

**THAMES ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP  
REPORT OF MEETING  
Held on 14 NOVEMBER, 2018 – 1500 – 1630  
PORTCULLIS HOUSE**

Supported by



1. The meeting was chaired by John Howell, MP for Henley.
- 1.1 Attending were representatives from Thames Councils, PLA (Tilbury), EA, River User Groups, Thames Business and Recreational Boaters.
- 2 Subject for the meeting was “THAMES FUNDING”
3. Papers were delivered by:
  - 3.1 From the Environment Agency, Dave Bedlington
  - 3.2 From Surrey County Council, Cllr Mike Goodman and Officer Doug Hill
  - 3.3 From British Marine Federation, Mike Cook
  - 3.4 From Thames Motor Boaters Association. – Anthony Riley
4. **PAPER BY Dave Bedlington - EA Thames FRCM**
  - 4.1 Advised multi-faceted responsibilities all requiring funding, including water supply, movement of treated sewage, waste, conservation, ecology, fisheries, recreation, navigation and tourism.
  - 4.2 Probably one of the most managed rivers in the country.
  - 4.3 It is a mainly dry catchment with less rain than Sydney,
  - 4.4 However when the river is in spate there is very little that can be done other than opening all weirs and let the water flow down to the sea.
  - 4.5 There are currently three major flood prevention measures:
    - 4.5.1 Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme– Now mainly funded and currently out to planning
    - 4.5.2 Marlow Flood Plain scheme – Virtually completed
    - 4.5.3 Major Lower Thames Scheme by pass channels and weir rebuilding below the Jubilee River. Currently limited to critical activities to maintain programme whilst funding is secured.

**5. PRESENTATION COVERING THE STALLED LOWER THAMES FLOOD PREVENTION SCHEME – Surrey CC - Cllr Mike Goodman and Doug Hill**

- 5.1 Cllr Mike Goodman opened by suggested that during the floods 2014 there was a lot of effort in Somerset but Surrey was also badly affected. Somerset protection work has been completed but Surrey and other businesses and houses below the Jubilee River are still subject to flooding.
- 5.2 Surrey's power point presentation indicated the huge losses to the economy and personal tragedies with homes being flooded. It is essential that the entire scheme is delivered.
- 5.3 Surrey CC has the vision; *"To reduce flood risk to people living and working near the Thames, enhance the resilience national important infrastructure, contribute to a vibrant local economy and maximise the social and environmental value of the river.*
- 5.4 Government expect funding to come from local authorities and partners. The is scheme is eligible for £233m of Grant in Aid from central government plus £60m pledged in autumn 2014 budget. There are £61m contributions pledged by local councils, Thames Regional Flood & Coastal Committee and Local Enterprise Partnerships. Leaving a funding gap of approximately £234m at current cost levels.
- 5.4.1 Involvement of insurance companies would be helpful but they required answers to the return on their capital investment.
- 5.5 Dave Bedlington suggested that a "Game Change" might be financial contribution from the development of the new runway at Heathrow. There can be quid pro funding.
- 5.6 There might also be possibility for funding from UK Highways Authority.

**6. VALUE AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR TOURISM AND RECREATIONAL BOATING. SALES, SERVICE AND BOAT HIRE. – British Marine - Mike Cook**

- 6.1 Mike Cook focused on the economic benefits of boating tourism and recreational boating, both in London and Non-Tidal Thames.
- 6.2 He extrapolated a combined estimated figure of £200-250m GDP for London and Thames Valley, being £100m revenue and £100-150m added value.
- 6.3 Explained the sector imbalance, being that recreational boating is well established on the Upper Thames, but very little in London.
- 6.3.1 Conversely, that boating tourism well established in London, but very little on the Upper Thames.
- 6.3.2 This leads to the obvious opportunities of bringing back Boat Hire to the Upper Thames and more Marinas into London.

6.3 He explained that the major barriers stopping investment in these areas was the condition of the river (infrastructure funding) and in London, planning policy and a lack of vision.

**7. CRUISING, MOORINGS, ENVIRONMENT, AND RECREATION. INCLUDING THAMES PATH – Thames Motor Boaters Association - Anthony Riley**

7.1 Anthony Riley suggest that drastic cuts in government funding have had major impact on provision of services and maintenance of the non-tidal Thames. From improvement some years ago there is now a significant risk of deterioration on Thames infrastructure.

7.2 From their registration charges boaters on the Thames provide 50% of the current revenue income.

7.3 Environment Agency are suggesting a funding gap of circa £15m - £20m to maintain the navigations under their control of which the most significant is the non-tidal Thames. The above inflation increases year on year of 5.7% from January 2018 can only have a 'sticking plaster' effect in overcoming the lack of funding.

7.4 EA is severely limited by Thames Conservancy legislation which prevents alternative methods of financing the Thames.

7.5 Millions of people visit the Thames to benefit their wellbeing – this is good but it makes no contribution to the cost of maintaining the river.

7.6 He asks:

7.6.1 Government recognises the Public Benefit of the waterways.

7.6.2 Government permits and enables changes to current legislation

7.6.3 If Government may decides to transfer the EA waterways to CRT sufficient government support would likely to be provided.

7.7. The question is how we can ensure a Thriving, Vibrant and Valued Waterway.

**8. COMMENTS MADE BY REPRESENTATIVES AT THE MEETING.**

8.1. Comment from Marcel Steward – Strategic Projects Manager – Runnymede Borough Council.

8.1.1 On Lower Thames Flood Prevention Scheme

a.	Involvement of Insurance companies. There could be an improvement in the levy on policies with two existing suggestions on the table all with challenges.
b.	Return of capital investment on major flood plan infrastructure.

8.1.2 On Tourism and use of the Thames:

a.	Note that there are many 'Honey Spots' with huge potential not realised
b.	Many similar places on the Upper Tideway – not realised
c.	River should be considered as the whole not split

8.2 John Pleace (RTA Co Ltd Director and BM) requested that when the Lower Thames Scheme is developed the lessons learnt from the problems with the Jubilee when it came on stream are not forgotten.

8.3 John Howell asked for clarification of the £4m boat registration that might be at risk.

9. **WIND UP COMMENTS BY THE CHAIR, JOHN HOWELL, MP**

9.1 John Howell advised that had found the presentations valuable and succinct.

9.2 The challenge is to identify from the different issues presented which are the issues to prioritise.

9.3 It could be that he sponsors a private members' bill (PMB). This a type of public **bill** that can be introduced by either members of the House of Commons or House of Lords who are not Ministers.

9.3.1 This would require some work prior to the next Thames APPG meeting.

9.4 Of major importance is the delivery of the Lower Thames Flood Prevention programme.

THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 1630 ON SCHEDULE.

*MS-16 November, 2018*