TO BE KEPT FREE FROM DEVELOPMENT IS TO BE 15 METRES, MEASURED FROM THE LANDWARD EDGE OF THE TOWPATH, OR 20 METRES MEASURED FROM THE WATER'S EDGE, WHICHEVER IS THE LESSER. THE MINIMUM WIDTH AT ANY ONE POINT ON A SINGLE DEVELOPMENT IS TO BE 9 METRES. INFILLING OF ANY PART OF THE RIVER WILL NOT BE PERMITTED.

9.12. In order to enhance the environmental and landscape character of the Thames, it is essential that the open nature of the riverside is maintained. The Council considers that development adjacent to the Thames would be detrimental to the aim of protecting the views and vistas along the River. The Council will therefore ensure that a strip of land is kept free from development immediately adjacent to the River Thames. Diagram 9.1 below illustrates the operation of Policy RTT6. The river channel has been progressively narrowed in many places over the centuries. This has changed the nature of the river and adjacent land. Further encroachments could also have adverse implications for its hydrology. Therefore, in order to achieve the relevant distances, infilling will not be permitted. The rebuilding of historic river edge features such as lock workings and boathouses will not be affected by Policy RTT6.

Diagram 9.1 Location of Development adjacent to the River Thames

Diagram not included on website version – Replacement Elmbridge Borough Local Plan Deposit Draft Page 117
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RIVERSIDE DEVELOPMENT

RTT7 THE COUNCIL, WHERE APPROPRIATE, WILL ENSURE THAT ALL RIVERSIDE DEVELOPMENT AND PROPOSALS: -

- (i) SYMPATHETICALLY REFLECT THEIR RIVERSIDE LOCATION AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUTLOOK AND ORIENTATION;**
- (ii) ARE IN HARMONY WITH SURROUNDING BUILDINGS IN BOTH SCALE AND CHARACTER;**
- (iii) INCORPORATE A LANDSCAPING SCHEME AND TREE PLANTING COMMENSURATE WITH THE LOCATION;**
- (iv) MAKE SUITABLE PROVISION FOR PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE RIVERSIDE; AND**
- (v) DO NOT ADVERSELY AFFECT WATER OR ECOLOGICAL QUALITY IN THE AREA.**

- 9.13. Where development of the waterside is considered to be appropriate in accordance with Policies RTT1 to RTT6 above, the Council will ensure that the design of the development reflects the riverside location. Outlook and orientation must complement the waters edge, the scale of development should reflect existing quality buildings and where appropriate, a landscape and tree planting scheme will also be required. Wherever possible, new development should provide sitting-out areas, terraces or gardens overlooking water areas. The Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance on "Waterside Development" gives further guidance on these matters.

PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE RIVERSIDE

RTT8 PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE RIVERSIDE WILL BE IMPROVED BY: -

- (i) SECURING PUBLIC ACCESS TO AND ALONG THE RIVERSIDE IN ANY NEW DEVELOPMENTS BETWEEN HAMPTON COURT BRIDGE AND THE BOUNDARY WITH THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KINGSTON -UPON-THAMES;**
- (ii) SEEKING TO ACQUIRE, WHEN APPROPRIATE, IMPORTANT RIVERSIDE SITES WHEN THEY BECOME AVAILABLE;**
- (iii) PROVIDING A BRIDGE BETWEEN CIGARETTE ISLAND PARK AND ALBANY REACH TO LINK TWO EXISTING PARTS OF THE RIVERSIDE WALK;**
- (iv) ENCOURAGING PUBLIC RECREATIONAL USE OF THE RIVERSIDE INCLUDING IMPROVED SIGNPOSTING AND PUBLICITY;**
- (v) ASSISTING THE COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY IN IMPLEMENTING THE THAMES PATH NATIONAL TRAIL; AND**
- (vi) PROMOTING A RIVERSIDE WALK AND, WHERE APPROPRIATE, A CYCLE PATH IN THE VALLEY OF THE RIVER MOLE FROM HAMPTON COURT TO STOKE D'ABERNON.**

- 9.14. One of the key elements in enhancing the recreational use of the River Thames and its tributaries is the improvement of public access to the riverside which will result in an increase in its potential as a tourist attraction. The Council has given full support to the principle of the Countryside Agency initiative to provide a National Trail along the Thames. This will also provide greater access to the waterside for the people with disabilities and mobility difficulties. In conjunction with this project, the Council will encourage cross and river ferries and examine the opportunities to link other footpaths, particularly those adjacent to other water areas such as the River Mole and Island Barn Reservoir, into the new route. Where, in exceptional circumstances, it is considered necessary the Council will use its compulsory purchase powers to acquire land for such schemes. In addition, the Council will promote a new riverside walk and, where appropriate, a cycle path between Hampton Court and Stoke D'Abernon, as identified in Schedule V. When determining the route of the riverside walk and/or cycleway and preparing detailed plans, the need to preserve the amenities of those properties affected will be taken into account. Additionally the Thames Overways Project is

considering proposals for four cyclist/pedestrian bridges across the River Thames between Staines and Hampton Court.

HIRE BASES FOR MOTORISED CRAFT

RTT9 NO NEW HIRE BASES FOR MOTORISED CRAFT WILL BE PERMITTED ALONG THE RIVER THAMES OR ON SIDE CHANNELS. EXTENSIONS TO EXISTING FACILITIES WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF THERE IS NO CONFLICT WITH OTHER USERS OF THE RIVERSIDE AND THERE IS NO ADVERSE EFFECT ON LOCAL AMENITIES.

9.15. The total number of craft on the non -tidal Thames has decreased since its peak in 1976 of 27,000. This includes powered craft, the numbers of which dropped from 14,000 in the peak years to 11,000 in 1994. The total of hire craft fell to 360 in 1994 from a peak of over 1,000 in 1979. In terms of boating activity hire cruisers, nevertheless, make up a significant proportion of the traffic in the season. They are normally hired for 1 or 2 week periods and make use of the river on weekdays, as well as the weekends. The use of the majority of private craft is concentrated at the weekends. There is still, however, serious congestion on the water on that part of the river within Elmbridge. This is a threat to wildlife, and there is also general environmental damage. Motorised craft are particular culprits causing bank erosion, pollution and noise disturbance. In addition, the landward sides of hire bases require extensive areas of car parking which can be unsympathetic to the river environment. The Council, therefore, will not normally permit any new hire bases for motorised craft along the River Thames or on side channels. Account will also be taken of the level of potential congestion and conflict between users and wildlife when considering proposed extensions to existing hire bases in addition to other relevant Local Plan policies.

PERMANENT MOORING OF HOUSEBOATS

RTT10 IN ORDER TO PROTECT THE APPEARANCE OF THE RIVERSIDE AND TO REDUCE CONGESTION, FURTHER PERMANENT MOORING OF HOUSEBOATS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED.

9.16. The permanent mooring of houseboats is also a contributory cause of congestion on the Thames. Such congestion has both public safety and environmental implications, contrary to the Council's commitment to preserve and enhance the River Thames and its environs. The Council, therefore, will not normally permit any further permanent moorings, to prevent an increase in traffic on the river and enable the full channel width to be open to moving traffic. Where possible and necessary, opportunities will be taken to relocate existing moorings to side channels, gravel pits or marinas, and also to remove any unauthorised moorings.

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

RTT11 THE COUNCIL WILL ENCOURAGE THE RECREATIONAL USE OF THE THAMES, ITS TRIBUTARIES, AND ALL OTHER WATER AREAS BY RESISTING THE LOSS OF FACILITIES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR ENJOYMENT, AND BY ENCOURAGING THE PROVISION OF NEW FACILITIES AND IMPROVEMENT OF EXISTING FACILITIES, WHERE THE PHYSICAL CAPACITY OF THE RIVERS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS ALLOW.

- 9.17. The recreational opportunities of the River Thames and tributaries are many and varied, ranging from on-river pursuits such as rowing, canoeing, and motor -cruising, to bankside activities including angling, walking, cycling and birdwatching, or just simply taking in the view. The Council aims to encourage recreational uses while minimising conflicts between users, protecting the natural environment and retaining public access to the riverside. The Environment Agency also has a statutory duty under the Environment Act 1995 to conserve the natural environment and promote facilities for sport and recreation. The publication "A Recreation Strategy for the River Thames" sponsored by the Sports Council and the former National Rivers Authority will be used as an advisory document when considering recreational uses on and adjacent to the Thames.

RECREATIONAL USE OF RESERVOIRS

- RTT12 THE COUNCIL WILL ENCOURAGE RECREATIONAL USE OF THE RESERVOIRS, WHERE APPROPRIATE, AND WILL REQUIRE REINSTATEMENT OF ANY EXISTING RECREATIONAL USES OF A RESERVOIR IF SUSPENDED DURING GRAVEL EXTRACTION.**

- 9.18. Not all of the reservoirs in the Borough are currently used for recreation. Further recreational use will be encouraged subject to the water safety, health considerations, and the Council's normal development control constraints, together with the need to set aside areas for nature conservation.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES FOR THE THAMES AND TRIBUTARIES

- RTT13 THE COUNCIL WILL CARRY OUT AND ENCOURAGE OTHER ORGANISATIONS, ADJOINING AUTHORITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY TO PARTICIPATE IN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENT SCHEMES, TO IMPROVE THE APPEARANCE OF THE THAMES AND ITS TRIBUTARIES. THE PROPOSALS SPECIFIED IN SCHEDULE V AND SHOWN ON THE PROPOSALS MAP WILL BE TREATED AS A PRIORITY.**

- 9.19. Where the environmental quality of the riverside is in need of improvement and can be achieved without adversely affecting its delicate ecology, the Council recognises its responsibility to both initiate and encourage improvement schemes. Schedule V lists the proposed improvements to the waterside areas in the Borough. The Council will concentrate on improving the access to the riverside in general through the provision of towpaths and bridges. Environmental improvements will also be a key feature along the River Mole between Hersham and Molesey .