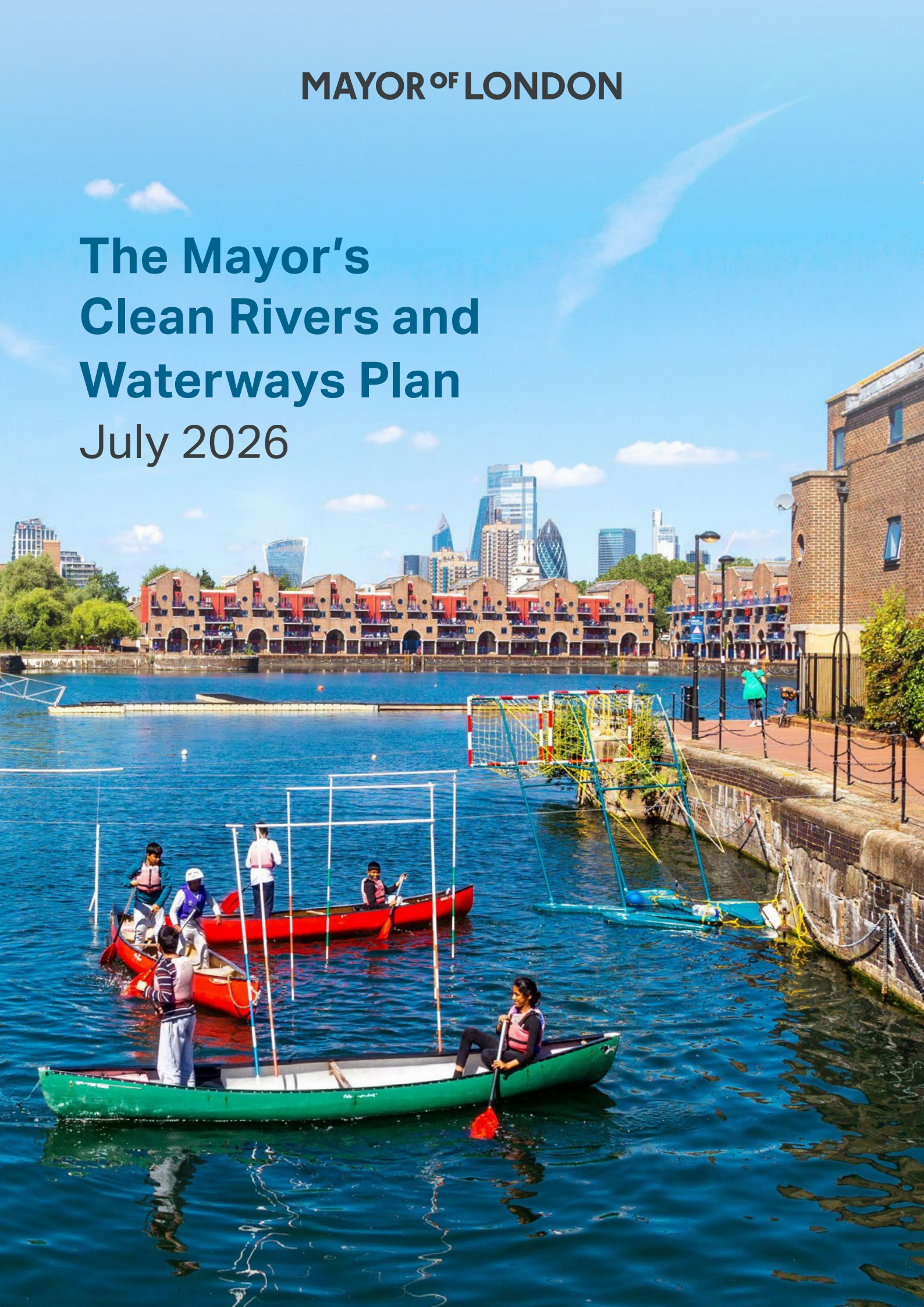
MAYOR OF LONDON

The Mayor's Clean Rivers and Waterways Plan

July 2026



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Front cover image:
Shadwell Basin Outdoor Activity Centre, London, UK

Foreword



This plan marks the beginning of one of the world's most ambitious urban waterway clean-up efforts. It sets out what we need to do to reduce pollution, revive nature and restore public access to our waterways to make every one of them clean, healthy and thriving.

When I became Mayor in 2016, I was told it would take nearly 200 years to bring levels of air pollution down to within legal limits. London met legal air quality limits in 2024. Our record on air quality shows what is possible when political ambition is matched with determination, investment and collaboration. Now we must bring that same focus to our waterways.

London's iconic waterways are the lifeblood of our city. They stretch across more than 600 kilometres, shaping neighbourhoods, supporting wildlife, providing spaces for recreation and active travel, strengthening our resilience to climate change and helping to define London as one of the world's great cities.

But too many of these places have been neglected, polluted or cut off from the communities around them. Habitats that should support otters, kingfishers, water voles, fish and other wildlife have been damaged by sewage, road runoff, litter and decades of underinvestment. The impact has been felt by nature and by Londoners, particularly those communities that already experience the greatest environmental inequality.

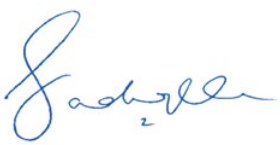
When Londoners elected me for a historic third term, I promised that the decline of our waterways would end. We have made incredible progress to clean up London's air over the last decade, and now the time is right to clean up our water. I said we would develop a bold plan to make London a swimmable city, restore lost nature and open up more blue spaces for Londoners to enjoy safely. This ambitious plan is the result of our work with partners across the capital.

Progress is already being made. The Thames Tideway Tunnel – London's new super sewer – is diverting millions of tonnes of sewage away from the tidal Thames, helping to reduce storm sewage pollution by around 95 per cent in a typical year. Beavers and water voles have returned to parts of our city.

Community groups and community scientists are already helping to monitor pollution and care for rivers. But we need to go further and faster.

That is why we will work with partners to invest more than £1.8 billion by 2030, alongside more than £13.6 million of mayoral funding to tackle pollution, restore nature and open up new swimming and recreation opportunities, improving access to help Londoners enjoy and reconnect with their waterways. Over the lifetime of this plan, we will create and restore 550 hectares of waterway habitat, restore 80 kilometres of river, improve habitats for fish and other aquatic wildlife, re-establish water vole populations and create or restore 400 ponds across London.

Our waterways belong to us all, and looking after them must be a shared endeavour. I want to thank the organisations, communities, experts and volunteers who have helped shape this plan and who will be central to delivering it. Together, we can create a greener, fairer, healthier and more resilient London for everyone.



Sir Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London



© Thames21, Turkey Brook, Enfield

> London's iconic waterways are the life blood of our city. They belong to us all, and looking after them must be a shared endeavour.

Executive Summary

London is a city shaped by water. Its rivers, canals, docks, reservoirs, wetlands and ponds have supported trade, transport, public health, culture, wildlife and recreation for centuries.

They remain among the capital's greatest assets; but their benefits are not shared equally. The complex system of ownership and management means their health is still too often undermined by pollution, poor access, fragmented habitats and poor performance by those responsible for their care.

The Mayor has convened more than 50 organisations – including government bodies, boroughs, water companies, regulators, environmental charities, community groups and recreation partners – to develop a shared 10-year plan for London's waterways. The plan brings together the ambition, evidence, investment and partnerships needed to reduce pollution, revive nature and revitalise public access.

This plan is focused on delivery. It establishes 48 actions and 17 goals under four themes, to be delivered by 2036. Early investment and delivery will be concentrated in 10 strategic locations where coordinated action can bring rapid and significant improvements for people and nature.

What clean and healthy waterways mean for London

- **Cleaner waterways with less sewage, road runoff, litter and harmful pollution.**
- **More and better habitats for fish, birds, water voles, beavers and other wildlife.**
- **Safer and more inclusive access to blue spaces, including new and improved swimming and recreation sites.**
- **Stronger community stewardship, better monitoring and clearer accountability across the water system.**

“This plan is focused on delivery. It establishes 48 actions and 17 goals under four themes, to be delivered by 2036.”

The four themes are as follows:

1



Water quality

Cutting pollution, strengthening monitoring and increasing accountability across the water sector and its regulators.

2



Nature

Creating and restoring waterway habitats, reconnecting fragmented habitats and enabling the return of native species.

3



Access

Improving the physical infrastructure needed for safe, inclusive access to and along waterways.

4



Inclusion and engagement

Widening participation, strengthening community connections and ensuring the benefits of waterways are felt by Londoners from every background.

What will change:

London will become a swimmable city

The Mayor will invest funds to improve open-water recreation sites and expand safe access.

Sewage pollution will not be tolerated

Partners will work to stop pollution at source; reduce the impact of storm overflows; and fix sewage-polluting misconnections at more than 200 sites within five years.

Londoners will see nature return

The plan will support 550 hectares of created or restored waterway habitat; 80 kilometres of restored rivers; and 400 created or restored ponds.

Lost rivers and habitats will be brought back to life:

Partners will identify opportunities to daylight buried rivers, reconnect rivers to floodplains and create fish superhighways.

Waterways will be more welcoming and accessible

New and improved waterside paths, better signage, water safety education and community-led improvements will make blue spaces easier to reach and enjoy safely.

Londoners will have more power to protect their waterways

Community science, volunteering and community partnerships will help identify pollution; shape local priorities; and support accountability across the system.

> Delivery will require determination and collaboration. This plan is both a delivery programme, and a call to action: to water companies, regulators, government, boroughs, landowners, businesses, NGOs and communities.



© Sylvie Belbouab, Paddleboarding

Acknowledgements

This plan has been produced by the Mayor of London with the support of a wide range of organisations and contributors. The organisations listed below have worked in partnership to develop the evidence, principles, goals and actions set out in this plan, and have committed to playing an active role in delivering them over the next 10 years. Many others also contributed through working groups, workshops and consultations.

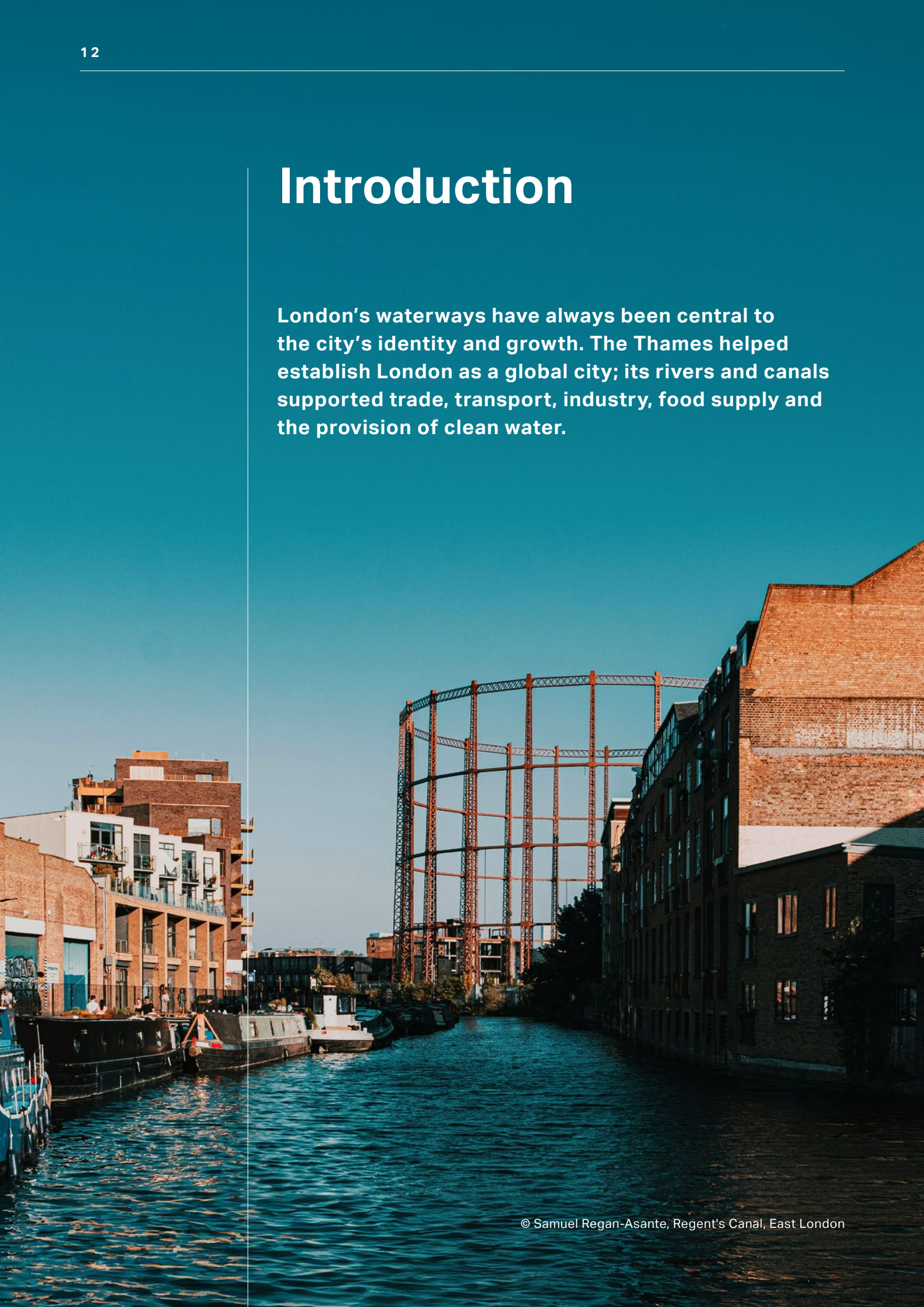
- Action for Race Equality
- The Black Swimming Association (BSA)
- Bridging Aquatics
- Canal & River Trust (CRT)
- The Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management (CIWEM)
- Citizen Zoo
- Clean and Healthy Waterways Youth Advisory Panel
- Clean Water Alliance
- Crane Valley Partnership
- The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)
- Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)
- Engage-Us
- Environment Agency (EA)
- Good Gym
- Greenspace Information for Greater London (GiGL)
- Groundwork London
- London Borough of Harrow
- Imperial College London
- Lee Valley Regional Park Authority
- London Assembly Environment Committee
- London Boroughs Biodiversity Forum (London Borough of Barnet)
- London Councils
- London Legacy Development Corporation
- London National Park City
- London Sports Trust
- London Wildlife Trust
- Middlesex University London
- National Highways
- National Trust
- Natural England
- The Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat)
- Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation
- Out and Wild
- Parks for London
- Port of London Authority (PLA)

- The Ramblers
- River Action UK
- Rivers in London Partnership (RiPL)
- The Rivers Trust
- St. Giles Trust
- South East Rivers Trust
- Stormwater Shepherds
- Swim England London
- Thames Estuary Partnership
- Thames Festival Trust
- Thames Skills Academy
- Thames Water
- Thames21
- The Ahoy Centre
- Tideway
- Transport for London (TfL)
- Walk Wheel Cycle Trust
- Women in Tri UK
- The Zoological Society of London (ZSL)

The Mayor also secured the support of Bloomberg Associates, a philanthropic consultancy which works with cities around the world and is part of Bloomberg Philanthropies.

Introduction

London's waterways have always been central to the city's identity and growth. The Thames helped establish London as a global city; its rivers and canals supported trade, transport, industry, food supply and the provision of clean water.



© Samuel Regan-Asante, Regent's Canal, East London

Today, waterways continue to shape London's neighbourhoods; support nature; offer routes for walking and cycling; provide places for leisure; and help the city adapt to a changing climate.

London's expansion created deep environmental pressures. The construction of the sewer system was one of the most important public health achievements of the modern era, but as the city continued to grow, investment in water infrastructure failed to keep pace. By the 1950s, parts of the Thames were so polluted they were unable to sustain life. More than 20 of London's rivers were buried or heavily modified to make way for development. Canals that had once been central to the city's economy were neglected.

This damage was not felt equally. Industrial activity, pollution, poor-quality public realm and lack of access have too often been concentrated in lower-income areas. Many communities living near waterways have not experienced them as safe, welcoming or theirs to enjoy. Cleaning up London's waterways is therefore not only an environmental task; it is a matter of public health, fairness and social justice.

Climate change makes these challenges even more urgent. More intense rainfall can overwhelm sewers and drainage systems, causing flooding, polluted runoff and sewage overflows. Hotter, drier summers can reduce river flows, concentrate pollution and place stress on wildlife. Rising sea levels increase the need for long-term tidal flood risk management. Communities already facing economic and social disadvantage are often most exposed to flooding, overheating and environmental harm.

The progress made over recent decades shows that decline is not irreversible. Regulation, investment, local campaigning, volunteering and nature recovery have helped bring parts of the Thames, Wandle, Lea, Crane and other catchments back to life. Trout, beavers and water voles have returned to parts of London, and the Regent's Canal has become a vibrant recreational corridor. Community groups and community scientists have shown how local knowledge can drive action. The Tideway Tunnel marks a major turning point for the tidal Thames - alongside major sewage works upgrades and the construction of the Lee Tunnel, this feat of engineering will protect the tidal Thames for years to come.

> Cleaning up London's waterways is not only an environmental task; it is a matter of public health, fairness and social justice.



Waterways visualisation
Based on original image, © DK-CM

Yet the environmental health of most of London's waterways remains far from good. They are affected by sewage spills; road runoff; drainage misconnections; litter, fly-tipping; disconnected and poor-quality habitats; and fragmented management responsibility. Public concern about sewage and river pollution has grown sharply, and Londoners rightly expect faster action.

The need for reform of the water sector is now well established. In its 2025 final report, the Independent Water Commission (led by Sir Jon Cunliffe) called for a fundamental reset, citing the absence of a long-term strategy for water; a complex regulatory landscape; underinvestment by private water companies; excessive shareholder payouts; and a lack of transparency. Through this plan, the Mayor will continue to hold Thames Water and the wider water industry to account, while pressing government for the regulatory change needed to deliver lasting improvements to London's waterways. This plan is designed to build long-term resilience into London's waterways and the communities around them. It will clean up pollution; restore natural processes; improve access; strengthen monitoring; and widen participation. Above all, it will help Londoners see waterways and blue spaces (defined as rivers, canals, docks, reservoirs, wetlands and ponds) as part of the city's shared public inheritance.

Principles for delivery

The plan is underpinned by principles that should guide decisions, investment and delivery across every theme and strategic location.

Support safe enjoyment:

More Londoners should be able to access and enjoy waterways – but this must be underpinned by clear water safety advice, appropriate infrastructure and honest communication about where activities such as swimming are and are not safe.

Embed equity and inclusion:

Fairness must shape priorities, investment and engagement, with particular focus on communities most affected by pollution, climate risk and poor access to nature.

Prioritise nature-based, climate-resilient solutions:

Wetlands, rain gardens, sustainable drainage, restored floodplains and naturalised riverbanks should be used wherever they can reduce pollution, manage flood risk and support biodiversity.

Work at catchment level:

Water quality and river health depend on the whole catchment – where water comes from, how it moves through the landscape and what affects it along the way. This means problems should be addressed at source.

Deliver place-based and evidence-led action:

Every waterway and community is different, so delivery must be shaped by local evidence, local need and local opportunity.

Enable shared responsibility:

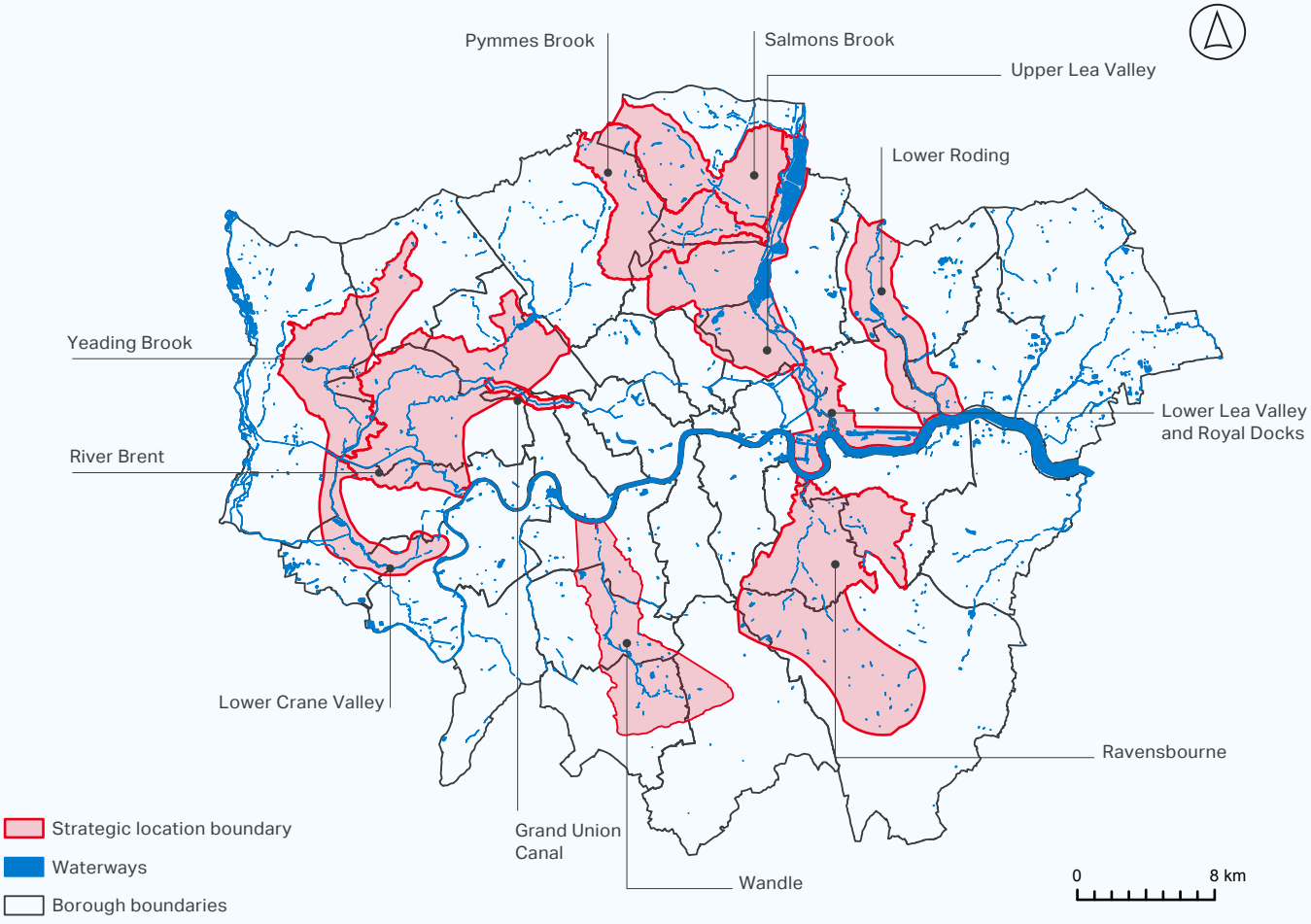
No single organisation can deliver this plan alone. Water companies, regulators, government, boroughs, landowners, businesses, civil society and residents all have roles to play.

Innovate and be flexible:

Partners should test new approaches, share evidence, adapt where needed and scale successful models across London.

Strategic locations

The Mayor has committed to action across the whole city. Early delivery is focused in 10 strategic locations, where coordinated investment can deliver the greatest and quickest benefits.



Sources: TfL, Greater London Authority, OS, UK Environment Agency, DEFRA

Produced by Bloomberg Associates

£6.5m

The Mayor will invest £6.5 million to support strategic projects in these locations, alongside at least £4 million from the Green Roots Fund for waterway projects.

These locations were identified by analysing a broad set of criteria, including water-quality data; ecological condition; habitat loss; access gaps; and socio economic indicators.

The Mayor has committed to action across the whole city. Early delivery is focused in 10 strategic locations, where coordinated investment can deliver the greatest and quickest benefits. These locations were identified by analysing a broad set of criteria, including water-quality data; ecological condition; habitat loss; access gaps; and socio-economic indicators.

Priorities by location

- **Grand Union Canal:** Opening up water-based activity opportunities through upgraded canal towpaths, improved canal access and wider waterside regeneration.
- **River Brent catchment:** Reducing sewage pollution through resolving misconnections, alongside habitat and riverside access upgrades as part of the West London Regional Park.
- **Yeading Brook:** Delivering a major rewilding programme to restore and re-naturalise the waterway, creating a resilient, biodiverse river corridor.
- **Lower Crane Valley:** Creating a new 40km riverside trail, alongside river restoration, habitat improvements and re-naturalisation.
- **Wandle catchment:** Restoring the rare chalk stream, and enhancing the river corridor, through a new vision for a Wandle Valley Regional Park; improving access and inclusive engagement; restoring habitats; creating fish superhighways; and exploring opportunities to daylight lost rivers.
- **Ravensbourne catchment:** Daylighting and re-naturalising sections of the river, restoring habitats and improving access along the river.
- **River Roding:** Increasing connectivity and improving riverside access, alongside community engagement through habitat restoration and monitoring.
- **Lower Lea Valley and Royal Docks:** Supporting waterfront transformation, improving access to inclusive water recreation, including delivering safe open-water training.
- **Upper Lea Valley:** Delivering strategically located sustainable drainage systems to reduce pollution and flood risk, alongside opportunities to daylight and restore river sections.
- **Salmons Brook and Pymmes Brook:** Delivering natural flood management and pollution reduction through wetland creation, and wider landscape restoration; and improving access.

Challenges, goals and actions by theme

The following sections set out the main challenges, goals and summaries of the actions for each theme. The full actions matrix (Appendix 1) is intended to drive delivery and support accountability.

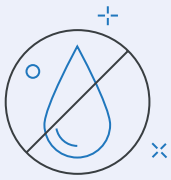


© Eleanor Church, London Wildlife Trust

Water quality

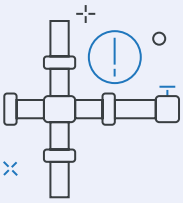


Key facts



0

of London's rivers were assessed as being in good overall condition under the Water Framework Directive in 2019



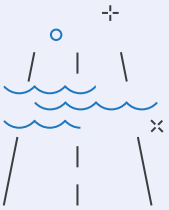
3,400

properties with misconnected drainage have been identified over the past five years



40,000

sewer blockages are cleared by Thames Water each year



451km

451km of London's roads are at high risk of causing road runoff into waterways

Many of London's waterways are affected by multiple sources of pollution.

Sewage spills, misconnected drainage, road runoff, litter, land contamination, blockages, ageing assets and underinvestment all contribute to poor water quality. The result is harm to wildlife, reduced public confidence and fewer opportunities for safe recreation.

Combined sewer overflows and storm-driven spills are a particular concern in London. They can discharge untreated wastewater during heavy rainfall, especially where hard surfaces prevent rainwater from soaking into the ground and where sewers are already under pressure. Misconnections are also a major issue. Wrongly connected pipes can send sewage, detergents, kitchen waste and bath water directly into rivers and surface-water drains.

Water-quality data is not always easy to find, understand or act on. E. coli is critical for assessing human health risk in bathing waters, but is only monitored at designated bathing sites. Ammonia (which is strongly associated with sewage contamination and organic waste) is monitored more consistently. It will be used as a practical indicator of progress in reducing the frequency of sewage spills, alongside broader monitoring, community science and river health evidence.

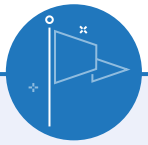
Other nutrients, such as nitrates and phosphates, also contribute to problems including algal blooms, depleted oxygen levels and stressed ecosystems. Phosphates enter waterways from sewage treatment works, misconnected drainage, and agricultural runoff (mainly from outside the city).

Runoff from roads and urban areas contributes plastics, oils and metals to our waterways. These can be intercepted before they reach waterways through nature-based solutions such as raingardens, swales, wetlands and permeable paving, or tackled at source by reducing road vehicle use, and accelerating the shift to clean, sustainable transport.

Evidence from regulators and independent reviews has highlighted past shortcomings in the regulation, management, maintenance and investment in London's wastewater infrastructure by Thames Water. The Mayor will continue to hold Thames Water to account to deliver its largest-ever programme of investment over the next five years. He will also advocate for the government-led reform of the water sector, to embed long-term accountability and transparency across the system.

What will change

Action under this theme will cut pollution at source, improve monitoring and strengthen accountability. Water infrastructure will be upgraded, priority misconnections fixed, outfalls mapped, proactive sewer cleaning increased, polluted road runoff tackled through nature-based and engineered solutions, and clearer public information made available. The Mayor will continue to advocate for stronger regulation, greater accountability, and meaningful reform across the water system – including how London's water infrastructure is structured and overseen.



Goals

1. **Reduce the number of polluted surface-water outfalls; and the average number of combined sewer-overflow events each year.**
2. **Increase green and engineered solutions that reduce runoff from hard surfaces, especially roads.**
3. **Reduce ammonia concentration levels in all London rivers.**
4. **Strengthen river-health monitoring, and actively engage 500 community scientists.**
5. **Increase transparency, coordination, enforcement and accountability among government agencies, regulators and utilities.**

Action summaries

ACTION	WHAT THIS WILL ACHIEVE	LEAD(S)
Increase water infrastructure investment	Upgraded and resilient water infrastructure, reducing pollution and improving water quality.	Thames Water
Map unmapped sewers and outfalls	Better targeting of pollution prevention activity, and clearer understanding of catchment pressures.	Thames Water; GLA; TfL
Complete Tideway Tunnel works	Reduced storm overflows into the tidal Thames and Lea.	Thames Water
Reduce litter and other pollution sources in the Thames	Less litter, sewage and other pollution in the tidal Thames.	PLA; Clean Thames Partnership
Fix misconnections at key polluted outfalls	Less wastewater pollution reaching rivers and canals.	Thames Water; GLA; boroughs; EA
Increase proactive sewer cleaning	Reduced blockages, flooding and pollution incidents.	Thames Water
Support the national plastic wet wipes ban	Fewer sewer blockages, and reduced microplastic pollution.	Thames Water; GLA; boroughs
Scale up sustainable drainage systems	Reduced surface-water flood risk and waterway pollution through rainwater capture at source.	Flood Ready London Partnership
Increase nature-based road runoff infrastructure	Cleaner runoff from roads, and better water quality.	National Highways; TfL
Expand water-quality monitoring	Improved data collection to target London-wide water-quality interventions.	GLA; RiPL members; EA; Thames Water
Make water quality information easier to access and understand	Clear, accessible information that helps Londoners understand local river health.	GLA; ZSL; EA; Thames Water; Thames21
Advocate for stronger regional water regulation	Advocate for water-industry reform; stronger enforcement; and accountability and alignment across the water system.	GLA
Support catchment-wide coordination	Better local coordination of knowledge, investment and delivery.	Thames Water; Catchment Partnerships
Embed waterways in planning policy	Water-quality, access and habitat considerations reflected in new development.	GLA
Increase inspections of treatment works	Fewer illegal or harmful sewage discharges.	EA



Case study

£20m

Thames Water's £3 million investment helped the Crane Valley Partnership secure a further £20 million of funding across the catchment.

© River Crane, Pevensey Road, Hounslow

Crane Smarter Water Catchment

The River Crane is an urban pilot catchment for Thames Water's Smarter Water Catchment initiative.

Partners have followed a catchment-based approach to identify priorities and deliver solutions that improve water quality, open space, habitats and community benefits. Thames Water's £3 million investment helped the Crane Valley Partnership secure a further £20 million of funding across the catchment, which has been used to deliver measurable progress towards "Good Ecological Status". The project shows how local partnership can turn technical evidence into visible change.

The 2025 Independent Water Commission's final report highlighted the pilot as an example of how catchment working can drive local, cross-sector action on water. A proposed 40km riverside Crane Valley Trail, now supported by the Mayor's Green Roots Fund, will connect green spaces along the river for the benefit of local communities.

Case study



x10

114 t

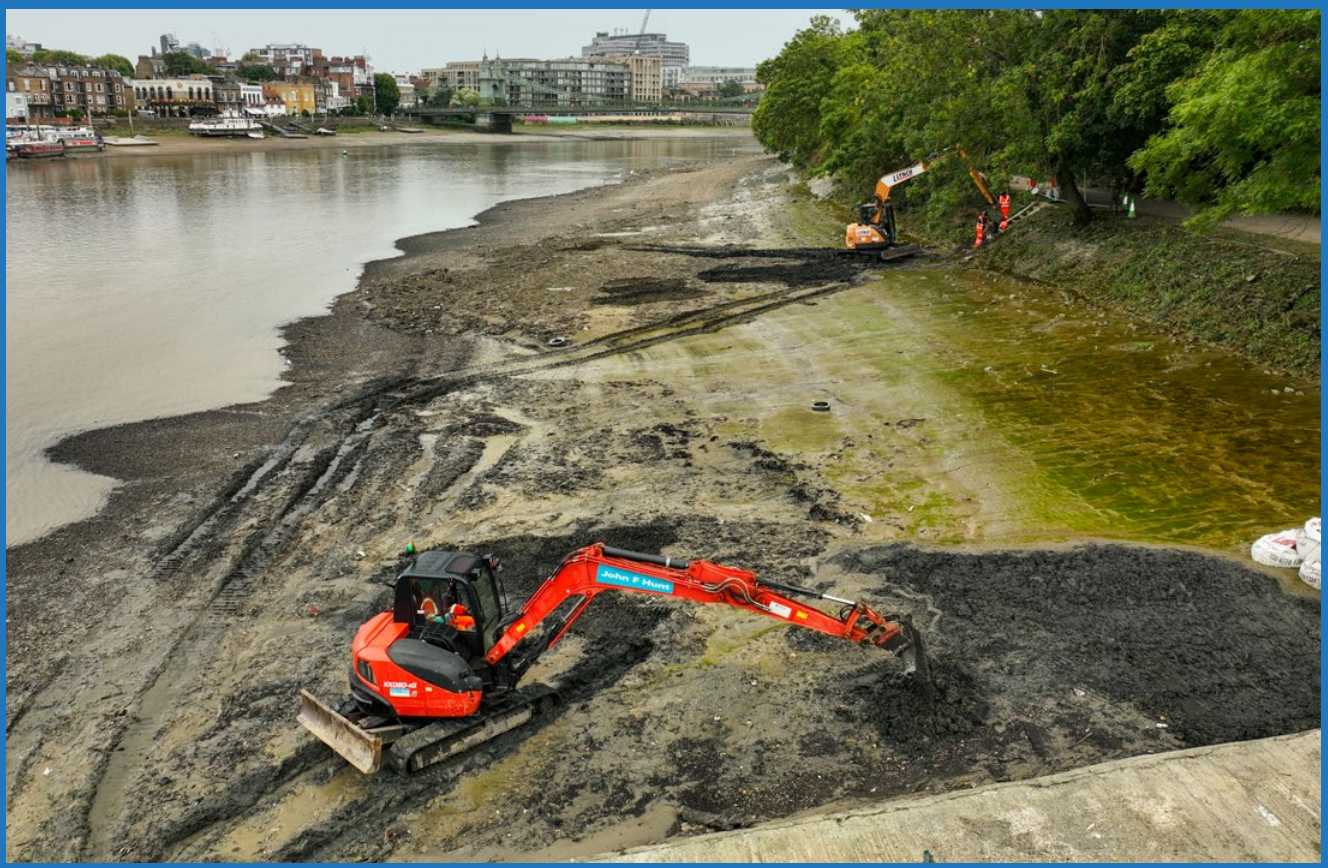
In 2025, 114 tonnes of congealed wet wipes – the weight of 10 double-decker buses – were removed from the tidal Thames.

Wet wipe pollution on the Thames

Wet wipes remain a major cause of sewer blockages and microplastic pollution.

In 2025, 114 tonnes of congealed wet wipes – the weight of 10 double-decker buses – were removed from the tidal Thames near Hammersmith Bridge in a project led by the Port of London Authority (PLA), in partnership with Thames Water and Thames21. The mass had altered the river's course and threatened local wildlife. This marked the first large-scale mechanical removal of wet wipes from the Thames, building on years of volunteer work by Thames21, and will help protect river health and reduce microplastic pollution.

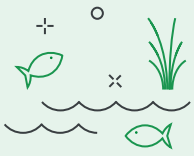
© PLA, Wet Wipe Island



Nature

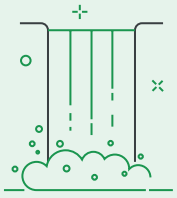


Key facts



115

fish species have been recorded in the tidal Thames, up from zero in 1957



6

of the world's rare chalk streams flow through London



20+

rivers in London have been buried and lost



3

out of 47 surface water bodies in the London Management Catchment are classified as having 'good' ecological potential

London is home to more than 18,000 species of plants and animals. Its waterways form a vital habitat network for a diverse selection of wildlife, such as fish and birds.

But historic modification, culverting, polluted water and invasive species have degraded and fragmented habitats – reducing waterways' ability to perform their natural functions, and support diverse and resilient ecosystems.

Restoring nature is not separate from improving life for Londoners. Healthy rivers and wetlands can reduce flood risk; cool neighbourhoods; improve wellbeing; support learning; and create more beautiful public spaces. Nature recovery is also one of the clearest ways to demonstrate that London's waterways are becoming healthier.

"Restoring nature is not separate from improving life for Londoners. Healthy rivers and wetlands can reduce flood risk; cool neighbourhoods; improve wellbeing; support learning; and create more beautiful public spaces."

What will change

Action under this theme will create and restore waterway habitats; reconnect fragmented habitats; and enable the return of native species. Partners will create, restore or revive 550 hectares of waterway habitat, 80km of river and 400 ponds; reconnect rivers to floodplains; improve engineered water bodies; and remove barriers to fish movement – supporting resilient, connected ecosystems.

Goals

1. **Create and restore 550 hectares of waterway habitat.**
2. **Restore 80km of river.**
3. **Improve river health in all London freshwater rivers, using riverfly monitoring to measure impact.**



© Thames21, Urban Riverfly Training, Turkey Brook, Enfield

Action summaries

ACTION	WHAT THIS WILL ACHIEVE	LEAD(S)
River health monitoring	Locally collected evidence to support healthier rivers for wildlife and people.	London Citizen Science Network; RiPL members
Reintroduce beavers in suitable locations	Restored natural processes, boosted biodiversity and reduced flood risk.	Citizen Zoo
Manage invasive species	More resilient and recovering native waterway species, including work to maintain a mink-free London.	Waterlife Recovery Trust
Reintroduce water voles	Re-established water vole populations across suitable catchments.	ZSL
Create a blue habitat mapper	Evidence-led and well-monitored nature recovery action.	GiGL
Investigate blended finance for waterway recovery	Additional long-term funding for river restoration and maintenance.	GLA
Develop an estuary edges action plan	Greener Thames estuary riverbanks for wildlife and people.	Thames Estuary Partnership
Streamline restoration permissions	Simpler, robust permissions for river-restoration projects.	EA
Uncover London's lost rivers	Delivery-ready projects to uncover priority river stretches.	RiPL members
Improve non-natural waterways	Better habitat quality in engineered water bodies such as canals and docks.	CRT; RiPL members
Reconnect rivers to floodplains	Natural floodplains that hold more water, create varied habitats and improve resilience.	RiPL members
Restore fish superhighways	Connected native fish habitat and more resilient ecosystems.	EA
Create and restore ponds	New and restored freshwater habitats that support biodiversity and community connection.	ZSL

Case study

Ealing Beavers

The Ealing Beaver Project at Paradise Fields is the UK's first fully accessible urban beaver enclosure.

In October 2023, the Mayor took part in the release of five Eurasian beavers into Paradise Fields. The project was delivered by Citizen Zoo, Ealing Wildlife Group, Friends of Horsenden Hill and Ealing Council– with support from Beaver Trust, and funding from Ealing Council and the Mayor. Since then, kits have been born, dams and ponds have been created, local flood resilience has improved, and community engagement has grown. The project demonstrates how rewilding can deliver climate resilience, biodiversity and inclusive access in an urban environment, setting a benchmark for future initiatives.



© GLA, Beaver released in Paradise Fields, Ealing Beaver Project



Case study

Citizen science and river health

Riverfly Monitoring and Outfall Safaris (coordinated through the ZSL-led London Citizen Science Network) show how volunteers are providing crucial data and driving action to improve the state of London's rivers.

Riverflies are strong indicators of river health, and volunteer monitoring helps alert authorities to potential pollution. Outfall Safaris enable volunteers to record and report pollution via an app – with annual surveys now covering every London river. This helps water companies and regulators trace misconnections, blockages and failing assets; and target repairs.

© Thames21, Urban Riverfly Training, Dollis Brook



Access

Key facts



40%

of London's waterside space is not publicly accessible



6%

of Londoners used London's waterways for recreational activities in the water – such as swimming – at least once a month in 2025



4%

of Londoners used London's waterways for recreational activities on the water – such as boating – at least once a month in 2025

Every Londoner, regardless of background or postcode, should be able to benefit from the city's waterways.

This does not mean every waterway can or should be used in the same way. Some places are environmentally sensitive, privately owned, structurally constrained, or unsafe for activities such as swimming. But many barriers to access can be removed through better design, investment, signage, maintenance, programming and community partnership.

Access must be safe and inclusive. London now has more regulated open-water swimming sites than ever before. At the same time, some waterways – including parts of the tidal Thames downstream of Putney Bridge – will never be suitable for swimming because of currents, deep mud, tidal variation and vessel traffic. Clear safety education is essential.

> Access must be safe and inclusive. Some waterways will never be suitable for swimming because of currents, deep mud, tidal variation and vessel traffic.



What will change

Mayoral funding will support new and improved open-water recreation sites, where safe and appropriate. New and better-connected waterside routes, higher standards for path design and maintenance, improved wayfinding and community-led improvements will enable more Londoners to walk, wheel, cycle, sit, play, learn and exercise safely alongside the water.

Goals

1. **Increase publicly accessible waterside paths and frontage by 10km, with at least 4km in economically deprived areas, where safe and environmentally appropriate.**
2. **Improve the quality and condition of 20km of existing publicly accessible paths along waterways.**
3. **Increase the percentage of Londoners who have seen or heard information about how to safely spend time alongside, in or on waterways.**
4. **Improve connections and increase access to waterways from walking and cycling routes and public transport hubs at 10 locations.**

Waterways visualisation

Action summaries

ACTION	WHAT THIS WILL ACHIEVE	LEAD(S)
Create new waterway paths and frontage	New accessible waterside paths in areas with the least existing access.	GLA; Ramblers
Promote best practice through development	Better waterway access in new development and public realm projects.	GLA; Walk Wheel Cycle Trust
Provide resources for community groups	Empowered communities delivering local access improvements.	National Trust; Nature Towns and Cities
Improve waterside quality and condition	Safe, welcoming and year-round usable routes and public realm.	Parks for London; London Councils; boroughs; GLA
Promote consistent path design and maintenance standards	Higher-quality, more consistent waterway path provision, including better signage.	Walk Wheel Cycle Trust; CRT
Increase open-water leisure and recreation opportunities	More water-based recreation, that is safe and inclusive, in areas where provision is limited.	GLA
Improve water safety understanding	More Londoners enjoying waterways safely and confidently.	PLA; CRT
Develop a new river-walking route	At least one new river-walking route in London.	TfL; Ramblers
Improve waterside path connectivity	Better wayfinding and access points to and from waterways.	Walk Wheel Cycle Trust; TfL; Ramblers
Improve air quality	Cleaner, healthier air along waterways and reduced exposure for boaters, towpath users and residents	GLA



Case study

Southall Grand Union Canal Wellbeing Way

Led by the CRT and Ealing Council, with support from Peabody and Let's Go Southall, and funded by the Mayor, Wellbeing Way is revitalising canalside and green spaces in Southall.

Physical improvements include a new park wetland; towpath accessibility upgrades; seating, play and outdoor gym equipment; and improved signage. Community-led activities – including volunteer wellbeing sessions, archaeology digs, clean-ups, gardening and health walks – have helped build local ownership and strengthen community cohesion, alongside the physical changes.

© GLA, Southall Grand Union Canal

Case study

Wandle Valley Regional Park

The Wandle Valley Regional Park stretches across 23.5km, from Croydon to the Thames at Wandsworth.

It brings coherence to a connected landscape of parks, heritage assets and nature reserves linked by the River Wandle. The Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust, established in 2013, brings together nine core partners: four London boroughs (Wandsworth, Merton, Sutton and Croydon), the EA, Natural England, the South East Rivers Trust, the National Trust, and the Wandle Valley Forum (representing more than 150 community and voluntary groups). Over the past decade, this partnership has attracted significant investment and improved access along the river, with the Big Green Fund delivering £1.2 million of capital improvements at Poulter Park; the Gateways project opening new sections of the Wandle Trail across the four boroughs; and Get Active Wandle Valley supporting everyday physical activity along the corridor.

£1.2m

Over the past decade, this partnership has attracted significant investment and improved access along the river, with the Big Green Fund delivering £1.2 million of capital improvements.



© GLA, Wandle Park, Colliers Wood Entrance

Inclusion and engagement



Key facts



28%

of Londoners say that they feel moderately or highly connected to London's waterways



6%

of Londoners report having actively engaged in waterways through volunteering in the last 6 months



Londoners with higher incomes, White Londoners, and those without disabilities are more likely to engage with the city's waterways – and are more likely to find them safe and easy to access.

London's waterways should be welcoming for everyone.

Yet feelings of exclusion, physical barriers, cost, lack of equipment, limited representation, safety concerns and poor-quality environments have created unequal patterns of use. Some Londoners have far fewer opportunities to access waterways, enjoy water-based activities or influence decisions about their local blue spaces.

In 2025, 32 per cent of Londoners reported using watersides for walking or cycling at least once a month. This was lower for Londoners with annual incomes below £20,000; Black Londoners; Asian Londoners; and disabled Londoners. These inequalities matter, because waterways can improve physical health, mental wellbeing, social connection and climate resilience.

Engagement must go beyond consultation. It should build a sense of belonging; support community stewardship; create opportunities for young people; and make space for cultural, sporting, educational and environmental activity.

> Waterways can improve physical health, mental wellbeing, social connection and climate resilience.

What will change

Action under this theme will put people at the heart of London's waterways. Open water training in the Royal Docks, new school activities, volunteering opportunities, community networks, inclusive events and regular polling will help widen participation and shape future delivery.

Goals

1. **Achieve a 20 per cent increase, in Londoners from under-represented groups, among those regularly participating in waterway activities.**
2. **Increase the number of under-represented groups engaging with partner programmes.**
3. **Achieve a 25 per cent increase in funding for waterway activities.**
4. **Achieve a 30 per cent increase in improved knowledge of, and perceived connection to, waterways.**
5. **Achieve a 20 per cent increase in community volunteering in, on and along waterways.**



© Katrina Duffey, London Wildlife Trust, Camley Street

Action summaries

ACTION	WHAT THIS WILL ACHIEVE	LEAD(S)
Scale up community engagement programmes	Broader, deeper and more representative community engagement with waterways.	Thames21; South East Rivers Trust
Integrate waterways into GLA youth engagement	More young Londoners enjoying waterways safely and regularly; this includes exploring the feasibility of a waterways pass.	GLA
Deliver participation activity and events	A broad range of inclusive water-based and waterside events.	The Ahoy Centre
Scale up Active Thames investment	More Londoners accessing beginner-friendly recreation on tidal and inland waterways.	PLA
Increase investment across all waterways	More funding for recreation and engagement programmes on rivers, canals and other waterways.	GLA
Undertake regular perception polling	Data-led understanding of inclusion, connection and engagement.	GLA
Deliver waterway education programmes	More school students learning about waterways, climate and nature.	London National Park City
Set up community partnership networks	Better collaboration between local groups, boroughs, landowners and agencies.	London National Park City
Scale up volunteering opportunities to increase the number of people engaging	More coordinated volunteering, focused on under-represented groups.	Groundwork
Create youth waterway volunteering opportunities	More young people undertaking environmental volunteering across London.	GoodGym

Case study

The Black Swimming Association

The Black Swimming Association (BSA) has used data and lived experience to highlight inequalities in water safety and swimming participation.

Working with the PLA, the BSA co-designed water-safety campaigns with students at St Mark's Catholic School in Hounslow, and Riverside School in Barking & Dagenham; young people acted as architects of the messaging. Students became water-safety ambassadors, and developed transferable skills in research, planning and public speaking. Both schools have now embedded water safety into their safeguarding curriculum – with the project designed for future cohorts to revisit and develop.



© The Black Swimming Association, water-safety campaigns with students at St Mark's Catholic School in Hounslow, and Riverside School in Barking & Dagenham Ealing Beaver Project



Case study

Thames21 Thames Connections

Launched by Thames21 in 2020, Thames Connections works with under-represented communities across six of London's most diverse boroughs: Newham, Tower Hamlets, Southwark, Barking & Dagenham, Greenwich and Wandsworth.

The programme builds partnerships with community-led organisations, and co-designs river-based activities under three themes: improving blue spaces; cultural celebrations; and wellbeing through nature. By removing barriers that prevent ethnically diverse and low-income groups from participating in environmental work, it has boosted social cohesion and stewardship and connected residents to rivers in ways that reflect local identity, health and culture.

© Mama Osun, Thames21 Thames Connections Clean-up, Battersea Bridge

Delivery, governance and next steps

This plan brings together more than 50 partner organisations around a shared mission: to make London's waterways cleaner, healthier and more accessible. Delivery will depend on coordinated action across the whole system – from national government and regulators to boroughs, water companies, landowners, businesses, civil society organisations and residents.

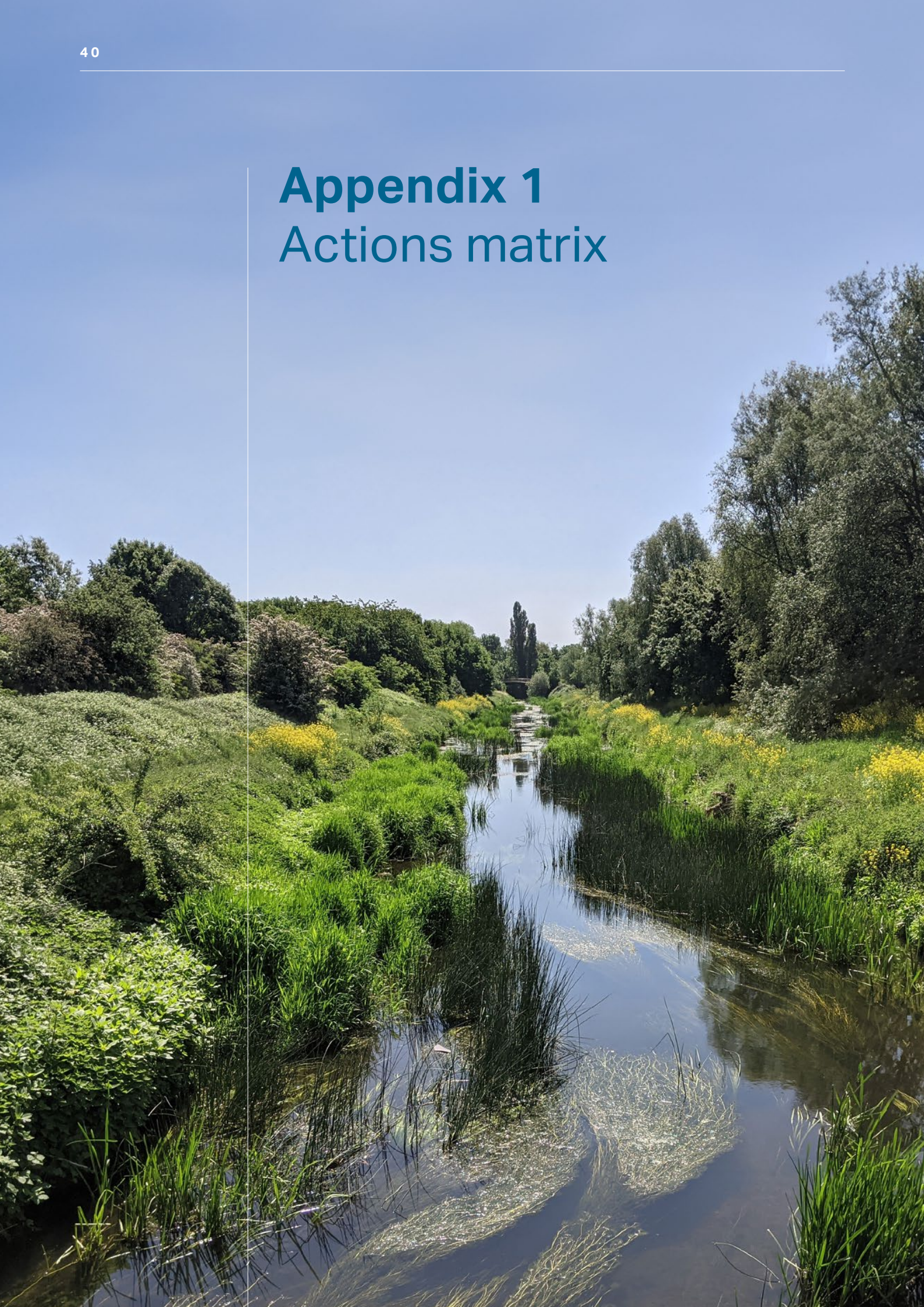
Each action has an identified lead, or set of leading organisations, alongside supporting partners who will work closely together to secure delivery. The Mayor will also convene action leads at least annually to review progress, assess barriers, identify resource gaps and maintain momentum. Milestones in 2027, 2029 and beyond will help ensure the plan remains on track through to 2036.

The plan does not create new statutory duties; and cannot require every organisation to act in a particular way. Delivery may be affected by funding, regulation, land ownership, planning constraints, water company performance and national policy. For this reason, the Mayor's role will be to provide leadership, investment, convening power, monitoring, advocacy and public accountability.

The GLA will work proactively with action leads throughout the lifetime of this plan to identify challenges early; align activities with available funding; and adapt approaches where needed. The Mayor will continue to convene partners to celebrate progress, maintain collaboration, connect new partners and keep the health of London's waterways in public view.

> Successful delivery will depend on coordinated action across the whole system.

Appendix 1
Actions matrix



Water quality

Challenge

- Parts of London's 150-year-old sewage system are no longer fit for purpose, under capacity or in disrepair and years of historic underinvestment make it difficult to stop all pollution sources and restore healthy rivers. In 2025, the largest ever investment was committed to upgrading sewage infrastructure. However, the available funding is less than what is required and needs to include more for nature-based actions. This means we can't yet address all pressures on river health.
- Our waterways' resilience and ability to stay healthy, and support wildlife, have been compromised by how London is built. Rainwater often can't soak into the ground, and picks up pollutants from hard surfaces as it runs into our waterways. Modifying our land and rivers, and canalising, culverting and burying waterways underground (as has historically occurred in London), contribute to poor water quality and ecological health. These practices limit the natural processes that keep river ecosystems healthy.
- Water quality data is hard to find and interpret and often incomplete, making it hard to inform and engage Londoners and ensure that the right solutions are focused in the right locations.
- Confusing rules, overlapping responsibilities and limited enforcement make it easier for pollution to slip through the cracks. Many Londoners don't realise some street drains discharge directly into rivers, and homes and businesses can also accidentally connect wastewater to these drains (misconnections). With limited capacity to identify and fix issues quickly, preventing and stopping pollution becomes harder.

> "Our waterways' resilience, and their ability to stay healthy and support wildlife, have been compromised by how London is built."



© GLA, River Roding



Goal

Reduce the number of polluted surface water outfalls and decrease the average number of CSO events.

NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
1	**Increase wastewater infrastructure investment**	London's water system is under strain from population growth, ageing assets and climate change. This action will drive increased investment to boost resilience, improve water quality and protect river health. Thames Water will use its investment planning processes to support targeted upgrades including modernising wastewater treatment, upgrading infrastructure and reducing pollution from storm water overflows. Key interventions include improvements at Crossness and Hogsmill sewage treatment works, sewer upgrades to cut overflow events and repairing and replacing pumped sewage pipes, such as work completed in Kingston Vale.	Thames Water		Environmental assessments for all high-priority storm overflows complete, setting clear spill thresholds and providing the evidence base for targeted investment.	Substantial delivery of Thames Water's 2025-2030 investment programme (to be completed by April 2030), including upgrades to sewer overflows; repairing rising mains; and upgraded and more proactive maintenance at sewage treatment works. Further detail on the 2029 milestones to be agreed once Thames Water's 2025-2030 Business Plan has been approved.
2	**Map unmapped sewers and outfalls**	Almost one-third of London's sewer network was privately built. Many of these "unmapped" sewers and surface water outfalls are poorly understood, making it harder to tackle pollution at source. This action will support Thames Water's programme to map these assets and link them to pollution incidents and network performance. Improved mapping and data, shared with regulators, boroughs and others, will support a joined-up approach to identifying misconnections, blockages and other problems, enabling more targeted investment, enforcement, and pollution prevention.	Thames Water, Greater London Authority, Transport for London	Boroughs, Environment Agency, RiPL members, Thames21, Zoological Society of London	Aerial mapping pilot launched; data for mapping of outfalls scoped and collated; TfL to complete a drainage survey for A312 pilot site to establish drainage assets, type and condition.	Thames Water complete an aerial mapping pilot (by March 2030). An online map of London's surface water outfall network is launched.

NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
3	**Complete Tideway Tunnel works**	The Thames Tideway Tunnel and associated projects are now operational, marking a major step forward in tackling sewage discharges into the tidal Thames. By contributing to a sustained reduction in storm sewage discharges into the tidal Thames and the Lee, this will support cleaner, healthier rivers that people and wildlife can enjoy. This action will ensure the system delivers its full environmental potential. Ongoing monitoring of river health and the clear communication of progress to Londoners and partners will be supported.	Thames Water	Environment Agency, Tideway	Handover of the Thames Tideway Tunnel to Thames Water completed.	Ongoing operation by Thames Water
4	**Reduce litter and other pollution sources in the Thames**	The PLA's Clean Thames Plan sets out a comprehensive approach to reducing litter, sewage and other pollution in the tidal Thames. This action will support delivery of the Plan's measures, including work with river users, local authorities, community groups and businesses. By bringing together partners, monitoring progress and sharing learning from pilot projects, this work will improve coordination and evidence led action to tackle litter and pollution sources more quickly and effectively.	Port of London Authority, Clean Thames Partnership		Model pollution inputs in collaboration with academia; and partner on a study on forever chemicals and non - pharmaceuticals in the Thames	Continue to provide funding for environmental improvement projects through the PLA Thames Environment Fund, including water quality improvement initiatives when appropriate.
5	**Fix misconnections at polluted outfalls**	Every day, the equivalent of 1.8 Olympic-sized swimming pools of sewage-polluted water is discharged into London's rivers from misconnected properties. This action will work with Thames Water, boroughs and the Environment Agency to identify and rectify misconnections affecting more than 200 priority outfalls across the whole of the Thames Water region, the majority of which are anticipated to be in London. It will support targeted investigations, property surveys and enforcement where necessary, alongside sharing of best practice to make effective use of existing powers, such as checks at point of sale. This action will cut pollution at source, tackling historic misconnections and ensuring homes and businesses are correctly connected, helping keep London's rivers cleaner.	Thames Water, Greater London Authority, Local Authorities, Environment Agency	Community Scientists, RiPL members	Dedicated resource for Local Authorities to fix misconnections recruited and best practices collated and shared.	Process for rectifying misconnections between organisations improved; process in place to resolve misconnections at point of sale; and 200 outfalls improved across the Thames Water Region (by March 2030).

NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
6	**Increase proactive sewer maintenance**	As London's sewers age and demands on them increase, proactive maintenance is critical to reduce blockages, flooding and pollution. This action will support expansion of proactive sewer cleaning and fat, oil and grease management, targeting high-risk areas. It will draw on data from flooding incidents, blockages and customer reports to prioritise interventions. Alongside physical maintenance, it will explore behavioural measures such as campaigns to reduce flushing of inappropriate materials. This action will keep sewers flowing, reduce flooding and pollution, and move the system towards smarter, preventative maintenance rather than emergency fixes.	Thames Water		Transition from pilot Targeted Catchment Investigation (TCI) programme (a proactive data-led approach to targeting and deploying interventions at a local sewer catchment level) to business as usual.	Progress proactive sewer maintenance aspects of the Pollution Incident Reduction Plan 2026; deliver cumulative annual sewer cleaning.
7	**Support national plastic wet wipes ban**	Plastic wet wipes are a major cause of sewer blockages and pollution in London, as they do not break down when flushed. Thames Water removes an estimated 3.8 billion wet wipes from the sewer network every year and clears 75,000 blockages at an annual cost of more than £40 million. This action supports delivery of the national ban on plastic containing wet wipes from Spring 2027, which will require enforcement by local authorities. Thames Water and the Greater London Authority will work with local authorities and other partners to educate Londoners about the ban to reduce the number of plastic-containing wet wipes entering the system.	Thames Water, Greater London Authority, Local Authorities	RiPL members	Deliver a wet wipe education campaign to Londoners	Active enforcement of legislation by local authorities.



Goal

Increase the number of green and engineered solutions deployed to reduce runoff from hard surfaces, including roadways, targeting outfalls that have the biggest impact on water quality.

NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
8	**Scale up SuDS delivery**	Following severe surface water flooding during storms in July 2021, the London Surface Water Strategy (LSWS), published by the Flood Ready London Partnership (FRLP) in 2025, set out the need to take a catchment-based approach to managing rainfall across the city. This action will scale up delivery of SuDS across London by strengthening co-ordinated planning, improving access to funding, and enhancing delivery pipelines. Subject to funding, a new market-based approach to delivering SuDS through street works' will be developed. The result will be faster, wider deployment of SuDS across London, to better capture, control and slow the flow of water where it falls, reducing flood risk.	Flood Ready London Partnership		Catchment Action Plans published for Lee Valley and Central London; programme launched to incentivise permeable surfaces and rainwater harvesting systems on private properties. Thames Water issued two calls for SuDS projects; TfL delivered 5000sqm or 0.5 ha of SuDS	TfL delivered a cumulative total of 1.5 ha of SuDS; FRLP committed to increased investment for multi-benefit SuDS; 8 additional LSWS partnerships established; full test of "SuDS for Streetworks Market" commenced; Thames Water funded SuDS projects completed.
9	**Increase nature-based runoff infrastructure**	Hard surfaces cannot absorb rainfall, causing polluted runoff to enter rivers and increasing flood risk. A combination of engineered and green solutions such as raingardens, swales, wetlands and permeable paving can help tackle this while adding much-needed greenery to neighbourhoods. This action will accelerate targeted surface water interventions by improving decision support tools, enabling partners to pinpoint the most effective locations for nature based and engineered solutions that will reduce polluted runoff.	National Highways, Transport for London	Boroughs, Environment Agency, RiPL members	National Highways update of the HERWAT site-specific tool for assessing water quality from roads commenced; TfL drainage survey of A312 pilot site to inform delivery options for nature-based solutions	Funding to update "Road Pollution Solutions" tool to help verify and target interventions secured; TfL to pilot a nature-based or engineered solution scheme pollution control of road runoff as demonstrator; and National Highways 13 priority outfalls within the M25 are addressed (as identified in National Highways Water Quality Plan).



Goal

Strengthen river health monitoring across all of London's river catchments and activate at least 500 citizen scientists each year for water quality monitoring.

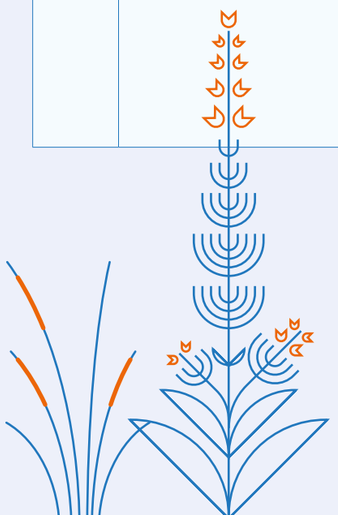
NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
10	**Develop a smarter targeted water quality monitoring programme**	Monitoring London's waterways is essential to understanding the challenges and changes they face over time. Community science adds vital on-the-ground insight, generating data that strengthens the case for investment and enforcement. This action will include: installing road runoff water quality sensors; expanding and standardising community science programmes; improving data sharing across the water sector; and bringing together ongoing real-time monitoring pilots. Together these approaches will provide a clearer, more up-to-date understanding of water quality issues across London, so that action can be targeted where it is needed most.	Greater London Authority, RiPL members, London Citizen Science Network, Environment Agency, Thames Water	Community Scientists, Imperial College, National Highways, Port of London Authority, Transport for London	Funding secured for next 4 years of Outfall Safaris; 11th Annual Citizen Science Forum in 2026 hosted; and four sites monitored by Environment Agency for road runoff pollution.	Approximately 6,000 sewer depth monitors and 34 additional water quality monitors installed by Thames Water across the Thames Water region; EU-funded real time monitoring pilot completed by Thames21; 500 Community Scientists trained; and TfL proactively working with partners to pilot a range of road runoff monitoring methods.
11	**Make water quality information easier to access and understand**	Accessing information on water quality can be challenging. Available data is held by multiple organisations, presented in technical formats and often out of date. This action will create a holistic, online River Health scoring system for London, building on work done to date by Thames21, that combines evidence and provides clear and accessible information for Londoners, researchers, community scientists, businesses and communities.	Greater London Authority, Zoological Society of London, Environment Agency, Thames Water, Thames21	London Citizen Science Network, RiPL members	River health scoring system developed and first round of scorecards produced; Hello Lamp Post location-focused interactive signage at 2 recreational water sites piloted by Environment Agency.	River Health Map updated by GLA and expanded as new data becomes available; location-focused interactive signage to all designated and potential recreational water sites rolled out by Environment Agency; one-stop online portal for all general bathing water data - including Swimfo - created.

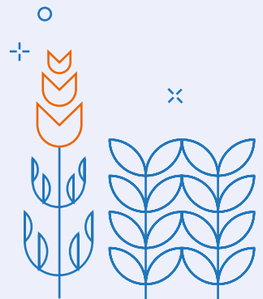


Goal

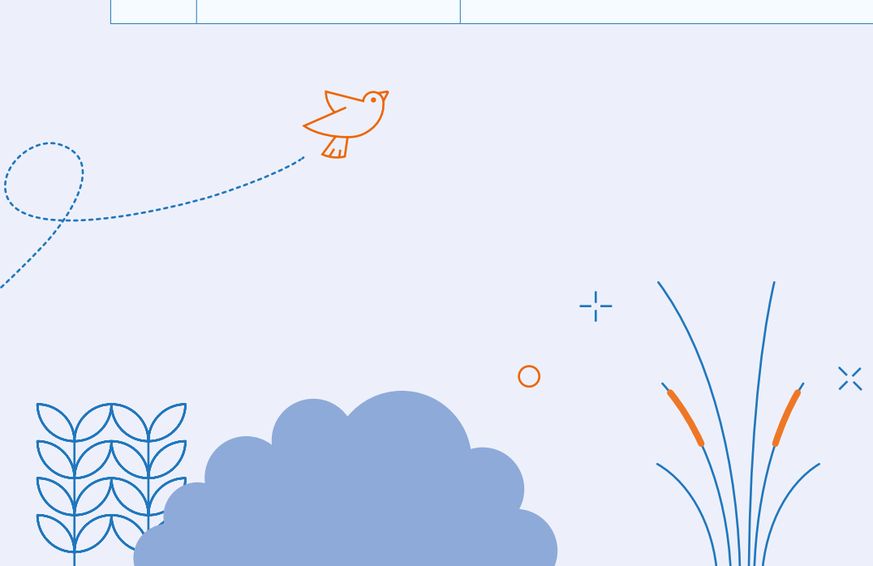
Increase clarity, transparency, coordination, enforcement, and accountability among government agencies, regulators, and utilities.

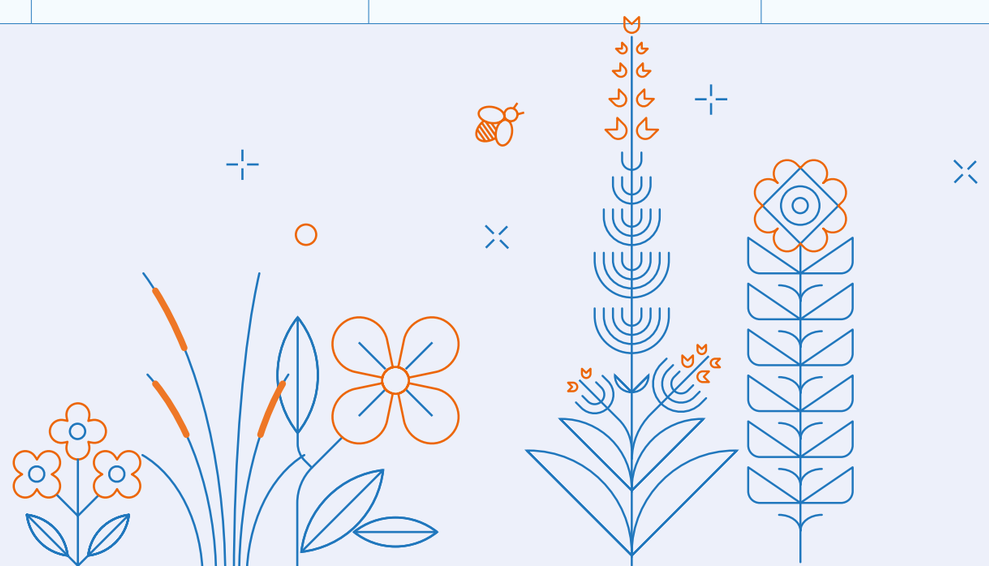
NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
12	**Advocate for stronger regional water regulation**	The Government's response to the "Cunliffe Review" of the water industry is reshaping how water services are regulated and how pollution is managed by water companies. This action will coordinate partners across London to influence national policy and regulatory frameworks so they reflect the city's needs. It will advocate for stronger enforcement powers, clearer accountability, better use of data and clearer duties on water companies and others. The focus is on ensuring that changes to the regulatory, monitoring and standards frameworks lead to real improvements in water quality, greater transparency for Londoners, and support for local priorities particularly enabling water companies to rectify misconnections.	Greater London Authority	RiPL members	Mandated in-person checks of drainage systems for new buildings and consolidation of powers to rectify misconnections advocated for; and increased transparency of water data and use of nature-based solutions.	Work with the evolving new regulator on a regional approach which works for London.
13	**Support catchment-wide coordination**	Catchment partnerships are England's most effective, locally trusted model for coordinating action to improve rivers. This action will work with existing catchment partnerships in London to strengthen their role, including through more stable funding and support. The aim is to help catchment partnerships bring together data, local knowledge and funding. It will also explore opportunities for at least one additional Thames Water "Smarter Water Catchment" in the current five-year water investment cycle.	Thames Water	Catchment Host organisations, Greater London Authority, RiPL members	Continue funding Catchment Hosts and support regional collaboration to enable further catchment restoration and monitoring at scale; and co-create a ten-year Catchment Plan for at least one additional river.	Co-deliver projects that contribute to the improvements set out in catchment plans.

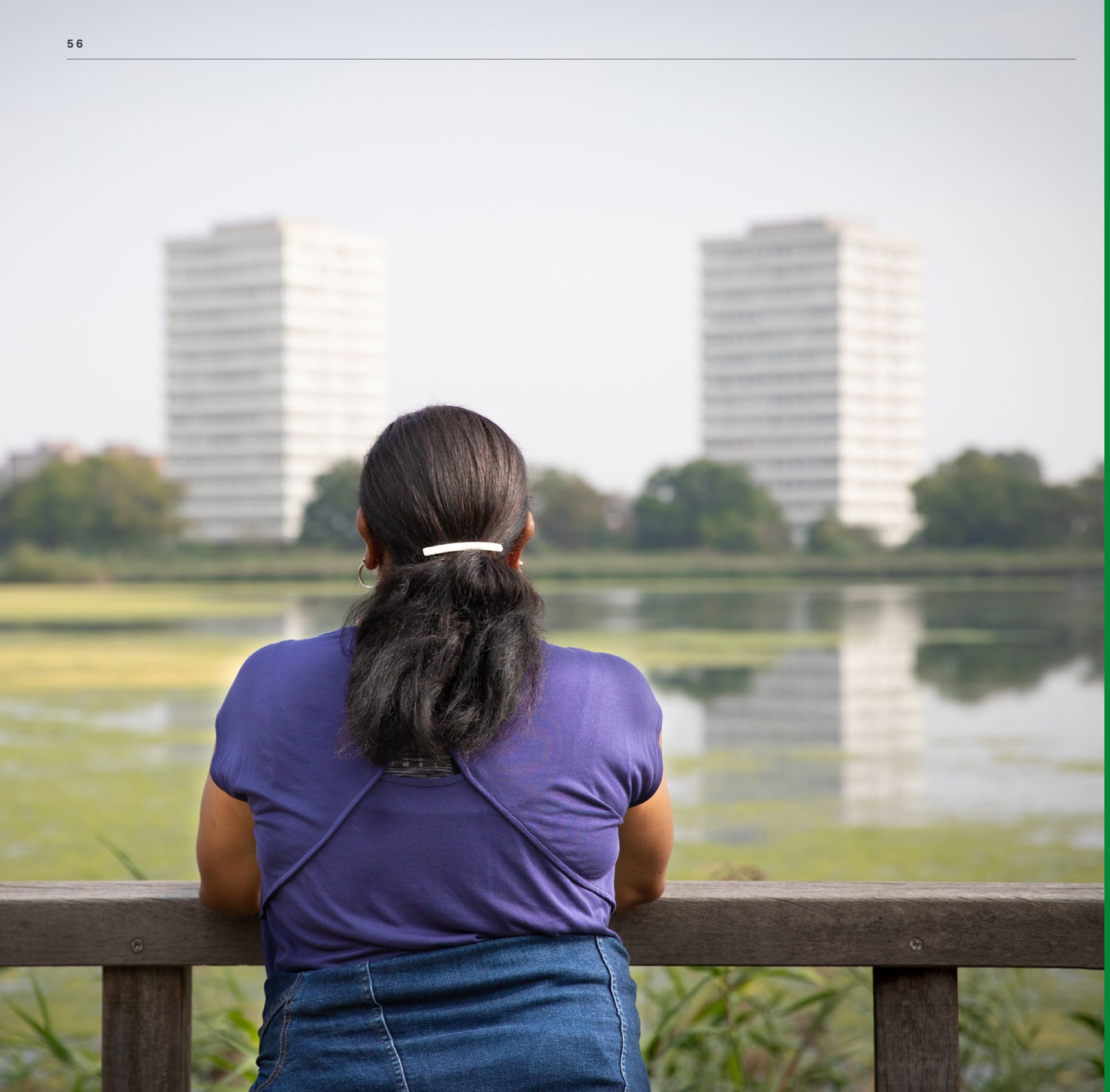




NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
14	**Embed waterways in planning policy**	The London Plan influences all new development in London and is a powerful tool for embedding high-quality water management and river restoration. This action will ensure the ambitions in this Plan directly inform future iterations of the London Plan, associated guidance and supporting documents. It will also align with the Mayor's work on Integrated Water Management Systems so that planning, design and delivery of new development actively contributes to cleaner, healthier and more accessible waterways.	Greater London Authority		Policies to improve water quality incorporated in the new London Plan.	Guidance for waterway development to help local authorities and developers deliver cleaner and healthier waterways.
15	**Increase inspections of treatment works**	In 2023, the Environment Agency announced significant changes to its approach to inspecting sewage treatment works and storm overflows, including a major increase in inspections. This action will track and support delivery of these changes in London, working with the Environment Agency and water companies. It will help ensure that increased inspections lead to better compliance, reduced illegal discharges and clearer public reporting and prompt permitting.	Environment Agency		Number of inspections of Thames Water assets from 2024 figures significantly increased; and permitting process for all newly-discovered CSOs entered.	Use complete mapping of Thames Water drainage network and key input into their Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan to achieve better environmental outcomes through focused regulatory compliance and permitting.







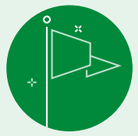
Nature

Challenge

- Despite recent improvements, many of London's waterbodies are not currently in good enough condition to support diverse and well-functioning ecosystems.
- As a result of varied historical and current pressures, many of London's waterway habitats are degraded or have been lost; and native species have declined or are locally extinct.
- Fragmentation and modification impair the ability of waterways to perform their natural functions as part of wider catchments, and act as linear corridors for species movement and migration.

> Many of London's waterway habitats are degraded or have been lost; and native species have declined or are locally extinct.

© Eleanor Church, London Wildlife Trust

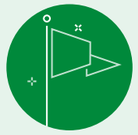


Goal

Create and restore 550 hectares of waterways habitat.

NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
16	**Reintroduce beavers in suitable locations**	European beavers are exceptional "ecosystem engineers." Their dams slow water flow, improve water quality, and reduce flood risk. In London, enclosed populations in Enfield and Ealing have already created dynamic wetland habitats, boosted biodiversity, supported climate goals, and engaged communities. This action will investigate the feasibility of establishing a London-wide beaver metapopulation through a multi-catchment approach, with publicly accessible enclosed populations in the near-term and free roaming managed populations in the long-term.	Citizen Zoo	Beaver Trust, Environment Agency, London Beaver Forum	Desk-based exercise to identify and map suitable habitats across Greater London undertaken; establish a knowledge exchange with international partners to learn from beaver management in comparable urban contexts.	Three additional fully accessible beaver enclosures across Greater London in partnership with local authorities established; and an operational London Beaver Management Group coordinating management, monitoring, and stakeholder engagement across Greater London established.
17	**Manage invasive species, including maintaining a mink-free London**	American mink are just one of several invasive species that threaten London's native wildlife, particularly water voles and ground-nesting birds. Thanks to consistent and co-ordinated efforts, London is currently thought to be mink-free. This action will continue management and monitoring to keep London mink-free, and respond quickly if mink are detected. By doing so, it will support efforts to protect and recover our native species.	Waterlife Recovery Trust	Canal & River Trust, Environment Agency, Greenspace Information for Greater London, London Invasive Species Initiative, London Wildlife Trust, People's Trust for Endangered Species, Zoological Society of London	Regular monitoring to confirm the absence of breeding mink in London conducted; and The London Invasive Species Initiative priority concern list for London updated.	All catchments in London and a 50km surrounding buffer zone are entirely mink-free.
18	**Reintroduce water voles**	Water voles, key indicators of healthy rivers, have vanished from 72 per cent of London sites since 1997 and now survive at only 11 locations. Launched in 2022 with Mayor of London funding, ZSL's London Water Vole Recovery Programme unites partners to restore resilient populations citywide. Natural recolonisation is ideal, but fragmented waterways slow recovery, making targeted reintroductions essential. This action reintroduces water voles to all catchments in London where habitat quality and connectivity will support them - helping secure the future of this vital species.	Zoological Society of London	London Water Vole Recovery Programme members	Records of water vole in London are submitted to GiGL and are updated annually.	Half of London's river catchments have restored water vole populations.

NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
19	**Create blue habitat mapper**	High-quality data is essential for understanding London's natural environment and tracking progress in nature recovery. This action will create a publicly accessible interactive map to monitor habitat creation and restoration across the capital. The platform will improve existing records, close data gaps, and integrate key sources, including the London Nature Recovery Strategy, River Restoration Opportunity Map, River Health Map, and the Thames Estuary Roadmap to Climate Resilience.	Greenspace Information for Greater London	Boroughs, Greater London Authority, Port of London Authority, RiPL members, Thames Estuary Partnership	Interactive mapper live for submissions.	Scoping work undertaken by GiGL, TEP and PLA to explore options for sharing estuarine and freshwater data; and programme of engagement with catchment partnerships and local groups to encourage data submissions completed.
20	**Investigate blended finance for waterway recovery**	Funding for multi-year development, delivery, and ongoing maintenance is a major barrier to large-scale river restoration. Integrating diverse funding sources from public and private sectors offers a significant opportunity to secure bigger, better investment for healthier rivers. This action will bring partners together to investigate significant long-term blended funding stream to support waterway recovery and the creation of nature-based solutions - ensuring restoration efforts are resilient and future-proof.	Greater London Authority	Boroughs, Environment Agency, Port of London Authority, RiPL members, South East Rivers Trust, Thames Estuary Partnership, Thames Water, Thames21, Zoological Society of London	Working Groups have been established and agreed scope of work.	Working groups have identified and developed a suite of projects against that meets the requirements for a range blended finance options.
21	**Develop estuary edges action plan**	The Thames Estuary is a vital migration corridor for species moving between marine and freshwater environments, such as eels. Yet only 2 per cent of its tidal banks remain natural, with most lost to development and flood defences. The Estuary Edges initiative creates features that restore habitat, enabling wildlife to move and forage naturally. This action will develop a 10-year Action Plan for Estuary Edges that includes mapping opportunities for new sites along the tidal river – supporting biodiversity and community engagement.	Thames Estuary Partnership	Environment Agency, Port of London Authority, Zoological Society of London	Working Group for Plan creation established.	Action Plan drafted and new Estuary Edge opportunities identified



Goal

Restore a total of 80km of river

NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
22	**Streamline restoration permissions**	There is significant potential to improve the ecological condition of London's rivers through targeted river recovery projects, but projects often face complex permissions and funding challenges. The current process is lengthy and often delays vital biodiversity projects. The Environment Agency is introducing an Earned Autonomy Model to give competent organisations more freedom for low- to medium-risk permitted activities. Exploring this option may streamline permitting and support applications, enabling greater river restoration across London.	Environment Agency		Comprehensive guidance on the development and delivery of nature recovery projects for external partners developed; and at least one London-based project participated in the Phase 1 Rollout.	New approach is operational.
23	**Uncover priority rivers**	As London grew, many waterways were buried to make space for roads and buildings. These 'lost' rivers still flow beneath our feet, and uncovering them through 'daylighting' or 'de-culverting' offers a chance to reclaim the city's natural heritage. Restoring rivers to an open state improves water quality, creates space for water, and helps manage flooding. With vision and investment, London could become the daylighting capital of the world. This action will plan and deliver complex projects, focusing on opportunities within existing green spaces to maximise public access to revitalised waterways.	RiPL members	Boroughs/landowners	Opportunities for daylighting and de-culverting river stretches in each catchment prioritised to create a pipeline of possible projects.	Dagenham Brook Restoration project has completed feasibility studies and secured landowner agreement; commence project to de-culvert the buried Gores Brook through Parsloes Park; and conduct feasibility study on opening upper reaches of the River Wandle in Croydon.
24	**Improve engineered waterbodies**	London's canals are iconic blue spaces - connecting communities, supporting wildlife, and offering free access to nature. Yet engineered structures for boating and flood management often mean bespoke approaches and approvals are needed for habitat work. This action will result in ecological improvement of 3km of human-made watercourses where natural solutions cannot be achieved. Projects like floating wetlands, using natural coir rolls to establish lush vegetation, will bring life back to the water, boost biodiversity, and make canals greener, healthier, and more inviting for everyone.	Canal & River Trust, RiPL members	Boroughs/landowners	Opportunity mapping of constructed waterways completed, accounting for varied uses of water spaces.	Surveys of non-navigable waterways with recommendations for projects / improvements particularly highlighting corridors between natural habitats completed; and best-practice examples of ecological enhancements in human-made watercourses based on case studies from Canal & River Trust network collated and shared.

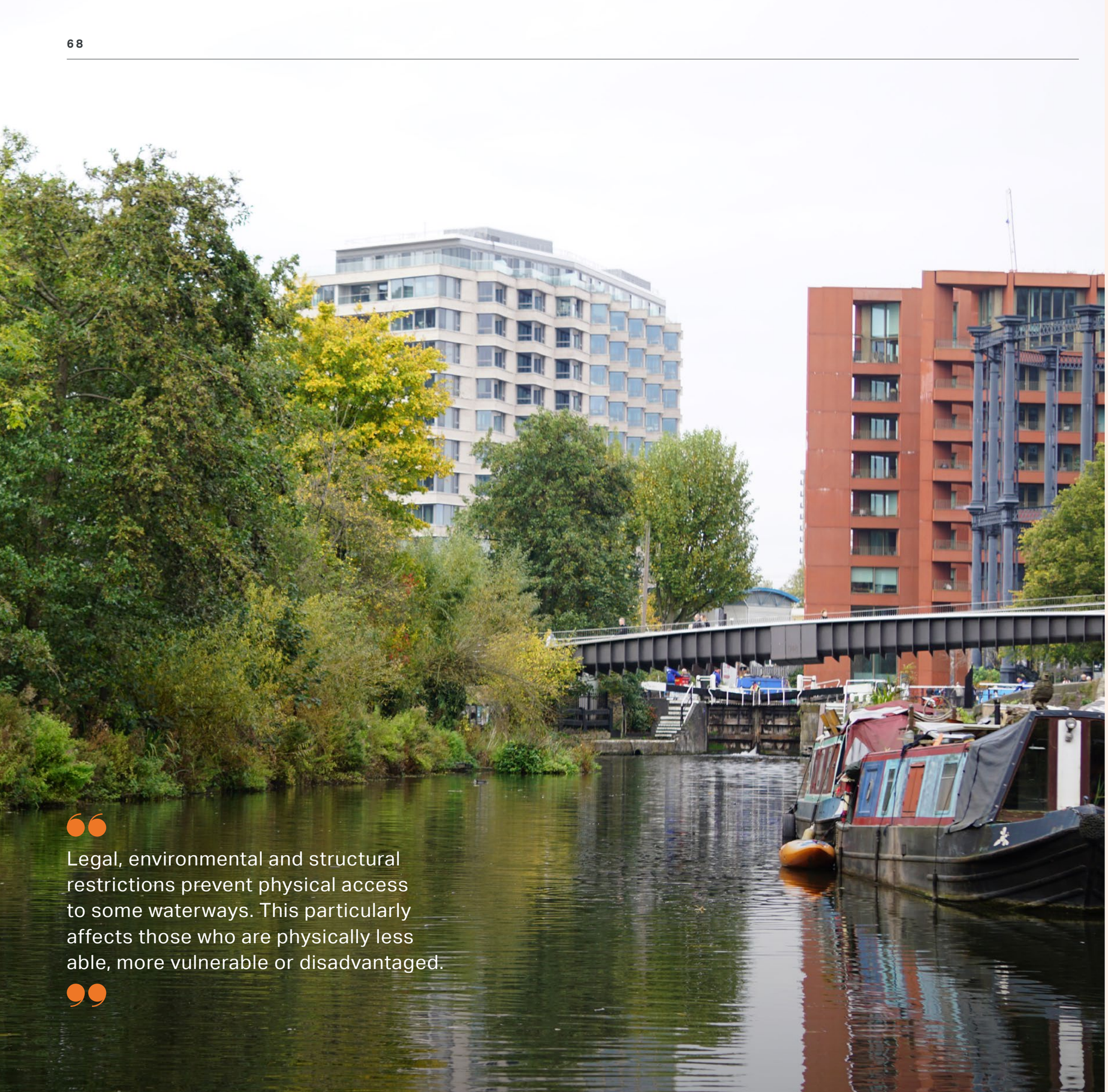
NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
25	**Reconnect rivers to floodplains**	Floodplains are vital for river health, supporting diverse habitats and acting as natural sponges to absorb excess water - reducing flood risk. With floods becoming more frequent and severe, reconnecting floodplains is critical for resilience. Many have been lost or disconnected due to drainage, urbanisation, and channelisation. This action will support projects that restore and reconnect rivers to their floodplains, allowing them to be strongholds for biodiversity as well as storing vast quantities of floodwater.	RiPL members	Boroughs/landowners, Environment Agency	Restoration of sections of tributaries of the River Lea through Enfield Chase Landscape Recovery Project commenced including Stage 0 restoration of the Salmons Brook.	Large-scale rewilding project on the Yeading Brook underway; and major projects completed within the Lower River Crane re-naturalisation and enhancement vision.
26	**Restore fish super-highways**	Healthy rivers are free-flowing and connected, but human-made barriers like weirs block fish migration, trap sediment, and harm ecosystems. Over 50,000 obstacles exist in English rivers, and none of London's waterways are fully passable to fish. This action will reconnect all London rivers to the Thames and remove barriers at priority sites - boosting connectivity, opening kilometres of habitat for native fish, and creating thriving, resilient ecosystems.	Environment Agency	Boroughs/landowners, Port of London Authority, RiPL members, Thames Estuary Partnership	All obstacles to fish passage in the Hogsmill river removed; and agree on tidal obstacles to pass or remove for the catchment-wide plan supported by TEP's Fish Migration Roadmap data.	Studies have commenced to remove the Shepley Mill barrier and connect the Carshalton Branch to the whole Wandle river; all catchments have surveyed their fish barriers and scored how passable they are.
27	**Create and restore ponds**	Ponds and small waterbodies - standing water from 1 sqm to 2 hectares for at least four months - are vital for biodiversity. ZSL's 2024 survey - the first since the 1980s - found only 1,370 publicly accessible ponds remain, many in poor condition. Creating and restoring ponds is a simple, cost-effective way to support freshwater life. This action will unite stakeholders and volunteers through the Great London Pond Project, building on successes like Froglife's Blue Chain to create and restore 400 ponds to good condition.	Zoological Society of London	Great London Pond Partnership	Strategy for ponds in London created, and a forum 'The Great London Pond Project' convening stakeholders and supporting the restoration and creation of ponds.	At least 100 ponds restored or created.

Goal

Improve river health in all of London's freshwater rivers using riverfly monitoring to measure impact.

NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
28	**River health monitoring**	Some of London's waterways aren't healthy enough to support thriving wildlife, and restoring them starts with understanding our impact. Riverflies - "canaries of our rivers" - reveal changes in water quality, habitat, and flow, with declines signalling hidden problems. The Riverfly Monitoring Initiative (RMI) offers a simple, standardised way for communities to help track these indicators. This action will expand monitoring across London's freshwater catchments, building on incredible local and national efforts to secure healthier rivers for wildlife and people.	London Citizen Science Network, RiPL members	Environment Agency, South East Rivers Trust, Thames21, Zoological Society of London	Community support and volunteer participation to address London's riverfly monitoring gaps expanded.	Data collected on all freshwater rivers in London and used to inform priority river restoration action in strategic locations.





> Legal, environmental and structural restrictions prevent physical access to some waterways. This particularly affects those who are physically less able, more vulnerable or disadvantaged.

Access

Challenge

- Legal, environmental and structural restrictions prevent physical access to some waterways. Many remain inaccessible due to land ownership; absence of public access routes; or physical obstructions. Conversely, some environmentally sensitive sites may need protection from human use to support nature recovery
- Poor footpath design and/or conditions, lack of facilities, and under-resourced waterway management limit safety and inclusive access to waterways. This particularly affects those who are physically less able, more vulnerable or disadvantaged.
- Many waterways present a danger to life, and safety concerns can limit access. In some areas, water-safety problems need to be overcome, or the dangers need to be recognised, before access can be made possible.
- Lack of information on, and signage to, waterways disconnects them from local movement networks and public transport hubs. In many cases, waterways need to be better integrated into their wider urban context to encourage greater use.

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Goal

Increase publicly accessible waterside paths and frontage by 10km, where safe and environmentally appropriate, with at least 4km in economically-deprived areas.

NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING PARTNERS	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
29	**New waterway paths and frontage**	Much of London's waterside is currently inaccessible. This action will review waterways with the least access, focusing on areas of economic deprivation and work with delivery partners, London's catchment partnerships and major landowners to identify and prioritise opportunities for new or improved paths and frontage. Funding will be sought to deliver projects, including staff capacity where needed. The Mayor's Green Roots Fund and other GLA funding streams, including at least one-third of Green Roots funding, may be used to support high-priority waterway sites. Other projects will be delivered by Working Group members.	Greater London Authority, Ramblers	Catchment partnership co-hosts, Environment Agency, National Trust, RiPL members, Thames21, Transport for London, Walk Wheel Cycle Trust	Waterway areas with least existing access and high economic deprivation identified; and projects and funding scoped.	5km of new accessible waterside paths/frontage created.
30	**Waterway access best practice**	New development and public realm schemes provide opportunities to create new and improved waterway access. This action will collate and champion best practice examples of waterway access across London and share them through housing, planning and built environment networks to influence upcoming projects. The GLA will explore how to embed this learning into planning guidance and other tools, and work with boroughs and others to support development of planning policies that improve access to waterways through new development. This action will also promote approaches to design, tenure and management that support good access to waterways and the dissemination of water safety campaigns and training to residents. The aim is to ensure new developments deliver well-designed, safe, well-maintained waterside access, with appropriate life-saving equipment and clear signage.	Greater London Authority, Walk Wheel Cycle Trust	Canal & River Trust, Port of London Authority, Natural England, London Councils, Sukhvinder Kaur-Stubbs (former Board member, LLDC and MD of Engage Consultancy), National Trust, Ramblers, Thames Skills Academy	Workshop held with housing developers and borough representatives to discuss and share learning; best practice examples of waterway access in new development collated	Case studies among private and public stakeholders disseminated.

NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING PARTNERS	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
31	**Resources for community groups**	Many community and voluntary groups want to improve access to their local waterways but may lack information on where to start and how to overcome barriers. This action will collate and create a suite of practical resources, including guidance on working with landowners, regulators and boroughs; designing accessible and inclusive spaces; developing long-term maintenance plans and finding funding. Resources will be shared through Working Group partners and networks, and signposted on relevant websites. Case studies will highlight successful community-led projects in different parts of London. The aim is to make it easier for motivated groups to take forward their own access improvements, with clearer routes to support.	National Trust, Nature Towns and Cities	Canal & River Trust, Environment Agency, Greater London Authority, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, Natural England, Ramblers, Transport for London	Scope and seek funding for guide for community groups.	Guide and case studies for community groups commissioned and produced; and signposted via Green Roots Fund and Nature Towns and Cities.



Goal

Improve the quality and condition of 20km of existing publicly accessible paths along waterways (e.g. surfacing, lighting, recreational facilities, maintenance, including litter).

NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING PARTNERS	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
32	**Improve waterside quality and condition**	Poor waterside conditions, lack of facilities and under-resourced management limit inclusive access to waterways, particularly affecting those who are physically less able, more vulnerable or disadvantaged. This action will help ensure existing waterside paths are safe, welcoming and usable year-round, especially for those who currently face barriers. Parks for London and London Councils will convene boroughs to identify common challenges with quality and condition of existing waterside. This will inform a shared understanding of priorities and quick wins. The GLA will establish working groups with boroughs, catchment partnerships and landowners to address the challenges identified. This may include surfacing, lighting, maintenance resources, air pollution, litter management and recreational facilities. Funding and delivery partners will be sought for a survey of waterside conditions to identify priority areas for improvements.	London Councils, Parks for London (Step 1) Greater London Authority (Step 2)	Catchment partnership co-hosts, Environment Agency, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, National Trust, Nature Towns & Cities, Ramblers, RiPL members, South East Rivers Trust, Transport for London, Walk Wheel Cycle Trust	Borough workshop held; challenges, priorities and quick wins identified; working groups established; projects actively applying to the Mayor's Green Roots Fund.	10km of improved waterway frontage quality and condition.

NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING PARTNERS	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
33	**Improve air quality**	Air pollution along London canals, driven by solid fuel (wood/coal) stoves and diesel generators on moored boats, creates localised pollution and poor air quality for residents, towpath users, and boaters. This action will involve working with relevant partners to explore and promote practical options to reduce air pollution and exposure along London's waterways. Improved access to shore power will be supported where this is feasible, and the health impacts of emissions from solid fuel burning and diesel/petrol engine use will be highlighted through engagement with the boating community, alongside signposting to cleaner alternatives and good practice. The result will be cleaner air along London's waterways, while supporting boaters and communities to reduce exposure.	Greater London Authority	Boroughs, Canal & River Trust	Boating community engagement delivered (e.g. workshops/ briefings) to support practical actions to reduce emissions and exposure; training delivered for relevant borough officers to strengthen understanding and enforcement of Smoke Control Areas in waterside locations; and draft toolkit/guidance note produced for boroughs and partners on collaborating to reduce emissions from boats and reduce exposure in waterside areas	
34	**Path design and maintenance standards**	Poor design of waterside paths can create barriers to inclusive access. This action will promote the use of a design framework and minimum standards to support consistent, accessible and well-maintained waterway paths across London. The Canal & River Trust will share its existing towpath design guidance and advise landowners and managers on best practice. Walk Wheel Cycle Trust will seek funding to develop design standards that will support more consistent, higher quality provision of waterway paths across London, recognising different waterway contexts. The standards will be developed collaboratively with working group members and boroughs and will be disseminated via Working Group members. Ultimately, this will create better waterside routes that more people can access, enjoy and feel safe using.	Walk Wheel Cycle Trust, Canal & River Trust	Environment Agency, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority	Learning across the action leads and supporting partners shared; existing towpath/ waterway path guidance collated and reviewed, including frameworks and standards.	Engagement with working group members and boroughs; and design and maintenance standards shared to encourage their use.

NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING PARTNERS	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
35	**Increase open-water leisure and recreation opportunities**	There are limited opportunities for open-water leisure and recreation across London and existing facilities require improvements. This action will identify open-water sites with potential to provide safe, inclusive swimming and recreation, and work with landowners and operators to improve them. This may include changes to access points, signage, facilities, management arrangements and safety measures. The action will work alongside water quality, biodiversity and climate adaptation objectives to ensure that recreation is balanced with habitat protection and other uses. It will build on existing examples of successful open-water sites and explore opportunities to pilot improvements in places with high demand but limited provision, helping ensure that underserved and diverse communities can access and enjoy high quality open-water recreation.	Greater London Authority		Current provision audited and assessed; and partners convened to identify gaps and opportunities for improvements in provision.	Creation or improvement of two sites commenced.

Goal

Increase percentage of Londoners that have seen or heard information about how to safely spend time alongside, in or on London's waterways.

NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING PARTNERS	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
36	**Improve water safety understanding**	Many people are not aware of the risks associated with waterways or how to stay safe around them. This action will convene a roundtable of London's leads on water safety education and engagement to review existing campaigns and share best practice. It will share learnings and explore opportunities to increase the visibility of public awareness-raising campaigns, particularly among underrepresented groups. The focus will include both open-water and tidal Thames contexts, as well as construction and other work along waterways. The aim is to ensure more Londoners can enjoy waterways safely.	Port of London Authority (tidal Thames), Canal & River Trust (waterways)	Black Swimming Association, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, Thames Skills Academy, Tidal Thames Water Safety Forum	Organisations working on water safety across all of London's rivers and waterways brought together to review campaigns and share best practice, identifying opportunities to collaborate and coordinate.	Existing water safety campaigns being amplified, shared across London water safety forums and promoted consistently by partners.



Goal

Improve connections and increase access to waterways from walking and cycling routes and public transport hubs at 10 locations.

NO.	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING PARTNERS	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
37	**New river walking route**	Rivers offer the potential for high-quality walking routes that provide a safer, quieter, and greener way of getting around the city. This action will develop a new river walking route linking existing paths, parks and neighbourhoods. The route will connect communities currently lacking a strong connection to their waterway. Work will include auditing existing paths, signage and crossings; engaging boroughs and landowners; and seeking funding to improve physical access and implement greening interventions along the route. The route will be promoted through maps, wayfinding, digital tools and events. The result will be a flagship riverside route that encourages more people to walk, explore and enjoy London's waterways.	Transport for London, Ramblers	Greater London Authority, South East Rivers Trust, Thames21, Walk Wheel Cycle Trust	New river walking route scoped and funding identified.	New river walking route delivered (with long-term maintenance plan and included on walking apps).
38	**Improve waterside path connectivity**	Many waterways need to be better integrated into their wider urban context to encourage greater use. Ramblers and Walk Wheel Cycle Trust will identify barriers to inclusive access between waterways and nearby public transport hubs and movement networks on borough and Transport for London road networks. They will work with boroughs (and Transport for London where they are the highway authority) to identify opportunities for quick wins and longer-term improvements, such as wayfinding, crossings and lighting. Transport for London will support boroughs to deliver improvement programmes through the Local Implementation Plan (LIP) funding process, where appropriate, aligning with delivery of the new Walking and Wheeling Action Plan, and work with boroughs to highlight routes more clearly in any new physical signs or digital maps. Thames21 will support improving connections with their managed waterways. Funding will be sought to make physical access improvements, including better entrance and exit points. This work will help unlock the full potential of London's waterways by creating accessible, well connected routes that more people can enjoy.	Walk Wheel Cycle Trust, Transport for London, Ramblers	Canal & River Trust, Environment Agency, Thames21	Connectivity gaps identified; funding sources for access improvements scoped and identified; and TfL's Walking and Wheeling Action Plan published.	Wayfinding signage programme rolled out and connectivity to waterways improved at five locations.

Inclusion and engagement

Challenge

- Unequal access to London's waterways – both physically and in terms of perception – is compounded by a lack of representation that disproportionately affects particular groups.
- There are limited opportunities for nature, culture, sport and physical activities on and in waterways; this is due to cost, lack of equipment, and lack of awareness.
- Many people have negative perceptions, or lack knowledge of London's waterways (including a low sense of ownership and involvement). These factors discourage engagement with the waterways.

“There are limited opportunities for nature, culture, sport and physical activities on and in waterways; this is due to cost, lack of equipment, and lack of awareness.”

© Eleanor Church, London Wildlife Trust

Goal

Increase in numbers of underrepresented groups engaging with partner programmes.

NO	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
39	**Increase community engagement**	Secure funding to recruit paid Community Engagement Officers to work with community-led groups along priority waterways. By recruiting people who reflect local communities – particularly those from underrepresented groups – officers will build connections with residents, grassroots groups and partners. They will help identify barriers and opportunities to engagement with waterways and co-produce and deliver engagement activities on and alongside them. This will foster sustained community engagement and strengthen long-term relationships with waterways, leading to increased and more representative participation.	Thames21, South East Rivers Trust	Greater London Authority, London National Park City, Natural England, The Conservation Volunteers	Community Engagement Officer in East London piloted; one additional officer recruited and costs tracked; learnings shared with community groups; and follow-on funding bid submitted.	Scale up year on year as funding is identified and funding is secured to achieve an increase in engagement workers.
40	**Waterways youth engagement approach**	This action will develop a youth engagement approach to bring the waterways plan to life in a way that works for young people across London. This approach will help address barriers and promote and engage young Londoners in waterway activities. As part of this a 'Youth Waterway Pass' will be explored – a free membership scheme for 14-25-year-olds that offers access to waterway activities, events and new experiences on and along London's waterways.	Greater London Authority	Mayor's Fund for London Youth Panel, Transport for London Youth Panel	Agree preferred youth engagement approach; hold first waterways engagement sessions; test new models (incl. local youth voice offers in priority locations) to reach diverse young people; and explore the feasibility of a youth waterways pass.	Young Londoners actively shaping the waterways plan activation.

Goal

20 per cent increase in Londoners from under-represented groups who regularly participate in waterway activities.

NO	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
41	**Participation and events**	Increasing the number and range of events, recreational and sporting opportunities on the waterways will open up new opportunities for Londoners to engage with waterways. Waterway stakeholders will programme activities including walks, paddling sessions, festivals and clean-ups, focusing on underrepresented areas and groups. Together, these measures will help more people try activities on and along waterways, build confidence and skills, and develop ongoing connections with their local blue spaces.	Ahoy Centre	Black Swimming Association, Canal & River Trust, Greater London Authority, London National Park City, London Sports Trust, Natural England, OPDC, Out and Wild, Port of London Authority, Royal Docks, Swim England, Thames Festival Trust, Tideway, Women in Tri	Scope and map partner events and establish a baseline; develop a shared vision drawing on learning from working group events, projects like Illuminated River, walking guides and volunteer-led nature walks; and use the Happier Outdoors Network to share opportunities and link to Action 48 on increasing volunteering for young people.	Events and opportunities scaled up.

Goal

25 per cent increase in funding for waterway activities.

NO	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
42	**Scale up Active Thames investment**	Active Thames provides grants and support to organisations delivering inclusive activities on and near the Thames. This action will seek additional funding, expand the range of supported projects and strengthen links with community groups and equalities organisations. It will also share learning with other waterways and explore opportunities to reach more underrepresented Londoners. This will help more Londoners access meaningful waterway activities and feel better connected to their local environment.	Port of London Authority		Scaled up Active Thames funding announced.	Best practice shared.

NO	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
43	**Increase investment across all waterways**	Many communities and areas beyond the Thames remain underfunded and face barriers to accessing waterway investment. This action will explore opportunities for increasing targeted funding for waterways, underrepresented groups and under-served areas across London. It will work with funders to identify gaps in current investment and shape funding calls that support inclusive, community-led waterway projects. Bids from smaller organisations and communities who have not previously accessed funding will be encouraged, with investment aligned with the priorities of the Clean & Healthy Waterways Plan. This will help ensure that funding reaches the communities who need it most and expand inclusive waterway opportunities across London.	Greater London Authority	London National Park City	Waterway Green Roots funded projects announced; shared with waterway networks and encourage collaborations as well as linked with Go! London partners; and evidence base to select areas and target groups utilised.	Funding opportunities and best practice guidance shared; and opportunities to diversify funding with mixed funding models explored.

Goal

30 per cent increase in improved knowledge and perceptions of connection to waterways.

NO	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
44	**Regular perception polling**	Community engagement opinion and perception polling helps understand how Londoners view and use waterways. This action will deliver regular surveys and research to track awareness, attitudes, frequency of visits and perceived barriers, analysed by area and demographic group. Polling will be designed to complement existing research and inform decision-making across the Plan. The findings will support partners to adapt activities, communications and investment so they better reflect Londoners' experiences and address inequalities.	Greater London Authority	Port of London Authority, Thames21, Thames Festival Trust	First fieldwork wave completed and results collated to set the baseline for tracking and informing Plan strategy; and data (including stakeholder analytics) analysed to set targets	Follow-up perception polling completed and lessons captured to inform future research commissioning and delivery planning across the plan.

NO	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
45	**Waterway education programmes**	Educating young people to be more aware of and engaged with waterways will help build knowledge and connection to London's blue spaces. This action will focus on building understanding of waterways, climate, nature and local history. The programme will include in-school sessions and visits, and will be designed with partners such as London National Park City and others working in education. It will be targeted towards schools and communities with limited access to blue and green spaces.	London National Park City	Black Swimming Association, Canal & River Trust Explorers, Greater London Authority, Greater London Authority, Port of London Authority, Royal Docks, South East Rivers Trust, Swim England London, Thames Explorer Trust, Thames Festival Trust, Thames Skills Academy, Thames Water, Thames21	Learning and resources from partner interventions reviewed, including analysis of reach by age group; and survey schools on waterway activity and safety education completed including using the findings to co-design new interventions	Learning resources developed; and signpost and deliver at least 100 education interventions on the history, culture, river awareness, water safety, enjoyment and value of London's waterways.
46	**Community partnership networks**	Partnership working is key to increasing collaboration and involvement across London's waterways. This action will set up a partnership network in 10 strategic locations to increase collaboration between local groups, boroughs, landowners and agencies. Local groups involved in waterways engagement will be invited to regular meetings to share information, identify joint priorities and coordinate activity. The network will help amplify existing work and create new opportunities, as well as links with London's catchment partnerships.	London National Park City	Catchment partnership co-hosts, Greater London Authority, OPDC, South East Rivers Trust, Sukhvinder Kaur-Stubbs (former board member of LLDC and MD of Engage Consultancy), Thames21	Waterways partnership network linked to the 10 strategic locations and existing catchment partnerships created; community engagement officers, local volunteer centres, Borough of Culture networks and developers building diverse, locally rooted partnerships that champion blue spaces.	Regular quarterly meetings and knowledge exchange in place.

Goal

20 per cent increase in community volunteering in, on and along waterways.

NO	ACTION	DESCRIPTION	LEAD	SUPPORTING	2027 MILESTONES	2029 MILESTONES
47	**Scale up volunteering opportunities**	Volunteers play an essential role across London's waterways, supporting projects, protecting and restoring habitats and running events. This action will map existing waterway volunteering opportunities and identify gaps in activities, locations and participant groups. It will then support partners to develop new roles and offers so it is easier for Londoners to have a meaningful impact in their communities. Corporate volunteers will be signposted to waterway volunteering opportunities and new volunteers will be recruited, unlocking a stronger, more connected volunteer movement that accelerates the recovery and resilience of London's waterways.	Groundwork	Canal & River Trust, GoodGym, Greater London Authority, London National Park City, OPDC, Ramblers, RiPL members, South East Rivers Trust, St Giles Trust, Thames Skills Academy, Thames21, The Conservation Volunteers	Working group volunteering opportunities mapped, recruitment of lived experience volunteers and training completed; polling volunteer data analysed; volunteer policy best practice shared; opportunities promoted across networks.	Volunteering opportunities promoted; new volunteers from underrepresented groups recruited; and corporate volunteers signposted to priority sites.
48	**Create youth waterway volunteering opportunities**	There is a significant opportunity to involve more young people in volunteering on London's waterways, tapping into their interest in social action, nature and community. Through this action, GoodGym will convene and launch a waterways volunteering programme with and for young people, designed to create opportunities to connect with each other and their communities to lead social action in their area. A coalition of partners will work with a wide range of community partners for volunteer recruitment, and seek to position volunteering on waterways as fun, social and appealing. Building on what we know works (combining movement and volunteering), this programme will expand GoodGym's Movement for Change model and London National Park City's Ranger programme to reach more young people than ever before and create a new wave of environmental volunteering across the capital.	GoodGym	London National Park City, OPDC, Out and Wild, St Giles Trust	Cohort of 18–25 year-old leaders trained to organise and lead environmental volunteering recruited; volunteering opportunities mapped; recruit volunteers with lived experience and deliver training; and launch a co-designed programme, sign-up process and promotional campaign with young Londoners and partners.	New volunteering opportunities promoted across London through targeted referrals; a social media campaign and partner channels activated; word-of-mouth recruitment developed; leaders from under-represented groups recruited; media and brand partnerships to celebrate participants' success developed; and training, campaign and sign-up processes refined using feedback from young Londoners.

Appendix 2
How this plan was developed



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The Mayor recognised that without clear leadership and coordination, change would not be delivered at the pace or scale required. Upon his re-election in 2024, he pledged to work with partners to develop and deliver an ambitious plan to clean up London's waterways within 10 years. This was made a political priority.

The work officially kicked off in March 2025 at the Mayor's roundtable. This brought together CEOs and senior executives from government, water companies and regulators, charities, and community groups, to discuss the critical issues facing London's waterways. Partners committed to a collaborative process to develop a 10-year plan across four themes.

Working groups consisting of technical experts, volunteers and representatives from more than 50 organisations came together to:

- **agree on thematic problem statements and overall plan principles**
- **formulate the goals and actions needed to drive transformation for London's waterways.**

There were 16 working-group meetings in 2025, representing hundreds of hours of work. The groups visited key sites and met with experts and organisations who brought invaluable technical support, evidence and ideas.

Each of the four themes was co-convened by the GLA and thematic co-chairs from partner organisations. These individuals co-owned the development process for their theme, dedicating significant time and expertise over the plan production period. The Mayor is grateful for their leadership and partnership: Water Quality, co-chaired by John Bryden (Thames21) and Joe Pecorelli (ZSL); Nature, co-chaired by Petra Sović Davies (South East Rivers Trust); Access, co-chaired by Jo Dimitri (National Trust); and Inclusion and Engagement, co-chaired by Navdeep Deol (London National Park City).

This plan does not work in isolation – it builds on and supports other plans and strategies in London, and the work of partners and stakeholders. Key pieces of evidence were reviewed as part of the plan-development process. This includes the ongoing work of RiPL and London's catchment partnerships; and a specially commissioned report by ZSL that compiled the latest evidence. Bloomberg Associates also undertook a detailed analysis of similar work internationally, to draw out best practice.

This ambitious plan is the result of extensive work with partners. In committing to deliver action across the four themes, partners forged new alliances and built relationships that will outlast the plan itself.

Appendix 3
Actors and institutions that influence waterways



No single organisation is responsible for the health of London's waterways. Instead, a wide range of public bodies, regulators, companies, charities and individuals each hold distinct, and often overlapping, roles and responsibilities. This appendix sets out the main actors and institutions that influence London's waterways, and the part each plays.

London's 33 local authorities

(referred to in this plan as 'boroughs') manage planning permissions, including development along waterways; and enforce local environmental and building-related rules within their boundaries. They also oversee a majority of public realm projects along waterways, such as parks, towpaths, and riverside walks, as well as 95 per cent of London's roads, most of which drain into waterways. In addition, local authorities implement local flood risk measures, often in partnership with the Environment Agency.

Businesses

play a crucial role by reducing surface runoff and preventing pollution – such as oils, litter, cleaning products, and chemicals – from entering drains that discharge into our waterways. Through the design and maintenance of their sites, businesses can also create greener frontages, rain gardens, and river-friendly spaces that provide public access to the water and support habitats for wildlife.

The Canal & River Trust

is a national charity that manages canals and rivers formerly overseen by British Waterways. This includes 100 km of canals and other waterways in London, including the Regent's Canal, the Grand Union Canal and the Limehouse Cut. As part of this, the CRT maintains locks, towpaths, bridges and associated infrastructure; and supports public access, recreation and heritage of the canal network.

Catchment partnerships

are responsible for bringing together the full range of stakeholders for the catchment (the area of land that water flows from into a particular river), including councils, charities, water companies and landowners, to help improve water quality.

Civic organisations and charities

operate at neighbourhood, catchment and citywide levels. These groups mobilise volunteers; secure external funding; and pilot innovative, community-led approaches to river restoration, pollution reduction and public engagement. They also undertake practical conservation work – from litter clearance and habitat creation to water quality monitoring and community science – and act as

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trusted conveners, building partnerships among residents, businesses and public agencies. Civic organisations also advocate for stronger environmental policy; amplify community voices in decision-making; and help embed stewardship of waterways into London's cultural and civic identity. Collectively, their work ensures that rivers, canals, and ponds are not only cleaner and healthier, but also more inclusive spaces.

Environment Agency

is an arm's-length body under the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; it has significant regulatory oversight over London's waterways. The EA leads on flood risk management for major rivers and the Thames Estuary; and regulates abstraction, discharges, and water quality via the Environmental Permitting Regulations and the Water Framework Directive. It also monitors bathing water quality at designated sites; oversees biodiversity, fish populations and river ecology; and enforces environmental and water quality regulations. These regulations focus on the health of aquatic ecosystems. They do not set requirements for waterways to reach safe human health standards.

Flood Ready London Partnership

consists of all stakeholders with a role in managing flood risk in London. The Group was created to drive forward the delivery of London's first Surface Water Strategy. Alongside the Mayor of London, Members include London Boroughs, the Environment Agency, Transport for London, Thames Water, London Fire Brigade, Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee.

Greater London Authority

sets the citywide policy framework for environment, planning, housing and transport. It develops and oversees the London Environment Strategy, which includes objectives for rivers and blue and green infrastructure, and coordinates across boroughs on climate resilience and flood risk management, among other issues. Transport for London – part of the wider GLA family – is the integrated transport authority responsible for meeting the Mayor's strategy and commitments on transport in London. It runs the day-to-day operation of the capital's public transport network, and manages London's main roads.

Higher Education Institutions

play an important independent role in shaping and delivering improvements to London's waterways. Universities generate research, innovation and evidence that underpin environmental policy and practice – including long-running programmes to monitor water quality and ecology, develop solutions to pollution challenges, and evaluate what works. They also provide skills, training and workforce development across the sector, helping to build the expertise needed for long-term stewardship and delivery in London.

Independent Water Commission

was established in October 2024 to advise government on water sector reforms, publishing its findings in July 2025. Chaired by Sir Jon Cunliffe, former Deputy Governor of the Bank of England, it focused on ensuring there is a sufficiently robust and stable regulatory framework to attract the investment needed for the future, speeding up infrastructure delivery and restoring confidence in the sector. The Commission operated independently of UK and Welsh Ministers and was supported by a Defra secretariat.

Ofwat

is the independent economic regulator of water and sewage companies in England and Wales. It oversees the financial performance, efficiency and customer value of companies such as Thames Water; and sets price controls and investment requirements for water infrastructure.

Port of London Authority

has both regulatory responsibilities and an enabling role in protecting the Thames for the future. As a trust port, the PLA has no shareholders; and operates for the benefit of customers and stakeholders, now and in the future. Their operations cover 95 miles of the River Thames – from Teddington, through London and out into the North Sea. They work to keep commercial and leisure users safe; protect and enhance the environment; and promote the use of the river for trade and travel.



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Property owners

are central to London's vision for clean, accessible and biodiverse waterways. By managing rainwater where it falls – through green roofs, permeable paving and sustainable drainage – they help reduce pollution and pressure on the city's aging sewer network. Landowners along rivers, canals and streams can also improve access and habitat by opening up river corridors, restoring natural banks, and planting native vegetation that supports wildlife.

Londoners'

everyday choices – from how they dispose of waste and use household chemicals, to how they garden or manage runoff from their property – directly affect the health of local rivers and canals. By joining community clean-ups, volunteering with local groups, or participating in community-science initiatives, residents contribute vital time, knowledge and local insight to projects that improve water quality and biodiversity. Many Londoners also act as informal stewards, reporting pollution incidents and advocating for increased investments for and access to waterways in their neighbourhoods.

River Partnerships in London

provides a collective voice for London's rivers – raising their profile at a strategic level, to deliver catchment-scale on-the-ground action and make London a global leader in managing and restoring urban river catchments. Hosted by Thames21, RiPL is a partnership made up of catchment-hosting organisations that operate wholly or partially within the Greater London boundary, and other interested organisations that operate on a London-wide or national basis.

Thames Water

is the private water and wastewater company serving Greater London and the Thames Valley to the west of London. It manages drinking-water supply and sewerage for most of London; operates and maintains reservoirs, treatment plants and distribution systems under statutory duties set out in the Water Industry Act of 1991.



MAYOR OF LONDON