

Date: 28 July 2005

TO: All Members of the Executive
FOR ATTENDANCE

TO: All Other Members of the Council
FOR INFORMATION

Dear Sir/Madam

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the **EXECUTIVE** to be held in the **GUILDHALL, ABINGDON** on **Friday, 5th August, 2005** at **2.30 pm**.

Yours faithfully

Terry Stock
Chief Executive

Members are reminded of the provisions contained in Part 2 of the Local Code of Conduct, and Standing Order 34 regarding the declaration of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

A G E N D A

Open to the Public including the Press

A large print version of this agenda and any background papers referred to may be inspected by prior arrangement with Carole Nicholl, Democratic Services Officer, on telephone number (01235) 547631.

Map and Vision

(Page 8)

A map showing the location of the venue for this meeting, together with a copy the Council Vision are attached.

STANDING ITEMS

1. Apologies for Absence

To receive apologies for absence.

2. Minutes

To adopt and sign as a correct record the public minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 1 July 2005, (previously circulated).

3. Declarations of Interest

To receive any declarations of Personal or Personal and Prejudicial Interests in respect of items on the agenda for this meeting.

In accordance with Part 2 of the Local Code of Conduct and the provisions of Standing Order 34, any Member with a personal interest must disclose the existence and nature of that interest to the meeting prior to the matter being debated. Where that personal interest is also a prejudicial interest, then the Member must withdraw from the room in which the meeting is being held and not seek improperly to influence any decision about the matter unless he/she has obtained a dispensation from the Standards Committee.

4. Urgent Business and Chair's Announcements

To receive notification of any matters which the Chair determines should be considered as urgent business and the special circumstances which have made the matters urgent, and to receive any announcements from the Chair.

5. Statements and Petitions from the Public Under Standing Order 32

Any statements and/or petitions from the public under Standing Order 32 will be made or presented at the meeting.

To note that the authority has received a petition containing 82 signatures urging the Council to keep the open air pool open at the Abbey meadows, Abingdon.

6. Questions from the Public Under Standing Order 32

Any questions from members of the public under Standing Order 32 will be asked at the meeting.

7. Referral under the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules or the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules

8. Referrals from the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Other Committees

(a) Scrutiny Committee

Waste Management Contract- Annual Presentation

The Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 14 July 2005, received and considered the Annual Performance and Continuous Improvement Report in respect of the Council's Waste Management Contract 2003/09. In considering the report, the Committee resolved to advise the Executive as follows:

that the Executive be advised:-

- (i) that the Committee is generally content with progress on the Waste Management Contract 2003-09 but is disappointed that none of the performance targets relating to the contract have been met;*
- (ii) that there is an expectation by the Scrutiny Committee that it will undertake the 2005/06 Annual Review of the Waste Management Contract;*
- (iii) that in respect of bulky waste collections, the Scrutiny Committee is willing to undertake a review of the current service provided with a view to providing a more customer focused service;*
- (iv) that the Scrutiny Committee welcomes the work undertaken by the Oxfordshire Leaders' Group to promote partnership working on the removal of fly-posting and identification of fly-tipping across the County and asks the Executive to ensure that these arrangements are put in place as soon as possible.*

(b) **Council**

At the meeting of the Council held on 20 July 2005, it was reported that a petition had been received containing 73 signatures from the residents of St Katherine's House in Wantage, as follows:

"asking the Council to reconsider its decision to replace the travel tokens option with the offer of half-fare bus passes, at least for those over 80, most of whom need to have a taxi whenever they have to go to the Health Centre or visit the town and, even if one is available, many of them cannot physically board a bus."

The Council resolved that the petition set out above was referred without discussion to the Executive for determination, in accordance with Standing Order 13(4)(b).

9. Items Deferred from the Previous Meeting

10. Financial Monitoring

Members are requested to consider any significant budget variances and any requests for virement or permanent budget adjustment.

KEY DECISIONS

11. Forward Plan

(Pages 9 - 12)

To receive the Forward Plan containing Executive decisions to be taken from August to November 2005.

Recommendation

that the Forward Plan be received.

OTHER MATTERS

12. Service Plans Annual Reports 2004/05

Copies of Service Area Annual Reports have been circulated to all Members of the Executive and the Leader of the Opposition. Portfolio Holders have examined them with the respective Assistant Director in their meetings to review 2004/05 performance. Portfolio Holders will report any significant issues arising from the Annual Reports at this meeting.

The Portfolio Holder - Assistant Director performance review meetings also considered service areas' financial performance against budget. Portfolio Holders will report any significant 2004/05 year-end budget variances to this meeting.

Recommendation

that in light of the comments made by the Portfolio Holders, the Executive considers the Service Area Annual Reports and determines whether any specific issue should be examined in more detail.

13. Internal Audit Plan 2004/05 Out-turn

(Pages 13 - 16)

To receive and consider report 57/05 of the Strategic Director.

14. Thames Waterway Plan

(Wards Affected: Abingdon Abbey and Barton; Abingdon Caldecott; Appleton and Cumnor; Faringdon and The Coxwells; Hanneys; Kennington and South Hinksey; Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor; Longworth; North Hinksey and Wytham; Radley; Sutton Courtenay and Appleford;)

(Pages 17 - 30)

To receive and consider report 58/05 of the Strategic Director.

15. Assessing the Housing Needs of Gypsies and Travellers in the Thames Valley Region

Following the recently increased political profile of this subject, the Government Office of the South East has been requiring local authorities to take a fresh look at the housing needs of gypsies and travellers in their area and to match this against existing provision so as to arrive at a conclusion as to unmet needs.

The Association of Councils of the Thames Valley Region (ACTVaR), covering Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, met recently and agreed that a sub-regional assessment of the needs of gypsies and travellers would be a useful exercise that could inform housing and planning development strategies in this area. A working group of authorities was formed with Oxfordshire representation from Cherwell District Council and this group have drawn up a specification for a needs survey, together with indicative costs.

It is proposed that external specialist consultants be employed to carry out this piece of work at a cost per authority of approximately £5,000.

This authority have been asked, alongside all other authorities in the region, to commit to this

contribution and the purpose of this report is to ask members of the Executive to consider whether they would wish to take part in this survey and, if so, to provide a supplementary estimate for £5,000 to pay the authority's contribution.

Officers believe that there is some value in this survey although have some concerns that region wide conclusions will be too general to be of any particular planning use within the district. Officers will propose, therefore, that regardless of whether members wish to take part in this scheme, that the housing needs of gypsies and travellers form a key component of any forthcoming housing needs assessment that takes place in the district. Notwithstanding this, however, up to date information on this subject would be welcome and could prove a significant benefit for a relatively modest cost.

Recommendation

that the Executive indicates whether it wishes to take part in the region-wide survey of the housing needs of gypsies and travellers, and if so, approve a Supplementary Estimate from Contingency of £5,000 to fund this Council's contribution towards the total cost.

16. Share of Right-to-Buy Sales – Deficit relating to 2004/05

Former tenants of the Council retained their right to buy their homes when the housing stock was sold to the Vale Housing Association in February 1995. The sale agreement included a clause that for ten years the Council was entitled to the proceeds of these property sales above an agreed level and after adjustment for costs and loss of rent.

This arrangement ended in 2004/05. For information, the sums received over the term of the agreement have been as follows:

Year	'Agreed' number	Actual sales	Excess	Net sum received* £
1995/96	21	81	60	486,175
1996/97	19	88	69	630,070
1997/98	18	126	108	1,222,950
1998/99	17	94	77	907,808
1999/00	17	112	95	1,829,998
2000/01	17	31	14	477,543
2001/02	17	18	1	28,887
2002/03	17	17	0	(21,433)
2003/04	15	14	0	(17,933)
2004/05	14	5	0	(6,623)
Total				5,537,442

* until 1998/99 there was a Government levy of 20%

If there were no excess sales the Council still had to pay some of the VHA's costs in line with the agreement and the Executive agreed supplementary estimates in 2003/04 and 2004/05 when there were no excess sales (payments are a year in arrears).

When the 2005/06 budget was being drawn up it was not possible to predict the number of sales for 2004/05 so no provision was made for any deficit, although it was borne in mind when setting the level of contingency allocated to unforeseen items. In the event the number of sales means that there is a payment due from the Council to the VHA of £6,623. This is the last such payment.

Recommendation

That Members agree to a supplementary estimate from Contingency of £6,623 in 2005/06 to meet the net cost of preserved Right-to-Buy sales that occurred in 2004/05.

17. Outside Body Appointment - Thames Valley Waste Forum

The authority has been asked by the Association of Councils of the Thames Valley Region (ACTVaR) to appoint a Member representative to the Thames Valley Waste Forum. This is an Executive function and therefore the Executive is requested to appoint a representative to the Forum.

Recommendation

that Councillor Tony de Vere be appointed to the Thames Valley Waste Forum for the 2005/06 Municipal Year.

18. Abingdon Open Air Pool - STOP Business Plan

(Wards Affected: Abingdon Abbey and Barton)

A letter has been received from the STOP campaign, complete with a business plan for the Open Air Pool in Abingdon. A copy of the letter and plan has been sent to every Member of the Council. The business plan can be found on the following website:

<http://legges.users.btopenworld.com/latest.htm>

The Executive is asked to consider the STOP's business plan.

Recommendation

that the Executive determines its response to the business plan.

19. Exclusion of the Public, including the Press

The Chair to move that in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the remainder of the meeting to prevent the disclosure to them of exempt information, as defined in Section 100(I) and Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act when the following items are considered:

Minutes

(Category 1 - Information relating to a particular employee, former employee or applicant to become an employee of, or a particular office-holder, former office-holder or applicant to become an office-holder under, the authority).

(Category 9 - Any terms proposed or to be proposed by or to the authority in the course of negotiations for a contract for the acquisition or disposal of property or the supply of goods or services).

Property Matters

(Category 9)

Mobile Home Parks

(Category 7 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (other than the authority)).

EXEMPT INFORMATION UNDER SECTION 100A (4) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

STANDING ITEMS

20. Minutes

To adopt and sign as a correct record the Exempt minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 1 July 2005, (previously circulated).

KEY DECISIONS

OTHER MATTERS

21. Property Matters

(Page 31)

To consider the property matters attached and nay urgent property matters.

22. Mobile Home Parks

(Wards Affected: Radley)

(Pages 32 - 34)

To receive and consider report 59/05 of the Strategic Director.



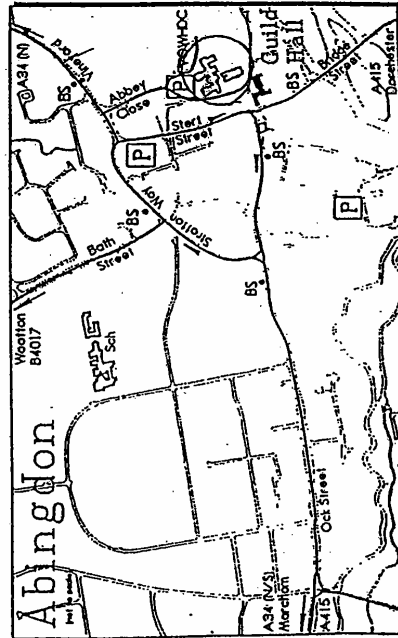
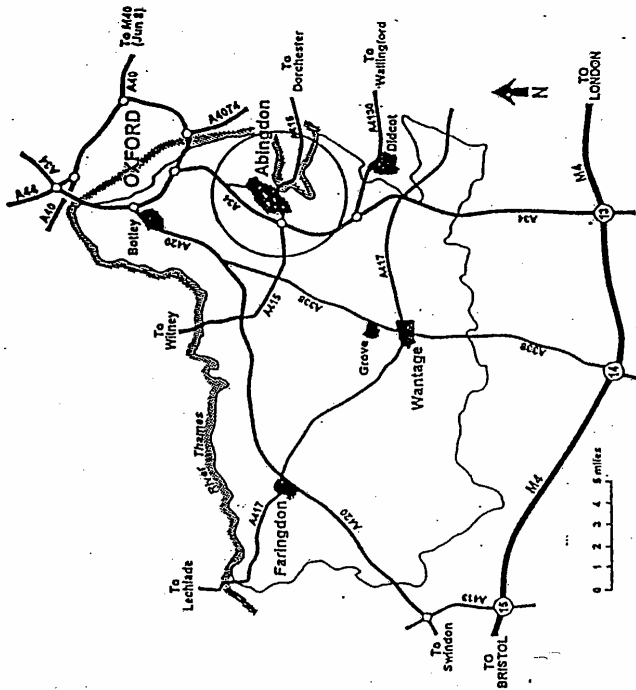
Our Vision - To build and safeguard a fair, open and compassionate community

Our Objectives -

We aim to:

- provide high quality public services which are effective, efficient and responsive to the needs of people within the Vale
- Strengthen local democracy and public involvement through freedom of information and accountability, so that everyone can take part in our community and contribute to the decisions which affect our lives
- Oppose all prejudice and discrimination
- Protect and improve our environment
- Create a safer community
- Encourage a strong and sustainable economy which is beneficial to all who live in, work in or visit the Vale
- Improve the quality of life of all members of the community

Adopted by Vale of White Horse District Council 18 October 1995



KEY : BS = Bus Stop

Vale of White Horse District Council
The Abbey House, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3JE Telephone (0235) 520202

LOCATION MAP



VALE OF WHITE HORSE DISTRICT COUNCIL

FORWARD PLAN

CONTAINING EXECUTIVE KEY DECISIONS TO BE TAKEN FROM 1 AUGUST 2005 - 30 NOVEMBER 2005

This Forward Plan sets out a schedule of Key Decisions likely to be taken over the four-month period shown above. It is a rolling plan, subject to change monthly. A Key Decision is a decision of the Executive which is likely to result in: the Council incurring significant expenditure or making significant savings; a high proportion of the community being affected; or an impact on two or more agendas or services. Executive decisions can be taken by the Executive as a whole, a committee of the Executive, an individual Member of the Executive, an officer of the Council, an Area Committee, through joint arrangements with other bodies, or another Council.

Where the decision is to be taken by the Executive, this comprises the Leader of the Council, Councillor Jerry Patterson, and the following elected Members: Councillors Mary de Vere, Tony de Vere, Joyce Hutchinson, Jim Moley, Roz Smith and Tessa Ward.

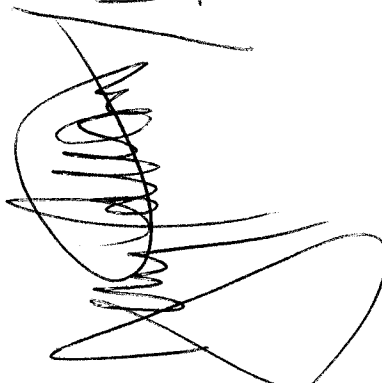
Representations can be made on any of the following issues before a decision is taken. Representations must be made to the relevant contact officer shown below by 5pm on the working day preceding the date of the decision.

Decision	Key decision?	Decision maker	Date first published	Consultees	Consultation method	Contact	Documents used
Financial Monitoring		Executive	This item will appear on the Executive agendas each month	Executive Portfolio Holders	Consultation with budget holders	Steve Bishop, Strategic Director and Section 151 Officer Te. (01235) 540332 steven.bishop@whitehorsedc.gov.uk	2005/06 Budget
Rural Towns Initiative		Executive 5th Aug 2005	July 2005	Councillor Jim Moley		Tim Sadler, Strategic Director Tel. (01235) 540307 tim.sadler@whitehorsedc.gov.uk	None.
Business Rates - Discretionary Relief Criteria Review		Executive 5th Aug 2005	July 2005	Councillor Jim Moley		Tim Sadler, Strategic Director Tel. (01235) 540360 tim.sadler@whitehorsedc.gov.uk	Existing criteria

Decision	Key decision?	Decision maker	Date first published	Consultees	Consultation method	Contact	Documents used
Service Plans		Executive 5th Aug 2005	February 2005	Executive Portfolio Holders		Strategic Directors	Draft Service Plans 2005/06
Internal Audit Plan 2004/05 Out-turn		Executive 5th Aug 2005	August 2005	Councillor Roz Smith		Tim Sadler, Strategic Director Tel. (01235) 540360 tim.sadler@whitehorse dc.gov.uk	Internal Audit Plan 2004/05
Thames Waterway Plan		Executive 5th Aug 2005	August 2005	Councillor Tony de Vere	The authority is being consulted by the Environment Agency.	Tim Sadler, Strategic Director Tel. (01235) 540360 tim.sadler@whitehorse dc.gov.uk	Draft Thames Waterway Plan
Corporate Governance - First Quarter 2005/06		Executive 2nd Sep 2005	September 2005	Councillor Jerry Patterson		Tim Sadler, Strategic Director Tel. (01235) 540360 tim.sadler@whitehorse dc.gov.uk	Report from last quarter 2004/05
Tilsley Park – Health and Fitness Phase 2		Executive 2nd Sep 2005	May 2005	Councillor Joyce Hutchinson	Consult with Management Contractor	Tim Sadler, Strategic Director Tel. 01235 540360 tim.sadler@whitehorse dc.gov.uk	Management Contract
Civic Halls		Executive 2nd Sep 2005	July 2005	Councillor Joyce Hutchinson		Tim Sadler, Strategic Director Tel. (01235) 540360 tim.sadler@whitehorse dc.gov.uk	None.

Decision	Key decision?	Decision maker	Date first published	Consultees	Consultation method	Contact	Documents used
Review of Home Renewal Strategy and Housing Capital Grants Policy		Executive 2nd Sep 2005	May 2005	Councillor Mary de Vere		Tim Sadler, Strategic Director Tel. (01235) 540360	Existing strategy and policy
Future of the Old Gaol	KEY	Executive 2nd Sep 2005	September 2005	Councillor Tony de Vere		Steve Bishop, Strategic Director and Section 151 Officer Tel. (01235) 540332 steven.bishop@whitehorsedc.gov.uk	Consultant's Draft Feasibility Study
Abbey Meadows		Executive 2nd Sep 2005	September 2005	Councillor Jerry Patterson		Tim Sadler, Strategic Director Tel. (01235) 540360 tim.sadler@whitehorsedc.gov.uk	Abbey Meadows Master Plan
North East Area Community Grants		North East Area Committee 8th Sep 2005	September 2005			Tim Sadler, Strategic Director Tel. (01235) 540360 tim.sadler@whitehorsedc.gov.uk	Grant applications
South East Area Community Grants		South East Area Committee 13th Sep 2005	September 2005			Tim Sadler, Strategic Director Tel. (01235) 540360 tim.sadler@whitehorsedc.gov.uk	Grant applications
Abingdon Area Community Grants		Abingdon Area Committee 11th Oct 2005	October 2005			Tim Sadler, Strategic Director Tel. (01235) 540360 tim.sadler@whitehorsedc.gov.uk	Grant applications

Decision	Key decision?	Decision maker	Date first published	Consultees	Consultation method	Contact	Documents used
West Area Community Grants		West Area Committee 18th Oct 2005	October 2005			Tim Sadler, Strategic Director Tel. (01235) 540360 tim.sadler@whitehorse dc.gov.uk	Grant applications
Community Grants		Executive 21st Oct 2005	October 2005	Councillor Joyce Hutchinson		Tim Sadler, Strategic Director Tel. (01235) 540360 tim.sadler@whitehorse dc.gov.uk	Grant applications

 / 11 July 2005

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (AUDIT)
TO THE EXECUTIVE
5 AUGUST 2005

Internal Audit Plan – 2004-05 Out-turn

1.0 Introduction and Report Summary

- 1.1 This report summarises the out-turn of the 2004/05 Internal Audit Plan, which shows a significant improvement since progress was reported in December 2004. This report also provides a summary of all assignments completed as part of the 2004/05 plan, and all unplanned assignments carried out.
- 1.2 This report also highlights any unactioned Internal Audit reports, i.e. those where the Action Plan containing the Internal Audit recommendations has not been returned to Audit with the proposed corrective actions.
- 1.3 The Contact Officer for this report is Sam Turner, Assistant Director (Audit), Tel: 01235 547615.

2.0 Recommendations

To note the content of the report and the improved performance of Internal Audit in 2004/05.

3.0 Relationship with the Council's Vision, Strategies and Policies

- (a) Vision strands A and C.
- (b) No specific strategy.
- (c) Anti Fraud & Corruption Policy

4.0 Background

- 4.1 The target for the out-turn (proportion of the audit plan achieved) in 2004/05 was 75%. The actual out-turn was 61%. There is a Local Performance Indicator (LPI) to monitor this performance. The proportion of the plan achieved is calculated on the basis of the number of audits completed as a proportion of the number of audits within the plan. This is therefore a somewhat crude measurement as audits are not of equal "size", the number of days planned for each audit being in proportion to its relative risk score. The target of 75% represents 43 audits out of a total of 57 audits.

5.0 Explanation of Out-turn and Improved Performance

- 5.1 The out-turn for 2004-05 of 61% represents 35 completed audits. This is the same percentage out-turn as in the previous year however this is in fact an improvement in performance, the reason for which is explained below.
- 5.2 In recent years there has always been a significant time lag whereby each year's audit plan slips into the following year. The 2004/05 audit plan has been cut off at a much earlier time than in previous years. Two audit reports were issued in May 2005 and the last audit report from the 2004/05 audits was issued in July 2005. This is two months sooner than the 2003/04 audit plan when several reports were issued in July 2004, one was issued in

August and one in September 2004. Therefore the year 2004/05 is effectively “shorter” than previous (and future) years. This adjustment was made as a deliberate move to bring the audit plans back into line with financial years. Members will note that the out-turn of the 2003-04 plan was reported to the Executive in December 2004.

5.3 Even taking into account the “shortened” year described above, the out-turn still represents below target performance, which is due to the following factors:

- (i) Sick leave (referred to in para 4.1 above) ceased to be a problem during the last few months of the year the time lost earlier in the year has still had an impact on the achievement of the audit plan. Similarly time spent on “management” including administrative issues improved during the second half of the year however the time lost earlier in the year has still had an impact on the achievement of the audit plan.
- (ii) Some audits took longer to complete than their planned number of days. We did not meet our target of completing 60% of audits within the planned number of days. Only 54% of audits were completed within the planned days and there were 16 audits that took longer than planned; this obviously affects the time available to complete other audits.
- (iii) Two unplanned audits were carried out and a further unplanned audit was commenced during 2004/05 and is to continue in 2005/06. It should be noted that in drawing up the 2004/05 audit plan there was no time allocated for “contingency” therefore all unplanned activity directly affects the time available to carry out the planned activity.

5.4 In addition to measuring the completion of the Audit Plan by the number of audits, as set out in paragraph 5.1, an additional LPI has been introduced for 2004/05 to measure the number of days spent on planned audits as a proportion of the number of days in the plan. This method of calculation was introduced because this is how the Audit Commission measures the achievement against the audit plan so this will give a figure which is comparable with other authorities. This shows achievement of the Audit Plan for 2004/05 as 81%.

5.5 The proportion of auditor days spent on “productive” (i.e. “chargeable”) work was 71%, which is better than the 65% target and better than performance in previous years. This LPI is important in the context of the below-target achievement of the audit plan because it demonstrates the extent to which audit resources are being spent on productive work. From 2004-05 this LPI has been amended to exclude overheads such as Annual Leave from the calculation to give a much more meaningful measurement of the productive v. non-productive time.

6.0 Schedule of Audits Completed (in descending order of Risk Score)

Audit	Date Final Report & Action Plan Issued	Date Action Plan Agreed	Outstanding Responses
Benefits (KFS)	07/03/2005	07/04/2005	
Debtors (KFS)	08/04/2005	10/05/2005	
Council Tax (KFS)	Dec-04	No Recommendations	
Main Accounting (KFS)	18/05/05	Due 05/08/05	
Business Rates (KFS)	Dec-04	15/02/2005	
Refuse & Street Cleansing	03/03/2005		Action Plan to be finalised by end of Aug 2005
Treasury Management (KFS)	09/03/2005	20/04/2005	

Audit	Date Final Report & Action Plan Issued	Date Action Plan Agreed	Outstanding Responses
Benefit Fraud (KFS)	07/04/2005	27/04/2005	
Accounts Payable (KFS)	03/03/2005	No Recommendations	
Capital Accounting (KFS)	30/03/2005	01/06/05	
Payroll (KFS)	24/02/2005	03/06/05.	
ISO Audits	n/a	n/a	
VHA Contract	n/a	n/a	
Recycling	14/03/2005		Action Plan to be finalised by end of Aug 2005
Mobile Home Parks	14/04/2005	03/05/2005	
Sickness Reporting	Nov-04	03/06/2005	
Faringdon Cash Office	03/08/2004	30/09/2004	
Sports Development	Sep-04	07/12/2004	
Pollution	Dec-04	07/02/2005	
Arts Development	Sep-04	17/12/2004	
Staff Allowances	July-05	Due 31/08/05	
Health & Safety (internal)	22/04/2005	Due 31/07/2005	
Abingdon Guildhall	Sep-04	24/11/2004	
Excess Charges	10/05/2005	Due 05/08/2005	
HECA	Dec-04	04/02/2005	
Car Parks	10/05/2005	As Excess Charges	
Training & Recruitment	07/04/2005	03/06/2005	
Facilities Management	Feb-05	08/03/2005	
Seasonal Activities	Dec-04	22/12/2004	
Annual Leave	Nov-04	As sickness reporting	
Office Telephones	07/04/2005	29/04/2005	
Petty Cash	23/02/2005	n/a	
Wantage Civic Hall	03/08/2004	06/09/2004	
Members Allowances	04/08/2004	13/10/2004	
Inventories	n/a	n/a	
Unplanned Audits 2004/05			
Arts Promotion (OYAP)	15/03/2005	n/a	
Telephony Tender	Nov-04	13/01/2005	
Rent accounting	Continued in 2005/06	Report Issued July 05	

KFS = Key Financial System as defined by our External Auditors (the Audit Commission)

7.0 Internal Audit Action Plans

- 7.1 Following each audit all the audit recommendations are issued in an Action Plan which the relevant managers are required to complete with their responses to the recommendations. The Action Plan is then signed off and returned to Internal Audit.
- 7.2 The table at section 6.0 is a schedule of the audits completed, the date each Action Plan was issued and then either the date the completed Action Plan was received or an explanation of the status.

8.0 Effectiveness of Internal Audit

- 8.1 The schedule of audits completed shows that, as at 26 July 2005, there are only 2 Action Plans outstanding, and in fact these have already been drafted and discussed with audit and are currently being finalised. Last year when the outturn for 2003-04 was reported to the Executive in December 2004 there were still 7 Action Plans outstanding.
- 8.2 This highlights the improvement in receiving responses to Internal Audit reports over the past year.

SAM TURNER
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (AUDIT)

TIM SADLER
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR

Background Papers: None

VALE OF WHITE HORSE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report No. 58/05

Wards affected: Abingdon Abbey and Barton, Abingdon Caldecott, Appleton and Cumnor, Faringdon and the Coxwells, Hanneys, Kennington and South Hinksey, Kingston Bagpuize with Southmoor, Longworth, North Hinksey and Wytham, Radley, Sutton Courtenay and Appleford

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECT (PLANNING)
TO THE EXECUTIVE
5 AUGUST 2005

Thames Waterway Plan

1.0 Introduction and Report Summary

1.1 This report comments on the Thames Waterway Plan prepared by the Environment Agency. Whilst welcoming the preparation of the plan concerns are expressed about the open ended nature of some policies and that greater weight should be given to balancing environmental issues with the desire to see greater use of the River. A copy of the Waterway Plan is available in the Members Room.

1.2 The Contact Officer for this report is Alison Blyth, Principal Planning Officer on (01235) 547633.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 *The Environment Agency be thanked for the opportunity to comment on the Thames Waterway Plan, and that amendments to the plan be sought as set out below.*

3.0 Relationship with the Council's Vision, Strategies and Policies

3.1 The Environment Agency are intending that the River Thames Alliance should adopt the Thames Waterway Plan and the Council should modify its own plans and policy documents to reflect it.

4.0 Background & Supporting Information

4.1 At a meeting of the Council's Executive in July 2004 the Council agreed to join the River Thames Alliance and appointed Councillor Green as the Council's representative. Councillor Green has been consulted on this Plan and his comments will be reported at the meeting.

4.2 The purpose of the partnership is to bring together key stakeholders including the Environment Agency, Local Authorities, Riparian landowners and River User Groups to focus on strategic issues affecting the rejuvenation of the non-tidal River Thames.

4.3 One of the objectives of the partnership is to produce jointly agreed proposals for the development and management of the river and the preparation and implementation of a sustainable 'waterway plan' for the Thames.

4.4 It is intended that the Alliance should adopt the Thames Waterway Plan and that individual members, including the Council should modify their own plans and policy documents to reflect it. A Waterway Plan workshop was held in Reading last year from which a summary of draft policies and actions emerged.

4.5 The Council were consulted on the draft policies and actions last October. During the consultation period Jayne Mills of the Environment Agency gave a presentation to relevant Members and Officers of the Council. A small working group of officers and Councillor Green replied, on the Council's behalf, to the draft policies and actions.

4.6 Whilst many of the Council's comments on the draft plan have been taken account in the revised

plan, there are still two main concerns:

- Greater weight should be given to balancing environmental issues with the desire to see greater use of the river.
- Some policies are either inappropriate or are too open ended to be adopted by the Council in the review of its local plan. The proposed vision, core objectives and policies contained in the Draft Plan are included as an appendix to this report.

4.7 The Waterway Plan covers the corridor of the River Thames from its source near Cricklade in Gloucestershire to Teddington on the outskirts of London. The character of the river and its corridor varies vastly over this length. Towards London it is very busy and urban, whereas upstream, it is tranquil and runs through attractive open countryside. Because of its special character long stretches of the Thames flow through areas which are afforded special protection such as green belt, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and open countryside. If the Waterway Plan is not consistent with the policies operating in these areas it could cause confusion and lead to conflict. The vision, core objectives, underlying principles and policies from the plan are included in Appendix 1.

4.8 In view of the above concerns it is suggested that the Council requests the Waterways Plan be amended as set out below. The Agency has provided a consultation response form to assist those making representations and the comments below are framed to fit the form provided. The comments relate only to those sections and policies of the plan where it is considered that a change would be beneficial.

Section 1 – Introduction

Vision (page 4)

Add after Thames 'and its environs'.

Core Objective (page 4)

Bullet point two after "improve and maintain" add "in a sustainable manner"

Bullet point four insert at the start "where appropriate"

Section 3 – Underlying Principles (page 6)

At the start of this section of the plan it would be helpful to describe the diverse character of the Thames and some of the special policy areas through which it runs and that development which is appropriate to one stretch may not be suitable in another. An acknowledgement that conflict can occur between different users of the river, for example cyclists and walkers, or boaters and fishermen would also be helpful.

Principle 5 – Economic Principle (page 7)

The Draft Plan currently states "We will optimise the assets of the River to help achieve a sustainable economy. To avoid any misinterpretation of what is meant by a sustainable economy this principle should be re-written and should make clear the need to balance sustainable economic growth with environmental considerations.

Section 8 – Tourism (page 15)

Policy 3 Tourism policy – no objection to the policy but it should be noted that the Council has yet to decide the direction of its main tourism branding. If the Council does decide to go with for example Oxford it could still give support to The Thames with links on its website and provide information locally.

Section 9 – Sport and Recreation (page 17)

Policy 7 Sport and recreation policy – objection

Bullet point 3 of the possible actions to achieve this policy refers to providing facilities for multi sport clubs. This action should be prefaced with “In appropriate locations”. New facilities for multi sports may not be acceptable in the green belt or areas of open countryside.

Policy 8 Sport and recreation policy – objection
Same comment applies as to Policy 7 above.

Policy 11 Access policy – objection

In environmentally sensitive locations along The Thames it may not be appropriate to encourage the creation of car parks. “Where appropriate” should be inserted in the policy itself and against bullet point one.

Policy 13 Access policy – objection

The third action under this policy refers to provide camp sites or budget accommodation at 16km intervals along the river. The provision of camp sites may again not be appropriate along certain stretches of the river, “where appropriate” should be inserted into the action.

Policy 15 Boating policy – objection

Comment made to Policy 13 applies to the second action under this policy.

Section 10 – Powered boating (page 25)

Policy 17 Boating policy – objection

Add resisting the loss of public slipways to bullet point one and insert “where appropriate” in front of support provision of facilities like dry docks and boat repair yards for the same reasons as set out above.

Policy 18 Permanent mooring policy – objection

As written this policy would allow permanent moorings to be created anywhere along The Thames. The current policy operated by the Council allows permanent moorings to be created only at or adjacent to settlements and by locks where they are most likely to be accessible and less likely to affect the character of the river sites environs. The policy should be amended to reflect this policy approach.

Policy 20 Residential boats policy – strong objection

This policy allows for residential boats that can be navigated but are lived on for all or most of the year, to be located in off-river basins with suitable facilities. Because the Vale is very rural there is unlikely to be any location where it would be appropriate to encourage residential boats. If residential boats were to use existing moorings this would take away spaces for those seeking to moor overnight. This policy should be deleted from the plan.

Policy 21 Hire boat policy – objection

The last bullet point of possible actions under this policy to support the creation of new hire boat bases is to open ended and needs to specify where new facilities may be appropriate.

Policy 22 Passenger boat policy – objection

The same comment under Policy 17 applies to the second bullet point under possible actions.

RODGER HOOD
Assistant Director (Planning)

TIM SADLER
Strategic Director

Background Papers: Thames Waterway Plan – Consultation 2005

Summary of Waterway Plan

Vision

The vision of the Environment Agency and its partners in the River Thames Alliance is **the healthy growth in the use of the freshwater Thames for communities, wildlife, leisure and business.**

The overall aim of the Thames waterway plan is to map out the reinvigoration of leisure and tourism along the river corridor in ways that are both socially inclusive and sustainable.

Core objectives

- Improve and promote access and information for all users (on water and land)
- Improve and maintain the river infrastructure, facilities and services for all users
- Contribute to enhanced biodiversity, heritage, and landscape value in the waterway corridor
- Increase use of the river and its corridor

These objectives can only be achieved through action-oriented partnerships. The recently formed River Thames Alliance offers a focal point for delivery of the plan.

Underlying Principles

Stakeholder engagement principle

The Thames waterway plan will be developed, reviewed and implemented with the involvement of all interested stakeholders.

Sustainability principle

The plan will be a model for sustainable development of the river.

Funding principle

Long term funding is essential to maintain the infrastructure and facilities along the river and implement the plan objectives.

Health principle

We will optimise the assets of the river for people's health and fitness.

Economic principle

We will optimise the assets of the river to help achieve a sustainable economy.

Policies

Policy 1

Development policy We will support appropriate development necessary to achieve the objectives of the Thames waterway plan

Possible actions

- 1 establish a planning policy sub group of the River Thames Alliance

- 2 develop model policies for the Thames for adoption in Local Development Frameworks
- 3 define “appropriate” with reference to the character of the river, for example to ensure that tranquil and remote reaches are not compromised
- 4 follow principles of Thames Environment Design Handbook guidance
- 5 undertake environmental impact and flood risk assessments of relevant projects and proposals
- 6 introduce mitigation and enhancement measures in accordance with Environment Agency guidance

For the river to thrive some development will be necessary to sustain the visibility of its sport, recreation and tourism assets.

Policy 2

Social inclusion policy We will make the benefits of the river available to all society.

Possible actions

- 1 focus attention on areas of deprivation
- 2 gain understanding of barriers and participation
- 3 develop projects to increase involvement of ethnic minorities, women and people with disabilities
- 4 work with clubs and user groups to promote existing opportunities to all

Reports by the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council and Sport England reveal socially excluded groups have low levels of participation.

Policy 3

Tourism policy We will promote the Thames as a “must visit” destination, developing it as a key brand within Tourism South East.

Possible actions

- 1 provide up to date information that inspires people to visit the river
- 2 work in partnership through the River Thames Alliance Marketing Group
- 3 maintain, improve and publicise the visitthames website
- 4 establish a brand identity for the River Thames
- 5 seek positive media coverage to raise the profile of opportunities on the river
- 6 publish up to date tourist information about the river, including camping, angling, hiring a boat and reach information
- 7 provide a telephone answering service about the river
- 8 maintain an atmospheric photographic image library
- 9 erect signs on bridges and main routes identifying the River Thames

The river faces strong competition from other destinations employing significantly greater marketing spend. Users expect high quality information in a variety of media.

Policy 4

Tourism policy We will provide an excellent experience for visitors to the Thames.

Possible action

- 1 set waterway standards for the provision of services and facilities
- 2 encourage take up quality grading schemes including hire boats
- 3 improve provision and quality of riverside facilities

Operators along the river must offer the highest standards.

Policy 5

Tourism policy We will provide information and interpretation for visitors at the riverside.

Possible action

- 1 provide interactive touch screen Thames information at key lock sites and principal towns along the river
- 2 display local information at all lock sites
- 3 include information about the landscape, wildlife and fishing
- 4 provide signs from the towpath to nearby shops, pubs, restaurants and places of interest
- 5 promote sensitive design and siting of signs through adoption of Thames Environment Design Handbook guidance

Visitor surveys have revealed a strong demand for better information.

Policy 6

Sport and recreation policy We will use the river to increase participation in sport and active recreation.

Possible actions

- 1 ensure that the Thames Waterways Plan is consistent with other regional strategies such as the South East Plan for Sport
- 2 encourage innovative, inclusive and sustainable schemes to involve more people
- 3 plan and manage increased use to minimise potential conflict
- 4 publish codes of conduct in consultation with users

The river is one of the region's major natural resources, right on many people's doorstep.

Policy 7

Sport and recreation policy We will work with sports and recreation clubs on the river to help increase their membership.

Possible actions

- 1 support sport governing bodies and clubs with outreach programmes that encourage participation by all sections of society
- 2 provide accurate up to date information about sport and recreation opportunities on the river
- 3 provide facilities for multi sport clubs

Canoe, sailing and rowing clubs provide people with access to boats, training and facilities. Angling clubs can promote participation.

Policy 8

Sport and recreation policy We will realise the open-space opportunities provided by the Thames.

Possible actions

- 1 work in partnership through the river Thames Alliance to ensure that the value of the river is included in open-space audits and development plans
- 2 provide accurate up to date information about sport and recreation opportunities on the river

3 provide facilities for multi sport clubs

To implement the Planning Policy Guidance advice given by Government (in PPG 17).

Policy 9

Access policy We will encourage people to travel to the river on foot or by cycle.

Possible actions

- 1 create footpath links and cycleways to the river, particularly from urban areas
- 2 provide bridges or ferry services to cross river to access the Thames path
- 3 use fingerposts and waymarking to identify all access points

Access to the river by cycle or on foot promotes health and is environmentally friendly.

Policy 10

Access policy We will encourage access by public transport

Possible actions

- 1 encourage bus and train services, especially at weekends, to riverside
- 2 promote access by train or bus, to walk along the towpath returning from a different train/bus stop (using leaflets, web site, posters, special timetabling, shuttle buses, ticket deals etc)
- 3 improve footpath links and signage between stations and river

Making recreation facilities accessible by public transport promotes social inclusion. Public transport is better for the environment than more cars.

Policy 11

Access policy We will provide facilities for those needing access by car.

Possible actions

- 1 create car parks to serve popular angling and boating reaches
- 2 provide adjacent slipways where necessary

Cars are used for access by anglers carrying bulky equipment, and by people bringing canoes and trailed boats. 55% of walkers use cars to get to the riverside and parking is needed for people using wheelchairs.

Policy 12

Access policy We will provide access for people with disabilities.

Possible actions

- 1 carry out an audit to identify barriers to access
- 2 provide ramps for wheelchair access to lock sites and Thames path
- 3 create wide level paths free from stiles, to accommodate wheelchairs
- 4 create access and platforms to facilitate angling by people with disabilities
- 5 introduce scent trail and interpretation for people with visual impairment
- 6 provide accurate information so that people with disabilities are able to make an informed decision about suitability of access

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requires service providers to take reasonable steps to overcome barriers to access. In addition, the accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems must be considered when Rights of Way Improvement Plans are prepared.

Policy 13

Access policy We will encourage walking alongside the river and on the adjoining access land and rights of way network.

Possible actions

- 1 align the Thames path next to the river on legally defined public rights of way
- 2 create, sign and promote circular walks incorporating the Thames Path
- 3 provide campsites or budget accommodation at 16km intervals (a day's walk)
- 4 provide drinking water at all lock sites
- 5 work with the National Trail Officer to promote the Thames path

The Thames is the only river to have a designated National Trail. Walking is a low cost activity that promoted health.

Policy 14

Access policy We will encourage cycling alongside the river where it is appropriate.

Possible actions

- 1 clarify where cycling is currently permitted
- 2 define on a reach, reach basis lengths that are appropriate with reference to the Thames path National Trail criteria
- 3 restore the historic towpath and provide new bridge crossings
- 4 work with Sustrans and the National Trail Office to make local improvements to path surface and access

There is demand for leisure cycling on traffic-free routes. Cycling is a low cost activity that promoted health.

Policy 15

Boating policy We will make it easier to take up low cost boating.

Possible actions

- 1 provide canoe portage points above and below all locks
- 2 provide campsites or budget accommodation at 16km intervals (a day's paddle/row)
- 3 improve slipways and car/trailer parks
- 4 provide white water for canoeists at existing weirs where feasible

It is important that people with low incomes are able to enjoy boating.

Policy 16

Angling policy We will encourage angling along the river.

Possible actions

- 1 support taster sessions with free block licences and reduced price for beginners licences

- 2 provide improved access and facilities, particularly for anglers with disabilities
- 3 promote fishing permits for use at locks and weirs
- 4 provide up to date information on free and day ticket lengths
- 5 promote angling on the Environment Agency's "free" towpath length below Staines
- 6 research ways to manage crayfish

Fishing is an outdoor sport, readily accessible at a number of levels with the potential to be totally inclusive.

Policy 17

Boating policy We will encourage more boats to use the river.

Possible actions

- 1 resist loss/support provision of support facilities like dry docks and boat repair yards
- 2 provide facilities for boats (toilets, water points, refuse disposal etc)
- 3 marketing to raise awareness of the river
- 4 run courses in boat ownership and boat handling skills
- 5 promote events on the river

The number of privately owned powered boats has dropped 30% since 1990, from 12993 to 9049 in 2004.

Policy 18

Permanent mooring policy We will encourage the creation of new permanent moorings.

Possible actions

- 1 promote creation of off-river basin with soft edge treatments
- 2 encourage improvement of existing moorings on the river supporting their extension where appropriate
- 3 examine capacity of reaches to accommodate more boats (with particular reference to lock use generated)

Adequate provision of moorings is the key requirement for boating. Existing moorings are at or near capacity.

Policy 19

Visitor mooring policy We will provide visitor moorings to meet boaters' needs.

Possible actions

- 1 provide sufficient value for money visitor and overnight moorings at all riverside towns and attractions
- 2 create moorings at new sites where required to meet the waterway standard
- 3 encourage boaters to welcome other boats to moor alongside

Adequate provision of moorings is the key requirement for boating.

Policy 20

Residential boats policy We will support the creation of new residential boat moorings in off-river basins with suitable facilities.

Possible actions

- 1 consider the AINA guidance and adopt as appropriate
- 2 limit the proportion of berth in a marina that are for residential use

Policy 21

Hire boat policy We will encourage a thriving, high quality hire boat sector on the river.

Possible actions

- 1 provide value for money visitor and overnight moorings at all riverside towns and attractions
- 2 provide facilities for boats (toilets, water points, refuse disposal etc)
- 3 support quality grading scheme for boats on the river
- 4 work with trade bodies to support the hire boat industry
- 5 market the river as a tourism destination
- 6 support the creation of new hire boat bases

Since 1980 the number of holiday hire boats registered on the Thames has fallen by 85%, from 815 to 123 in 2004.

Policy 22

Passenger boat policy We will support scheduled passenger boat services along the river.

Possible actions

- 1 create landing stages at all major towns and attractions
- 2 resist loss/support provision of support facilities like dry docks and boat repair yards
- 3 integrate timetable with bus and train links
- 4 give priority at locks to scheduled service trip boats if necessary to keep to timetable
- 5 advertise and promote services (including timetables on web sites)
- 6 build river bus stops with shelter and timetables
- 7 evaluate possible urban commuter services

Passenger trip boats provide access on the river for people who cannot afford to hire or buy a boat.

Policy 23

Freight policy We will encourage commercial transport of freight on the river.

Possible actions

- 1 give full consideration to waterway freight opportunities in regional spatial strategies, sub regional plans and local development frameworks
- 2 commission a study into the potential for freight transport on the river

Water transport is more environmentally friendly than road or rail.

Policy 24

Landscape policy We will conserve and enhance the special characteristics of landscape value in the river corridor.

Possible actions

- 1 conduct a consistent and comprehensive landscape assessment of the entire river, updating existing studies where necessary
- 2 form local partnerships (similar to the Thames Landscape Strategy Hampton to Kew) that will use local river corridor characterisations to develop an agreed set of local prioritised actions, based on thorough understanding of the nature, built and cultural heritage
- 3 sensitively manage the key landscape, landmarks, locks, open spaces and vistas
- 4 respect and restore historic features
- 5 minimise the impact from potentially intrusive development
- 6 introduce selective landscape and amenity enhancements to reduce visual intrusion from recreation access, car parking and boat mooring facilities
- 7 create ecological buffer zones between the river and adjacent arable fields, and encourage a greater diversity of indigenous trees, shrubs and other plants where biodiversity has been reduced by agricultural practices
- 8 introduce planting to screen intrusive features (for example road, rail and pylon routes) and frame views
- 9 reinstate grassland and water meadows and introduce or regenerate woodland and scrub habitats on marginal land
- 10 review, update and promote wide adoption of the Thames Environment Design Handbook
- 11 restore river infrastructure using traditional construction materials and appropriate designs (specified in Thames Environment Design Handbook)
- 12 retain headroom restriction on boat size imposed by Osney Bridge

The special landscape qualities are a vital part of the visitor experience.

Policy 25

Climate change policy We will plan how the river is managed to respond to climate change.

Possible actions

- 1 identify how best to adapt to climate change, minimising the negative effects, whilst taking advantage of more positive aspects
- 2 plan how to protect the interests of recreation and navigation whilst meeting the demands of flood risk management, water supply and protection of key water dependent environmental sites
- 3 consider the management implications arising from possible lower flows in summer and higher flows in winter
- 4 provide space for wildlife to adapt to climate change (buffer zones, wildlife corridors etc)

Our climate is changing and instances of violent storms, droughts in summer and floods in winter seem set to increase. This is likely to have significant impact on river levels.

Policy 26

Biodiversity and fisheries policy We will enhance biodiversity and fisheries quality along the Thames and its corridor.

Possible action

- 1 conserve and enhance valued species and habitats with particular reference to river based Biodiversity Action Plan (BPA) species such as water vole, otter, white-clawed crayfish, depressed river mussel, Loddon Lily and fish BAP species, including barbell, salmon, lamprey, shad, grayling, brown trout and bullhead
- 2 conserve and enhance key features of particular wildlife importance, including flood meadows, backwaters, islands, natural banks and weir streams and pools
- 3 identify key areas of habitat protection and enhancement and manage to promote biodiversity
- 4 use soft bank protection, with hard edge works introduced only when essential and that incorporate compensation for loss of natural habitat when possible

- 5 where possible introduce bank enhancement to existing lengths with predominantly hard edge treatments
- 6 improve access for fish to reach spawning areas by modifying existing fish passes, where necessary and by introducing new passes or more natural by-pass channels around weirs
- 7 protect and restore the natural river environment, including valuable in-stream features such as gravel shoals, emergent reed beds and islands
- 8 protect underwater plant and fish communities
- 9 balance the recreation needs with the need to protect key water dependent sites when managing water levels
- 10 ensure that works and activities do not result in the transfer and colonisation of invasive non-native plant and animal species
- 11 raise wider awareness of the threat of invasive non-native plants and animals to the river's natural environment character
- 12 produce site management plans (which include biodiversity and fisheries considerations) for every lock

The wildlife and habitats of the Thames are intrinsically linked to its character and thus, to the aesthetic, social and economic value of the river and its corridor to those living and working nearby and those using and visiting it, there is a direct link between fisheries quality and the value of the Thames for angling.

Policy 27

Heritage policy We will maintain and enhance the cultural heritage, historic assets and archaeological value of the river and its corridor.

Possible action

- 1 manage land, buildings and structures (such as locks, bridges and weirs) of historic interest, or harmony with their setting, design, materials and construction methods
- 2 carry out an audit of heritage features
- 3 protect and conserve buildings, sites and objects of archaeological, architectural, engineering or historic interest
- 4 raise awareness of historical significance of sites along the Thames through education, signage and interpretation initiatives

The Thames is world renowned for its character and history which helps to attract visitors and thus contributes to social and economic well-being.

Policy 28

Education policy We will optimise the contribution the river can make to education and life long learning.

Possible actions

- 1 establish an education sub group of the River Thames Alliance
- 2 introduce learning projects in partnership with education resource providers like the River & Rowing Museum. Including a pilot using passenger boats on the river
- 3 produce curriculum support material based on the river corridor

The river provides an accessible and interesting resource, relevant to many education disciplines.

Policy 29

Visitor health and safety policy We will adopt a consistent approach to visitor risk management

Possible actions

- 1 carry out assessment and introduce risk control measures in accordance with the guiding principles established by the Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group
- 2 gather information on accidents and near misses from user groups

We believe that it is possible to achieve acceptable levels of risk and enhance the environment and encourage public access. Safety, access and conservation need not be mutually exclusive.

Policy 30

Service and facilities policy we will provide services and facilities that meet the reasonable needs of all our users.

Possible actions

- 1 set waterway standards for the provision of services and facilities
- 2 identify gaps in provision and introduce new or improved facilities to meet need
- 3 produce design guidelines for new facilities
- 4 produce lock site management plans

Other competitor waterways have already established standards. We will lose users if we fail to meet expectations.

Policy 31

Monitoring and review policy We will monitor the impacts from implementing the Thames waterway plan.

Possible actions

- 1 carry out Strategic Sustainability Assessment of the plan as it is developed and reviewed
- 2 gather data and research patterns of recreation use
- 3 set realistic, measurable targets with time scales, for every policy
- 4 measure social, economic and environmental impacts
- 5 formally review the plan in 2010

We need to be able to assess how successful we are in meeting the plan's objectives. It is important to respond to changes in people's activities and lifestyles. We must also be able to detect any adverse cumulative impacts from incremental change.

By virtue of paragraph(s) 9 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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