

PLANNING GUIDELINES

The aims of the River Thames Society (RTS) are to:

- protect the natural beauty of the river, adjacent lands and buildings of historic interest; promote nature conservation;
- preserve and extend amenities which allow and encourage the use of the river for all purposes;
- support and contribute to the efforts of other organisations with a similar interest in the river.

RTS and its members therefore have a close interest in planning matters as they affect the Thames and its immediate environs.

These guidelines have five themes relevant to planning derived from the RTS aims:

- A. Improve/maintain public access to the river;
- B. Protect the natural environment;
- C. Promote the best built environment
- D. Keep the river active;
- E. Support like-minded others.

A. Improve/maintain public access to the river

Opportunities should be sought to improve the Thames Path and complete missing sections, keeping the Path available for public use. Permissive access, dependent on conditions set by the freeholder, is a poor second best. The Path should be accessible for those with a wide range of disabilities. Access points to/from the river should be protected, with public steps, stairs, landings and slipways kept open for use at all hours.

B: Protect the natural environment

Built development should be restricted in the most natural reaches. Bankside/midstream permanent moorings should be off-line, clustered into marinas or boatyards, except for end-of-garden moorings in built-up areas. This is better for the overall aesthetics, as well as enabling better servicing of vessels. The bank and riverbed need to be looked after. Any piling into the riverbed and

foreshore needs to be sensitive to native species needing protection, with camp-shedding the bank friendly to aquatic wildlife. Since bright lights can disturb bats, birds and fish, they should be shielded to inhibit spillage onto/above the river or onto adjacent sensitive areas of bank. Other agencies, especially the Environment Agency, have formal responsibilities in relation to environmental protection and the RTS supports them in that.

C: Promote the best built environment

The Thames is not land appropriate for redevelopment and that means no encroachment, with only river-related developments on/over the river. Whether or not formally classified as Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land, no Thames-side development should be seen as permitted development, but all should have proper scrutiny and public consultation. Any new development should respect historic structures, listed buildings and bridges and classic vistas on or by the Thames. New bank-side development should be set back from the river's edge; be low rise; respect views from the river and from the opposite bank; minimise light, noise, vibration, air or other pollution for the river and its close environment and be sensitive to local ecology.

D: Keep the river active

Existing wharves have to be safeguarded to enable the Thames to continue to be used for freight, with new ones created to replace any lost to new development. Working boatyards and slipways are needed for the ongoing maintenance of passenger and other vessels and must be protected. Unpowered craft enable a wide range of people, including the young, to have active enjoyment of the river through sailing, paddling, kayaking, rowing and punting. So appropriate facilities such as riverside youth clubs must be encouraged through the planning process. Short-term moorings are important for vessels enjoying the public right of navigation and are needed/should be protected in key locations close to amenities.

E: Support like-minded others

Other organisations with a similar interest in the river and its environs include those responsible for local river strategies, local amenity and community societies, river-related charities, environmental groups and the many boat clubs and river users, including Sea Scouts, Sea Cadets, paddling, rowing and sailing clubs.

The RTS has a special contribution to make as we cover all those interested in the river, the passive appreciators as well as active users. We cover all parts of the

river and can bring expertise from many quarters. Unlike many local amenity societies, we cover both banks. We have no commercial interests and believe we are uniquely placed to present a balanced view.

Conclusion

RTS tries to respond to public consultations, either in helping shape local plans or in response to specific planning proposals. Mindful that responses are usually going on to public websites, RTS responses are drafted with care. If free text is permitted, responses usually start with an explanation of the remit of the RTS. There is then comment on the specific issues, with a focus on the river aspects, mindful of (a) planning considerations for Local Authority applications, (b) the Port of London's remit for River Works Licence applications and (c) the criteria used in applications before the Marine Management Organisation. It is often helpful to then quote relevant standing planning policies. Sometimes it is only possible to respond on-line to pre-set questions, which rarely seem to directly address the issues of concern to us.

Experience shows that protecting the river and its special environment is not easy. There are public slipways protected by s106 agreements, which prove unusable in practice since land access was not adequately ensured or advertised. We have seen completion of an accessible Thames Path presented as the only public benefit for developments that were grossly inappropriate in other ways. We have seen a river-related s106 agreement providing supposed benefits which were not wanted by the river users for whom they were earmarked: the lesson is that any good intentions must always be checked with the designated users to ensure they hit the mark.

