**AN ENGAGEMENT VISION FOR YOUR TIDAL THAMES**

**WORKSHOP OUTPUTS – OCTOBER 2014**

**1.0 INTRODUCTION:**

The purpose of developing an Engagement Vision for the Thames is to invite the wider Thames community to respond to positive and proactive ideas about the future of the tidal Thames in an engaging and visual way. It will not be a conclusive vision in its own right, as a number of these already exist, but a way of testing out and exploring the desires of the wider Thames community, what their priorities are, and how they might best contribute to this future. These ideas will underpin the prioritisation and development of projects within a participatory opportunity map at the next stage of the catchment planning process.

The Your Tidal Thames Project Team and Strategy Group undertook a visioning workshop which consolidated and updated ideas put forward by the wider Thames community in the first round of public consultation. The workshop was designed to enable the Strategy Group to think and comment freely about the ‘The State of the Thames’ 25 years into the past, the present and 25 years into the future. The exercise of looking backwards and forwards enabled their collective imaginations to consider the direction of travel – do we want more or less of something in the future? It also highlighted people’s perceptions of the state of the river at an expert level. The combined knowledge of the group made for a diverse picture of the past, present and future of the river.

The results of the workshop have been presented in the following document in order to characterise areas of progress, decline and opportunity and describe the approach that the partnership will take when championing projects. The idea is that the wider Thames community will be able to centre their contributions in the context of what has been before, building on that which works.

The process also enabled those currently involved to identify gaps in the existing consulting approach and look to address them in the move towards the creation of a tidal Thames-wide catchment plan. Based upon the recommendations of the Strategy Group, Your Tidal Thames will share the resulting Engagement Vision with a broader Thames Community – including commercial interests and wider public – in early 2015.

**2.0 SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP RESPONSES:**

Each of the seven themes identified in the pilot consultation (2013) were explored in small groups using a Ketso workshop kit. These responses were then recorded and analysed using the Ketso software, which prompted the identification of ‘cross-cutting themes’ to group ideas together. Each theme has been elucidated by using the group’s responses within the workshop to draw out the character of change over time, and the desired direction of travel. The recommendations which follow are based on an interpretation of this direction which suggests an agreeable approach to project development and championing, taking into account the ‘wider benefits’ of projects put forward though the catchment-based approach.

**2.1 ACCESS TO RIVERSIDE, ONTO THE RIVER AND ONTO THE FORESHORE:**

The Thames landscape has transformed from an industrial landscape with poor access to the river to one bustling with business and leisure activity as the value of land around it has increased. Yet there are still many individuals and groups who have yet to experience the Thames itself. Through access and engagement, communities can get a better understanding the issues that affect the river, learn to enjoy and value it as a resource, and wish to care for it into the future. New development schemes along the Thames could contribute to these improvements through inclusive and sensitive design and investment. Integrated planning and policy guidance is needed to guide developers and connect initiatives. NGOs could also play a role in engaging developers and building relationships. Once built, existing and new access and public space can be managed and maintained in a strategic way. With access, comes responsibility for safety and wellbeing, and access improvements should be coupled with clear interpretation.

**Moving forward, we wish to champion projects which:**

* **Connect existing and well-used access routes**
* **Consider management, maintenance and interpretation within plans**
* **Preserve and restore public open spaces along the river**
* **Enable enhanced access to the foreshore though events and activities which highlight the safety measure that are required**
* **Trial approaches which work with riverside developers, encouraging them to invest in and design spaces for people**

**2.2 FLOODING AND FLOOD STORAGE**

Engineered solutions are helping to manage flood risk in London which is brought about by tidal surges, freshwater flow from further up the catchment and flash flooding in wet weather. Barriers and hard defences will continue to be required, but greater public and technical understanding of climate change and flood risk has stimulated a preference for sensitive and integrated solutions. These favour working in harmony with natural systems and future-proof existing and prospective engineered projects.

**We wish to champion projects which:**

* **Store flood and storm waters within natural systems, and recognise water as an integral part of the landscape, and seek to open it up rather than hide it away.**
* **Interpret and communicate the process of flood storage and management to the public in places that can see and understand it.**
* **Demonstrate innovation and flexibility in adapting to future climate change**
* **Capitalise on London-wide planning initiatives, and take these further with a commitment to deliver enhancements, integrated water management and water sensitive design.**

**2.3 HABITATS AND WILDLIFE**

The recent past has seen recovery in the number and variety of wildlife within and around the Thames, thanks to improvements in water quality and habitat following the decline of industrial practices. The estuary ecosystem comprises habitats within and around the river, and many of these nature reserves are exemplary, with public enjoyment and monitoring of wildlife increasing in popularity. With engagement, understanding has increased with the public recognising and valuing habitat which are less obvious, such as mud flat and wetland areas. However the tension between resource use and protection continues, and practices and behaviours which harm the environment must continue to be reassessed. Added to this, while Conservation efforts are being planned on a much larger scale with multiple partners involved, working frameworks and relationships between bodies can be complex.

**We wish to champion projects which:**

* **Build upon pre-existing local biodiversity plans and national habitat frameworks**
* **Recognise the potential for building habitat into other projects and maximise opportunities for habitat and biodiversity gains through development.**
* **Engage the public in species and habitat promotion and conservation**
* **Create habitat which builds upon the existing natural capital, by connecting sites together or enhancing habitat and biodiversity value**

**2.4 PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND EDUCATION**

Public perception and understanding of the Thames over the last 25 years has grown and improved to the extent that that the wider Thames community have been proactively engaging in the catchment based approach model of decision making. But despite this expansion, the limitations of public knowledge and education are also recognised. Negative perceptions about the river persist, regarding its health, public health and safety and barriers to access. Opportunities to promote the river and enshrine the Thames as the cultural heart of London will strengthen its position within future political decision making.

**We wish to champion projects which:**

* **Use the Thames Estuary as a classroom**
* **Market what is on offer around and on the river to people, including tourists who live further afield.**
* **Promote education and engagement with aspects of the estuary environment including the ecological and cultural landscape, safety and wellbeing, and moving towards whole watershed education.**
* **Present cohesive and compelling ‘stories’ which interpret human dependence on the river as a resource**
* **Foster concern and community action through active use of the river by the public and educators**

**2.5 REDEVELOPMENT AND RIVERSIDE PLANNING**

‘Redevelopment’ represents the shift from riverside industry buildings to development related to residence, finance and city centre culture. There are also development plans for the central London, Outer London, Essex and Kent for commercial and enterprise purposes, and to house opportunities for siting renewable energy sources such as wind farms. Linked in many ways to access, the conflict between enabling people to access the river and over-developing the areas close to its banks remains, and efforts to climate proof development must be considered. There are concerns for the future of natural environment in and around the Thames which may see an abundance of ‘hard’ landscaping, further stressing an already altered estuary.

**We wish to champion projects which:**

* **Champion good planning to limit negative impact on the natural and recreational environment and maximise environmental gains including climate resilience**
* **Inform and influence planning policy and spatial strategies by making it easy for developers to engage in ‘pre-planning’**
* **Protect and connect existing habitat within development first, and off-set habitat loss second**
* **Open lines of communication with developers and the community**
* **Look to influence development and build in sympathy for the heritage landscape, iconic views and natural environment**

**2.6 RIVER TRAFFIC, TRANSPORT AND COMMERCE**

Traffic on the Thames has shifted in recent times from largely commercial to increased transport for commuting and leisure. The wider Thames community is keen to see more commercial transport on the river – where it presents a more environmentally friendly option than road transport – and better value passenger transport, which is mindful of the pressure of wash on the foreshore and the impact on the growing fishing and recreational river scene. It also sees the potential for enhancing skills and employment through sustainable fishing and wildlife tourism and crucially, watermen’s apprenticeships.

**It is accepted that more engagement is needed on this area, so with that in mind, we wish to:**

* **Support and facilitate further engagement with the PLA, Passenger River Service Companies, Commercial and Development interests on this issue,**
* **Champion projects which pilot transport initiatives which encourage balanced commercial, recreational and passenger use of the Thames and simultaneously protect the Thames environment.**
* **Advocate for and interpret the natural environment alongside human political, cultural and economic histories.**
* **Ensure supported projects do not jeopardise the viability of river infrastructure – including safeguarded wharves – and the sites vital for river services (e.g. boatyards) are identified and preserved.**

**2.7 WATER QUALITY, SEDIMENT, POLLUTION AND LITTER**

Overall water quality within the Thames has and is improving, but it can be hard for the public to understand what ‘healthy’ means. As a result, public perception can lag behind scientific understanding and in addition, where data exists, for example about shellfish quality, it is not necessarily used to engage the community on the wider issue of water quality. Aims for water quality improvements should be aspirational rather than simply meeting increased demand, and focussed on integrated solutions to manage flood, storm and rain water and therefore sewage, misconnections, pollution, surface run-off and litter.

The key to achieving aspirations for water quality is to provide regular opportunities for wide range public stakeholders to engage with statutory agencies and water companies. Improved access to data and clear messaging will encourage understanding and action.

**We wish to champion projects which:**

* **Gather evidence and data either with or for the public to enable decision-making and lobbying**
* **Actively engage the public with water quality issues via outreach, communications and the media and by spreading consistent and cogent messages about water quality.**
* **Improve communication between all stakeholders, especially the general public, by producing more condensed, user friendly methods (including social media) and consultation that are easy to participate in.**
* **Demonstrate the benefits of improved water quality – e.g. better for wildlife, reduced odour, nicer to look at, no rubbish. Reduced costs for the public purse when water costs less to treat.**