

This event was chaired by the CEO Robin Mortimer, in the presence of the chair and vice-chair and all but one of the executive team. This was an improvement on the 'B' team that had hosted the event the previous year. Although it proved helpful to have various issues discussed, there was little new for 'Thames watchers' that was not already well-covered on the PLA website.

The **introduction from the CEO** covered key issues in the 3 arms of the PLA's Thames Vision, ie Trading Thames, Destination Thames and Natural Thames. Excellent performance was reported from pilotage services. The PLA were embarking on a series of plans for the river together with riparian Councils, starting with the Bexley masterplan followed by equivalents for Tower Hamlets and Newham, with the intention of rolling out for all the tideway. This would be the planning process for the river and help identify where developments could happen, being proactive in identifying which part of the river was right for what activity. A study had found zero-emission electric ferry vessels could be a much cheaper and more rapidly deliverable solution for a new river crossing. Another £150k has been granted to 23 local projects under Active Thames, with an emphasis on increasing inclusion and encouraging activity in under-represented groups. The PLA had released a 'clean Thames manifesto', with the PLA now being more active as an advocate. There was an agreement with the relevant water authorities to move faster than the national target for reducing sewage discharges into the river. The wet wipe issue was also being addressed. The previous week the net zero river plan had been released, looking at the river as a whole.

James Stride the new Harbour Master then spoke briefly, inter alia encouraging reports of incidents and near misses. One of his team, Adam Layer then explained that although they were prepared to take enforcement action, the more usual approach was informal and advisory. At times and without warning they might do blitzes on vessels in certain areas, eg checking compliance among passenger vessels.

Although this was a PLA meeting, the floor was then given over to **Thames Water**, as in the previous year, although this year's focus supposedly on water supply soon got contaminated by questions on sewage. Conor Loughney explained the details of the plans for Teddington DRA (Direct River Extraction) with his colleague Rob Hinks outlining some of the environmental assessment. This was familiar to those of us who had been following this issue. The PLA's interest seemed mostly in the navigational impact, if any, on the reduction in water level between Mogden and Richmond half-tide lock, estimated at not more than 5cm. Full reports on the estimated environmental impact were still being prepared.

Peter Finch (for the RTS) was informed the storm overflows from Mogden would continue as now, even with a tertiary treatment plant built above the storm tanks. Another questioner pointed out there was evidence of muck on his boat's hull and Thames Water agreed the current discharges were unacceptable, with the PLA referring to its clean river manifesto, at the same time as agreeing the Thames Tideway Tunnel (TTT) would not benefit the upper river. Another audience member advocated more reservoirs, and was told there was a big one planned, but lead times were long. Dido Berkeley spoke about the importance of integrated water management. There was a plea for green bonds with one for London and the Thames basin. Johnson Cox (PLA chair) responded saying other companies were accessing those green funds and Ofwat had a green recovery programme. But the PLA did not issue bonds, since its balance sheet was not big enough and it did not need to raise

money. Yes, there were still other schemes in Beckton under consideration. It was noted the sewage discharges that took place locally were not just on wet days.

There was then an opportunity in the limited time left to ask more general questions and comments from the floor.

- Chris Livett regretted any 5cm drop in water level, the 2½ acre land grab that had come with TTT and the increasing use of the river for private gain. He spoke about how in his lifetime high tides had been increasing and there was a severe flood risk with decrepit river walls. Why didn't the PLA and Thames Water consider a dredging programme? The response was although there was agreement on the increased water levels and flood risk, TE2100 was not looking at dredging in the upper river and it was not the right solution
- There was a call for a second barrier: this was already in TE2100 but with a long lead time
- For the RTS, I asked about the interface with the River Thames Scheme, which would affect flood flowing from above Teddington. The response was the PLA's concern was limited to the potential impact on navigation and the height at Richmond lock, and it had been claimed the net impact would be neutral.
- Yes, it was understood that sometimes the flow above Teddington was reversed
- There were no plans to publish the report on the Ocean Diva incident from last June, and in any case that vessel had now departed.
- There was still no solution to shore power at Greenwich
- It was noted the EA were planning to reduce from 2035 the protection for our area that came from the Thames barrier. With more water coming downstream, there would be bottlenecks at Richmond bridge and weir
- One questioner asked about licensing of vessels on the river, being told that private leisure vessels didn't need this, because Jim Trimmer (PLA) said of "the public right of navigation"
- How to prevent boats hitting Hammersmith bridge, like that one last year? Response: it was a licensed class V vessel and was under investigation
- The PLA had responded to Thames Water's consultation on Teddington DRA: send an email to Jim Trimmer and he'd send a copy. He explained the PLA's concern was navigation and water levels/quality, not the principle of whether water extraction was right or wrong
- A questioner with a mudlarking licence described seeing people exploring the foreshore around Putney, including digging deep holes. He assumed they did not have licenses, but noted after many years he had never been asked to show his. The PLA appeared to take no action after his reports, with photos. Jim Trimmer responded explaining the PLA needed photos of people digging holes, not just carrying a spade which was not of itself illegal. It was difficult for the PLA to act without evidence.
- A question was asked on behalf of Diana Roth about the need for chains and railings on steps and stairs, with the suggestion that developers could provide any needed funding. The response was this was not always appropriate but it would be raised with the towpath group, chaired by Diana, on which the PLA is represented
- Chris Livett explained he would be closing Putney Pier after the boat race since it was going to dry dock. But it would be back. In the meantime, there was the Uber Pier. Also, for information, Imperial Wharf was being extended to provide more visitor moorings.
- As the meeting closed, I mentioned there were still many questions which had been notified in advance and had not been reached, and was promised a response in writing. I pointed out that promise had not always been kept previously.

The PLA were true to their word about answering questions in writing. Attached here are the answers received soon after the meeting. Thanks, PLA, and especially James Trimmer

Q What progress on the **HRO**? There have been some late challenges to the whole process: is this going to make any difference?

A As you know, the MMO has recently contacted all those who have, as yet, unwithdrawn representations in order to understand the intentions of each objector. Following the completion of that exercise (I understand the closing date for responses is next week) we hope to have a substantive response from them in due course and will proceed from there. There are, as far as I know, no late challenges to the process as a whole.

Q Some years ago we were promised greater **openness about applications** for new River Works Licences, so there would be time for interested parties to make comments before decisions were made by the PLA. The system for the public listing new applications never really worked, and it was assumed it was now waiting for the new arrangements after the HRO had passed. Can this be activated **without waiting for the HRO to pass**?

A. Whilst there's nothing legal to prevent consultation on RWL applications, we're not in a position to undertake this in advance of the HRO being agreed. We do undertake non-stat consultation on dredging applications and contentious applications and/or that raise significant issues currently and that approach will continue until the new system is brought in.

Q Where the PLA is the registered owner of the river bed, under what circumstances if any does the PLA consider that the riparian owner could be **trespassing** if they moor a vessel alongside their own land?

A Having taken legal advice on this, the question is both simple and complicated to answer (as, legally, tends to be the way). The simple answer/internal view is that, unless exercising a public right of navigation (and mooring in the course of doing so), then any more permanent mooring over the PLA owned riverbed without permission is a trespass. However, the tidal nature of the river (except upstream of RL&W) is a massively complicating factor.

Q Would the PLA be prepared to host an **accommodation barge** for asylum seekers, along the lines of the Bibby Stockholm in Portland?

A This is a hypothetical question and without wanting to be unduly political, I can't answer it.

Q. Report please on the progress made constructing the proposed new residential boat 'marina' at **Watermans Park**, a joint venture between the developer, Hounslow Council and the PLA.

A Work on site to create the new moorings has stopped. My understanding is that the next phases of work will require the demolition of the concrete structures and a PLA demolition licence will be required (what was in place has expired). Furthermore, we've not had responses to RFI's [requests for information] on the second application relating to responsibility for the works that are going to remain, and various issues relating to the RAMS [risk assessment method statements] and WFD [water framework directive]. It's for the Licensee to act and get the work moving again. Our Head of Estates has recently met with the new representative at the Council, following Mike Sudlow's departure.

Q Is there any progress to report on the provision of **pump-out facilities** in the upper tideway, accessible to passing leisure boats as well as commercial vessels?

A. Pump-out facilities for leisure in the Upper Tideway are listed on the PLA's website (as are visitor moorings). I'm not aware of any new facilities being proposed.