

Note of the PLA public meeting Putney 1st April 2025

The location for the annual meeting for the upper tideway was moved at short notice to the Thames Rowing Club in Putney: attendance was thin compared with previous years. Several of the PLA executive top team were there, but this time no PLA non-executives.

Robin Mortimer (PLA CEO) started the meeting explaining some key aspects of the PLA's work from the last year under the headings familiar from the PLA's Vision of Trading Thames, Destination Thames and Natural Thames. The big money-making came from the port activity downriver, from commercial licences, pilotage fees and the like. There was also mention of matters of more local interest, like the revetment works between Putney and Kew and the joint work with Richmond Borough on tree management. The PLA was continuing to argue for safe but adequate water levels in the upper tideway in the face of proposals above Teddington from the River Thames Scheme flood diversion project and Thames Water's plans for increased water extraction. No mention was made of the recent public inquiry into the PLA's Harbour Revision Order. It was promised that the slides used would be put up on the PLA website.

Questions were invited, which from others included:

- Responsibility for financing flood defences – *answer the riparian owner.*
- When would the breached Thames path near Kew re-open – *hoping for August.*
- There were questions about various environment friendly initiatives - *Grace Rawnsley, the PLA Director of sustainability, explained the difficulties of monitoring water quality in estuary waters and how the tidal Thames was hoping to be a pilot site for this.*
- There was a plea for the PLA to lobby government about integrated water management
- There was general regret and concern about the young girl lost in the river the day before
- There had been new steps installed as part of revetment works, but these were dangerously slippery and lacked handrails. *Mention was made of the hoped-for formal requirement for riparian owners to install grab chains.* It was pointed out that the section of river bank in question belonged to the PLA. *OK, this would be taken back*
- There was a spit of land above Chiswick Bridge that interfered with rowers at low tide. *This would be looked at again even though previously dredging had not been thought the answer*
- Any news of the new pier by Putney Bridge? *No application received yet by the PLA, so contact Thames Clippers direct for more info*
- Why was there so much loose timber in the river this year? *No clear explanation*
- When might an elected stakeholder be expected on the PLA Board – *the CEO explained the founding legislation required the Board members to be skill-based not representation-based, so this was a question for the Department of Transport*

The greatest number of questions came from the RTS and were as follows:

1. Some objectors at the recent inquiry had likened the PLA to a property company. So tell us more about the asset value of the river bed.
 - a. There are extensive areas of river bed now registered to the PLA. What value is attributed to this fixed asset and where does it appear in the PLA's annual accounts? *Agreed this was not given on the PLA balance sheet. A brief history of the river bed ownership was then given.*

- b. When a section of river bed, held on trust for future generations, is permanently embanked it is lost to the port and the PLA. Where would the associated financial transactions be found in those accounts made publicly available? Recent examples are the various TTT sites and before that, the London Gateway site.
 - c. When the PLA grants long leases of its river bed to a commercial body, the value associated with this may appear in others' company accounts eg as intangible assets at Cadogan Pier in the 'sale of the century' (£43m in their last available accounts Sept 2023). How is this asset transfer represented in the PLA's own accounts? *Commercial agreements are not published.* There was then a minor grumble about the lack of transparency
2. For several years there have been questions at these meetings about progress with the marina at Watermans Park, a joint venture between the PLA, Hounslow Council and a company owned by the Moffats. The latest deadline for completion of phase 1 is the 1st July this year. Is the PLA confident that deadline will be met? And what would it take for the PLA to rethink the transfer of the phase 2 river bed to the Moffat company, since community interests can think of much better uses for that stretch of river, like being part of Brentford Heritage Harbour? *The answer from the PLA felt like an attempt to distance themselves – don't call this a joint venture. Responsibility lies elsewhere. If there isn't a licence from the MMO for works when there should be, they would take action.* Nothing said on phase 2, but no response was expected – this was to ensure recognition of the community interest here.
 3. How much has the HRO process cost the PLA to date? Specifically, what are the costs to the PLA of the public inquiry? Are any estimates being made of the total cost of the inquiry, including also the costs met by the objectors and by the MMO? And from the PLA point of view, has this been money well spent? *The answer was evasive with it being explained that costs of legal action is not normally separately identified. But the cost had been high.* A mysterious black cat walking across the skylight provided amusing distraction at this point.
 4. The PLA have announced an independently-led review of charges being made for balconies. Is any other action being taken in response to criticism made during the recent inquiry on the HRO, even in advance of the chair's report? *The CEO appeared to have missed the point here, and responded about needing to counter the misunderstandings about the relative importance of different sources of income.* So no reflection on the searing comments that had been made about the PLA's governance.
 5. On complaints, the Ports good governance guide says in 3.46 "Trust ports should have a system to consider complaints from stakeholders about governance issues or other matters arising from the port's activities. Trust ports should aim to reply to complaints fully and in writing within a reasonable timescale. Responses should set out whether the trust port considers the complaint to be justified and any remedial action to be taken". How are complaints handled within the PLA? How does one complain about the PLA when there is the catch 22 situation of no easy way to do this (ie no recognisable icon on the PLA webpage)? *The answer was to look at the webpage on 'how to contact us'.* But it was pointed out the search function on complaints just came up with wash complaints, and there was no summary analysis of complaints being made. And this would be normal in the public sector.