

SYMPOSIUM REPORT

THE RIVER THAMES, STAKEHOLDERS AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Symposium hosted by the **Greenwich Maritime Institute, University of Greenwich**

at **Queen Anne Court, Old Royal Naval College, Park Row, London SE10**

Wednesday, 14 April 2010

An event held as part of the pilot research project at the Greenwich Maritime Institute on Public Policy, Stakeholders and the River: The Governance of the River Thames – Port and Waterway – from 1900 to the Present (Nov. 2009-July 2010)

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[Click here](#) for the event programme (and speakers' biographies).

SYMPOSIUM PARTICIPANTS

This event brought together invited participants working in river, water resources and port management, policy-makers, amenity groups and other Thames stakeholders, as well as academics from related fields.

Speakers

Sarah Palmer (Director, Greenwich Maritime Institute) • David Spence (Director of Programmes, Museum of London) • Vanessa Taylor (Research Fellow, Greenwich Maritime Institute) • Colin Morris (Ports Division, Department for Transport) • Phil Pinch (London South Bank University) • James Trimmer (Head of Planning and Partnerships, Port of London Authority) • Jane Wilson (Senior Specialist Landscape and Geodiversity, Natural England) • Jill Goddard (Executive Director, Thames Estuary Partnership) • Kevin Reid (Senior Planner, Greater London Authority) • Gary Beckwith (Chairman, City Cruises) • Phil Stride (Head of London Tideway Tunnels, Thames Water) • Sarah Lavery (Environment Agency).

Delegates from the following organisations:

BB-Shipping (Greenwich) Ltd; British Waterways; City Cruises PLC; Consumer Council for Water; Department for Transport; Environment Agency; Greater London Authority; London Borough of Hounslow; Inland Waterways Association and Freight Group; London Waterways Commission; London Wildlife Trust; Museum of London Archaeology; Museum of London Docklands Archives; National Maritime Museum; Natural England; Pinpoint Communications; Port of London Authority; Regent's Network; River Thames Society; RSPB (South East England Region); RWE Npower/Thames RBDLP (General Industry); Seaspeed International Ltd; Thames Clippers; Thames Estuary Partnership; Thames Explorer Trust; Thames Gateway London Partnership; Thames Water; Thames21; Trinity House; Walk London; West London River Group.

Academics in planning, natural resource management, political science, geography and history from:

University of Brighton; Greenwich Maritime Institute; University of Greenwich Natural Resources Institute; London South Bank University; Middlesex University Flood Hazard Research Centre; North West Kent College; Oxford Brookes University; Queen Mary, Univ. of London; University of Sheffield (URSULA, ICOSS); University of the West of England.

THE RIVER THAMES, STAKEHOLDERS AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The trouble is that London River has so many mothers it doesn't know what to do. ... What is needed is one wise, far-seeing grandmother.

The Times, 15 March 1967

This was A.P. Herbert, novelist and campaigner for a 'tideless Thames', in a letter to *The Times* in 1967. Over forty years on, the Thames still has many parents and debate continues over the wisdom of a single governor. Who should decide what the river is *for* and how it should be managed? Is 'London's river' different from the river up- and down-stream, and does it require separate management? These questions are as challenging today as in the past.

This one-day symposium, hosted by the GMI, explored the role of stakeholders in decision-making and environmental governance for the River Thames today and in the past. The Thames and waterways of London are at the centre of a wide range of policy initiatives and grass-roots campaigns – including the revitalisation of wharves and waterways, the Mayor of London's 'Blue Ribbon Network', the Thames Gateway, London Gateway port and the Olympics, as well as ongoing environmental projects. These initiatives are rooted in a multi-level governance framework for the river involving a complex set of obligations and rights relating to consultation. The 'stakeholder' is currently crucial to consultation processes, but the river and port have always attracted a multitude of groups wanting to affect policy. The idea of the stakeholder grows out of a long history of debate over the role of users and the public in the governance of the river and riverside areas.

The symposium aimed to:

- explore the changing role of stakeholders and public participation in policy-making for the tidal Thames environment;
- highlight the most pressing issues relating to stakeholders' role in the environmental governance of the river and identify key areas for further research;
- inform on the River Thames governance history project at the GMI, and consider how far history helps us to understand stakeholder and public participation in the future governance of the river and port.

WELCOME / OPENING ADDRESSES

The event was opened by Professor Sarah Palmer (Director, [Greenwich Maritime Institute](#)) and David Spence (Director of Programmes, Museum of London).

Sarah Palmer welcomed participants and introduced the context for the symposium, outlining the aims of the pilot research project at the Greenwich Maritime Institute (GMI): [Public Policy, Stakeholders and the River: The Governance of the River Thames – Port and Waterway – from 1900 to the Present](#) (Nov. 2009-July 2010). A collaboration between the GMI and the Museum of London Docklands, this inter-disciplinary project is researching the changing modes of governance of the River Thames and Port of London in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It has three main aims:

- to assess the role of interest groups and governing bodies in changing perceptions of the nature and function of the River Thames in this period;
- to trace the development of the idea of the river as an 'environment' and relate this to wider debates about governance of the urban environment;
- to illuminate the role of stakeholders in policy-making and environmental governance today.

David Spence outlined the collaboration for the project between the GMI and the [Archives at the Museum of London Docklands](#). The museum archives, managed by Claire Frankland, hold the extensive records of the Port of London Authority and other organisations and individuals connected with the port and river. These collections are an extremely valuable but under-used resource for the environmental history of London and the river Thames. The GMI research team has surveyed the records as research sources for the environmental governance of the Thames. The team will provide

Administrative Histories for the museum, relating to a number of port and river-related organisations whose papers are held in the museum.

SESSION 1 GOVERNANCE AND STAKEHOLDERS: PAST AND PRESENT

Chair: Prof. Roger Knight, GMI

Dr Vanessa Taylor: Researching Governance and the Thames

Vanessa Taylor is the Research Fellow for the Thames Governance pilot project at the Greenwich Maritime Institute.

This presentation introduced the day's main themes and briefly outlined the changing governance structure for the tidal Thames in relation to key environmental functions (e.g. pollution control, water supply and flood defence). It considered some of the political challenges raised by the river's multi-functionality, fragmented management structure and multitude of stakeholders. What can we learn from past efforts to create democratic governance structures for the river and port?

The presentation considered the changing priorities and changing forms of political legitimacy for the Thames. The policy focus on the river has changed dramatically since the 1970s, with the closure of up-river docks, the concentration of the port downstream and the rise of environmental concerns. There has also been a breakdown in the consensus that governance should be tied to representation – a move away from public corporations with interest group and local authority representation (e.g. on the boards of the Port of London Authority and Metropolitan Water Board) to more diffuse forms of public consultation in the 1970s and 1980s, and since then a focus on stakeholder engagement.

The presentation looked briefly at the development of the idea of the stakeholder, from 1980s corporate management theory, to its diffusion as a political identity by New Labour since the 1990s, and its central role today in the notion of good governance. The European Union's 'Water Framework Directive' (2000) placed new obligations on water resource and river managers to engage with stakeholders through 'the active involvement of all interested parties'. In existing work on stakeholders, though, there tends to be little consideration given to earlier forms of public and group participation in policy-making.

The presentation sought to connect stakeholder consultation to the rich history of debate and political mobilisation in river management and other forms of environmental and urban planning. It considered how different stakeholders are from the interest groups and pressure groups of the past. How integral are stakeholders to policy-making processes today and who counts? Are stakeholders those with a pecuniary or institutional stake, but also *equally* local residents or interested members of the public? The presentation highlighted the extent to which technical and environmental debates relating to the river and port have always been fused with politics – from the debates between the Thames barrage and barrier in the 1950s and '60s to the debate over the 'floating airport' today.

[Click here](#) for Vanessa Taylor's presentation.

Further reading

[Orr, P., J. Colvin and D. King \(2007\). 'Involving stakeholders in integrated river basin planning in England and Wales', *Water Resources Management*, 21:1.](#)

[Reed, M.S., et al \(2009\). 'Who's in and why? A typology of stakeholder analysis methods for natural resource management', *Journal of Environmental Management*, 90:5.](#)

Wilkie, K. (1994). *Thames Landscape Strategy* (London: Thames Landscape Steering Group).

Colin Morris: Ports and their Stakeholders: Some Departmental Observations

Colin Morris is Head of the Ports Casework and Environment Branch at the Department for Transport (the Government department responsible for the Port of London Authority). In the run-up to the General Election, there was a limitation on what could be discussed.

The presentation summarised the Department's most recent guidance on 'good governance' for trust ports and their stakeholders (*Modernising Trust Ports*). The guidance document contained very frequent references to the term 'stakeholder', but it referred to a diverse range of players: the users of the port, 'the wider community the port serves' and the Department for Transport itself. Stakeholders were people with obligations, as well as rights: they have to take into account the interests of the port as a whole as well as their own individual concerns. The challenge of balancing individual stakeholder interests with wider interests was a theme through-out the day. The importance of ongoing dialogue with stakeholders was emphasized as more effective than one-off consultations.

See also: [Department for Transport, *Modernising Trust Ports* \(2nd Edn. 2009\).](#)

Discussion from the floor

1. Is there a 'democratic deficit' in relation to the River Thames and other London waterways? What kind of governing body would improve democratic accountability, and to what extent should it be stakeholder-led? Was a stronger role needed for the London Mayor and the GLA's [London Waterways Commission](#)? There was discussion of multi-national governance frameworks, such as the Commissions for the [Rhine](#) and [Danube](#), as models for a unitary governing body for the whole length of the River Thames.
2. There was also discussion of the uncertain future of 'trust ports' and the existing mechanisms for privatisation.

SESSION 2: PLANNING FOR THE RIVER

Chair: Prof Andrew Church, University of Brighton

Dr Phil Pinch: Mongrel Rivers: Waterspace Planning for the Thames

Dr Phil Pinch is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Urban, Environment and Leisure Studies at London South Bank University. His work includes writing on planning and the Thames.

This presentation highlighted the difference between uniformity ('pedigree planning') and diversity and hybridity ('mongrelisation') in approaches to planning. There was an appeal for 'mongrel' planning in relation to the Thames – a recognition of rivers, 'waterspaces' and riverside areas as distinct from land-based areas. The multi-functional uses of the river Thames and its nature as a fluid, dynamic environment were emphasized. The Thames played an important role in the economy and marketing of the city, as a transport artery and public amenity. But the river and riverside areas also raised a persistent question for planners: was public space or making money more important?

The presentation drew attention to the way we think about the river and the language we use. While recent conservationist approaches to planning for the Thames as a distinct 'Blue Belt' (similar to the Green Belt) might have a stronger, more cohesive impact, the 'Blue Ribbon Network' (part of the Mayor of London's 'London Plan') was more inclusive, incorporating all of London's waterways, but also more diffuse and 'fluffy'. The way we conceptualise rivers has impacts on policy decisions.

[Click here](#) for Phil Pinch's presentation.

Further reading

[Phil Pinch and Ian Munt \(2002\). 'Blue Belts: An Agenda for 'Waterspace' Planning in the UK', *Planning Practice and Research*, 17:2.](#)

Leone Sandercock (2003). *Cosmopolis II: Mongrel Cities of the 21st Century* (London/NY: Continuum).

Kevin Reid: Planning and the River Thames

Kevin Reid is Senior Planner and Strategist at the Greater London Authority. His responsibilities include drawing up and implementing the Mayor of London's planning strategy.

This presentation outlined the GLA planning department's key areas of responsibility in relation to the Thames and other waterways. These include planning decisions on riverside property development and drainage, liaising with the Environment Agency over flood defence, coordination of Thames Path developments, encouraging more use of the river, and of the river port and the 'safeguarded wharves'. Among the GLA's challenges was to coordinate the [Thames Policy Areas](#) of the various London boroughs with the Mayor's 'London Plan'. The presentation highlighted the changing pressures on the river and riverside areas since the 1970s, including the steeply rising value of riverside areas, once home to acres of derelict land. The 'Blue Ribbon Network' had emerged in the last ten years as a positive development within the 'London Plan', as a way of planning for the regeneration and conservation of the city's waterways.

[Click here](#) for Kevin Reid's presentation.

See also the Greater London Authority's [London Plan](#) and 'and [Blue Ribbon Network](#), and website for the [London Development Agency](#) (the Mayor's agency for sustainable economic growth).

Discussion from the floor

Much of the discussion centred on the challenge of achieving integrated planning for the river and riverside areas.

1. The need for different local authorities to work together and with the GLA was stressed, in order to produce an integrated approach to river planning. The 'London Plan' specified an obligation for riverside boroughs to designate '[Thames Policy Areas](#)', following specific criteria, in conjunction with neighbouring boroughs. The Thames Strategies were also prominent recent attempts to produce a more cohesive approach to planning for the Thames across its whole course.
2. The potential value of existing forms of governance for the river was raised. Attention was drawn to the Environment Agency's [River Basin Management Plans](#) (RBMPs) as a governance structure for the Thames and other rivers (under the European Union's 'Water Framework Directive'). Although the RBMP for the Thames was developed with a stakeholder forum (the [Thames Liaison Panel](#)), there remained, for some, difficulty in relating such wide-ranging, technical plans to actual planning decisions on the ground.
3. The question of public access to the river and the further development of the Thames Path were raised. This, too, required collaboration between, e.g. local authorities, the GLA, PLA and private land owners. There was an appeal for more proactive possible approaches to this development, including creating temporary walkways where more permanent solutions were still being discussed, as in the case of the land around Battersea Power Station.
4. 'Sustainable drainage' was highlighted as another area that would benefit from more holistic approaches to planning, shared between property developers and planners. The GLA, for example, is encouraging greater use of the river for rainwater drainage in the development of new riverside properties, to reduce the strain on the main sewers (which carry rainwater and sewage). This relates to the policy on [sustainable urban drainage systems](#) in the Mayor's London Plan.

SESSION 3: RIVER USERS AND INTERESTS

Chair: Prof. Sarah Palmer, GMI

Gary Beckwith: Many Hands make Light Work – Or Too Many Cooks ...?

Gary Beckwith is the Chairman of [City Cruises PLC](#), a passenger boat operator on the River Thames founded in 1996. He is also a member of the Mayor's London Waterways Commission and the River Concordat.

This presentation stressed reasons for celebrating the river and some of the outstanding issues needing attention. The improved environmental condition of the Thames was seen as a consequence of successful collaboration between river users and governing bodies in recent years (e.g. indicated by the recent finding of a Twaite Shad at Blackwell Point). But an appeal was also made for more creative uses of riverside areas – with cafes, lidos, beaches and so on – and for more piers. The importance of the tourist industry for London's economy was stressed, and the need for greater integration of road and river transport to encourage this, connecting coach stops and river boats. The stakeholders in this instance were also consumers: the people of London, the tourists who visit the city and the customers of the passenger transport providers.

The presentation stressed the many, varied governance and stakeholder bodies from the passenger boat operators' point of view. As well as the PLA, Environment Agency, [Maritime and Coastguard Agency](#) and the local councils, there were the less visible organisations, such as the [Crown Estate](#), the [Office of Fair Trading](#) and the [UK Border Agency](#). 'Governance' here was seen as a matter of persuading people to do the right thing.

See also the [London Waterways Commission](#) and [River Concordat](#) (partnership for the GLA's river passenger transport strategy).

James Trimmer: The Stakeholder Conundrum

James Trimmer is Head of Planning and Partnerships at the [Port of London Authority](#). The PLA is the statutory authority (constituted as a Trust Port) responsible for the management of the Port of London, and for navigation and conservation in the tidal river Thames (from the tidal limit at Teddington Lock to the seaward limit in the outer estuary). It owns much of the bed and foreshore of the river, and is responsible for most of the associated tidal tributaries.

This presentation summarised the PLA's environmental responsibilities and outlined the complex management structure for the tidal river. Stakeholders and governing bodies include: over twenty local authorities; one elected mayor; three Regional Development Agencies; national government; port employers and terminal operators; local communities. Additional layers of governance incorporate marine and coastal access regulations.

The various needs and desires of the myriad 'stakeholders' need addressing in the context of the PLA's responsibilities as a Trust Port. Stakeholder is a vague term meaning anything from ocean-going shipping companies and terminal operators downriver to individual dog-walkers along the upper river. Specifically, there are tensions between the (primarily navigational) needs of those terminals and shipping companies who bring in the revenue – which tend to be downstream in the estuary – and those (primarily in the river's upper reaches) who, though not bringing in direct funding, have a number of desires for improvements that inevitably cost money. The tension between the river's nature as an economic resource, on the one hand, and a public resource which needs paying for, on the other hand, was an ongoing theme of the day.

The PLA was said to be doing better in terms of public consultation now than ten years ago. It was increasingly recognising the need to engage with local communities and stakeholders before beginning on projects (and a recent controversy over tree removals carried out as part of the PLA's flood defence work had highlighted the need for this). Stakeholder engagement works in spite of the diversity of stakeholder interests, it was thought, because many of the relevant issues run parallel to each other and are largely not about conflicting interests.

See also the [PLA's history pages](#) and ['Communications and Consultation'](#) pages.

Phil Stride: The Thames Tunnel - The Importance of Effective Stakeholder Engagement

Phil Stride is Head of [London Tideway Tunnels](#) for Thames Water. Thames Water is the utility company responsible for water supply, water treatment and sewage treatment in the Thames region.

This presentation outlined the aims and challenges of the proposed Thames Tunnel. This major project is being designed to divert much of the 'sewage overflow' away from the Thames to Beckton Sewage Treatment Works. London's 'combined' sewerage system carries untreated sewage and rainwater into the river Thames when it rains – as often as once a week – through fifty-seven 'Combined Sewer Overflows' (CSOs). This is part of the Victorian-era drainage system built by Bazalgette. The hazards of the system were highlighted in the press in the summer of 2004 when heavy rains caused severe sewage overflows, killing fish in the river. The project requires extensive stakeholder consultation over a long period, including with 14 potentially directly affected London local authorities on site selection for the tunnel. Other stakeholders include the Environment Agency, PLA and GLA. Public consultation begins in September 2010. The importance of stakeholder engagement for successful project management was stressed.

Thames Water's water supply and storage plans also involve stakeholder consultation, especially for its five-yearly [Water Resources Management Plan](#) (subject to a public inquiry this summer).

[Click here](#) for Phil Stride's presentation.

See also the [Thames Tunnel Consultation Website](#), Thames Water's [Stakeholder and Community Engagement Strategy](#) (2009) for the project, and the [Thames Tunnel Stakeholder Forum](#).

Further reading

[de Garis, Y., N. Lutt and A. Tagg \(2003\). 'Stakeholder involvement in water-resources planning', *Water and Environment Journal*, 17:1.](#)

Discussion from the floor

1. Stakeholder debates were situated within wider political contexts. Debates over the status of Thames Water as a private utility replacing a former public utility could affect public responses to specific projects. Technical and political debates were fused also in the opposition of some local authorities to the 'super sewers' (Thames Tunnel).
2. The question was raised of the ongoing uncertainty over whether responsibility for planning decisions for the Tideway Tunnel project was going to be transferred by the Government from the local authority planners to the new [Infrastructure Planning Commission](#). This has implications for local democracy and is integral to the question of how stakeholders are situated in relation to policy decisions for the river.
3. Discussion touched on the obligation of today's governing bodies, utilities operators and stakeholders to take the interests of future generations into account, in finding sustainable, long-term solutions to current problems. This included providing efficient drainage systems which, unlike the CSOs, would not become obsolete in 100 years time. The challenge today was not just in trying to accommodate future population growth but, for example, in finding new ways to deal with rainwater drainage.
4. A question was asked about whether Thames Water would make use of river and inland waterway freight transport during the building of the Thames Tunnel, as an environmentally friendly option. This was said to be under consideration but it had to be considered alongside economic efficiency, as one of the duties Thames Water had to its customers under [Ofwat](#) regulations. This raises the more general issue of tensions within the regulation system between consumer interests and environmental considerations.
5. The importance of leisure users on the river was discussed. It was pointed out that the interests of PLA customers could run counter to those of other stakeholders on the river. For some stakeholders, this adds weight to the argument for an independent governing body for the river.

SESSION 4: WORKING TOGETHER

Chair: Alex Werner, Museum of London

Jane Wilson: Considering the Thames as a Landscape – A Shift in Stakeholder Perception

Jane Wilson is Senior Specialist [Landscape and Geodiversity for Natural England](#), the Government's advisory body on the natural environment with responsibility for 'sustainable stewardship of the land and sea'.

The presentation addressed Natural England's role as a stakeholder with its own stakeholders (including [London Biodiversity Partnership](#) and London Geodiversity Partnership, [Environment Agency](#), the [Forestry Commission](#), [London Wildlife Trust](#) and local councils). It situated the River Thames in relation to the organisation's current policies. The recent 'landscape-scale' approach to conservation has moved away from a focus on specific sites to a broader concern with the whole landscape. This approach seeks connections between green spaces for wildlife to move between habitats. It emphasizes the importance of thinking not just in terms of the Thames, but also its tributaries and corridors between the river and bank-side environments and other open spaces and habitats north and south of the river. The presentation suggested a relationship between *scale* and the nature of interaction between stakeholders. This integrative, 'landscape-scale' approach entails a need for partnerships and strong lines of communication across organizations, local authorities and stakeholder groups within London, and across different agendas. The presentation outlined the collaborative, workshop processes involved in identifying a series of landscape-scale areas in London in 2009-10, and work with local authorities and other stakeholders to incorporate design for landscape enhancement into local planning strategies. Through these workshops, Natural England has also identified 'natural signatures' for London, such as the lower Thames floodplains.

[Click here](#) for Jane Wilson's presentation.

See also news of [NE's recent stakeholder performance review](#) and [RSPB's work on the Thames and the 'landscape-scale' approach](#).

Jill Goddard: Talking Shop or Talking Turkey?

Jill Goddard is the Executive Director of the [Thames Estuary Partnership](#) (TEP), a neutral coordinating body for a network of users, stakeholders, local authorities and community groups located between Tower Bridge and the seaward end of the river. Bringing together over a hundred organisations, the TEP illustrates the great variety of groups interested in decision-making on the River Thames, from those affected by Marine and Coastal Access policy to organisations involved in dredging and flood defence. The TEP coordinated the stakeholder consultation process for the Thames Estuary 2100 Project (see next speaker).

The presentation outlined the work of the TEP and some of the challenges it faces. Apart from its role in coordinating communication between organisations, one of its most important functions is education. It facilitates the sharing of knowledge between a wide range of groups, from the general public to the key decision-makers along the river (said to be the local authority planners). It organises hands-on trips to the river to increase understanding of the life of the river, including the tides, flood defences, wildlife habitats, and the impacts of riverside developments. The presentation stressed the importance of 'talking turkey' for effective stakeholder engagement. This meant bringing vested interests openly to the table to allow differences to be discussed constructively. This combination of education, knowledge sharing and open discussion was seen as the key to effective stakeholder engagement.

[Click here](#) for Jill Goddard's presentation.

See also the TEP's early '[Management Guidance for the Thames Estuary: Strategy](#)' (1999).

Sarah Lavery: Planning for Flood Risk Management in the Thames Estuary – Whose Problem is it Anyway?

Sarah Lavery is the Project Manager for the Environment Agency's [Thames Estuary 2100](#) project (2002-2010). TE 2100 has developed a 'tidal flood risk management plan' for London and the Thames estuary. The Thames Estuary Project acted as their main conduit for stakeholder engagement. Public consultation on the project has recently ended and the plan will be submitted to DEFRA this year.

The presentation outlined the project's aims and the key features of its stakeholder engagement and public consultation. The Plan aims to provide effective flood defences and resilience up to 2100. This is in the context of climate change and rising sea levels, ageing flood defence structures and population expansion on flood plains in the Thames region. It has incorporated recommendations from the recent Pitt Review on the 2007 floods, which stressed the need for improved protection for critical infrastructure (such as water supplies and transport services).

This presentation, too, stressed the importance of education and knowledge-sharing in the consultation process. This worked two ways. TE2100 project sought to benefit from detailed local knowledge and also to inform widely on the proposed plans. Local communities were vital stakeholders for this project. Local authorities were being asked to plan for new flood defences and also, in some areas, to allow the sea back and there was understandably some local resistance. In the case of some estuary communities, flooding was an issue with especially strong past resonances and had to be handled with particular care. Providing clear information on the reasons behind plans and their implications for local communities was essential to the consultation process. Consultation with local authority planners also had to take into account what is socially and politically acceptable. This was another project where local concerns had to be carefully balanced with pan-London interests.

[Click here](#) for Sarah Lavery's presentation.

See also the summary of [findings from TE2100's public consultation](#).

Discussion from the floor

1. As in the case of the Thames Tunnel, there was discussion of the proposed life of the project. What about the need for new flood defences in the 22nd century? The TE2100 Plan provides recommendations for the short term (next 25 years), medium term, and long term (up to 2100). In addition, because of the uncertainties of future climate change and sea-level rises, the plan allows for a range of different scenarios.
2. The experience of both TE2100 and Thames Estuary Partnership consultations was that people were often suspicious of what they perceived as PR. Glossy presentations to local communities could be counter-productive. Spontaneous forms of communication were more positively received.
3. A question was asked about the limits of education and knowledge-sharing. What happens if all information and vested interests are openly on the table and there is still no agreement? At one end of the scale, there was negotiation and compromise and, at the other end – where the stakes are highest – there are compulsory purchase orders.
4. Who benefits from consultation? This was raised by one of the speakers as an important factor in approaching stakeholders. Consultation could be a time-consuming process. For those organisations repeatedly involved in stakeholder dialogue, there was a potential problem of 'consultation fatigue'.

THAMES STAKEHOLDERS, 1960-2010

Conclusions and Outstanding Questions

The event demonstrated that there is a vibrant interest in the role of stakeholders and public participation in managing the Thames. This section outlines some key points to emerge from the day and some outstanding questions.

1. Stakeholder consultation processes are rooted in specific governance frameworks. The particular challenges presented by the multi-functional nature of the River Thames and its fragmented governance structure were recurring themes for today's event.

2. 'Who counts?' is one of the most important questions to be asked about stakeholders. The speakers at this event on the whole represented the more influential, institutional stakeholders, with implications for the focus of the day's discussion. This reflects a wider dilemma for stakeholder engagement – the tendency for consultation processes to favour certain dominant organisations. Many of today's speakers are involved in mutual advisory relationships with each other. One of the benefits of this is that the cumulative experience and shared knowledge of key stakeholders can help overcome problems of fragmentation between different governing bodies and competing agendas. A drawback is that this can create inequalities between stakeholders in terms of routine access to decision-makers. As part of the GMI's ongoing Thames governance research, we will seek to talk also to a wider, more heterogeneous network of organisations about their experience of policy-making for the river, riverside and port.

3. The key functions of the river affect which stakeholders take priority. There is arguably more of an even balance today in managing the different functions of the river than at the beginning of this period. While the port was still based in London up to the late 1970s, policies for the London river prioritised port considerations over the interests of amenity and passenger transport sectors. Organisations such as the [River Thames Society](#), [London Tourist Board](#) and Greater London Council (GLC) struggled to make the river amenity case in policy circles in the 1960s, though environmental policies were gaining ground in the area of pollution control. Since this time, the concentration of the port in Tilbury and the greatly expanded environmental regulatory framework for rivers and ports have created a more even playing field for environmental and amenity groups.

4. Reconciling economic efficiency and revenue generation with the 'common good' remains a challenge for management of the river and port. All participants shared the view that effective environmental management was a central concern for the governance of the river and port, but there were different views of what this means in practice and how it should be paid for. In many cases, the interests of river users and consumers are potentially at odds with environmental considerations for the river. An example of this lies in the tensions within the water industry regulation system between, on the one hand, water suppliers' economic efficiency and water consumer interests and, on the other hand, concerns over future river flows and conservation of water resources. Recent debates over the development of the London Gateway port are another example.

5. The lead organisations for different policy areas on the Thames affect which stakeholders are prioritised. Policy relating to the river piers, for example, has been influenced by changes in the managing body. The publicly owned piers have changed hands several times since the 1970s – from the PLA to the GLC (1974), to Thames Water Authority (1986), back to the PLA (1989), and in 2000 to [Transport for London](#) (TfL) as part of the new GLA. Under TfL, integrated stakeholder networks have created a more coordinated policy for piers and commercial passenger transport (e.g. through the [River Concordat](#)).

6. Connecting different agendas and projects across different spatial scales is a challenge for effective stakeholder collaboration. Many larger projects create tensions between local community/local authority concerns and pan-London interests. Examples are the Thames Tunnel and TE2100 projects, and the GLA's ongoing obligation to reconcile local authority policies with the Mayor's [London Plan](#) and [Biodiversity Strategy](#). Many of the delegates in today's event face similar challenges. [Walk London](#), for example, deals with fourteen boroughs in London alone in promoting the Thames Path (which runs from the Cotswold Hills to the lower Thames).

The Thames is subject to environmental policies operating at several scales, including: river-basin scale, with the Environment Agency's [River Basin Management Plan](#) (linked to the EU's [Water Framework Directive](#)) and Thames Water's region; a pan-London scale, through the GLA's London Plan; local authority scale, through the boroughs' [Thames Policy Areas](#) and [Biodiversity Action Plans](#). While well-considered consultation frameworks are contributing to integrated environmental policies for the river and port, difficulties remain in connecting different projects. The Environment Agency's [Thames Liaison Panel](#) for its [River Basin Management Plan](#), for example, included representatives from London councils, the regional assembly, industry, the port authority, a number of NGOs and countryside groups, and the Consumer Council for Water. There were challenges in connecting the plan's extensive technical survey to specific environmental and river policies for London.

7. The river generates distinct sets of stakeholders along its course. This event focused on the tidal river (68+ miles long), but there are also distinct policy issues relating to the freshwater river above Teddington Lock (147 miles). Different sections of the Thames have their own constellations of stakeholders. Upper river groups include, to name just a few, the Thames Strategies, [River Thames Alliance](#), [River Thames Society](#) and West London River Group. Since the 1990s there has been an attempt to promote the idea of the Thames as a *landscape* through integrated management strategies coordinated across distinct sections of the river, by a series of sub-regional partnerships: from Hampton to Kew (the [Thames Landscape Strategy](#)), Kew to Chelsea ([Thames Strategy](#)), and Tower Bridge to Gravesham (Thames Estuary Partnership's [Thames Strategy East](#)). The [Cross River Partnership](#) is identified with the area from Chelsea to Tower Bridge, aiming to promote economic growth by improving connections between the north and south sides of the river. There are also specific, past and current, issues relating to communities in the lower Thames which were not examined in detail today. These will be explored in ongoing research at the GMI.

8. The Thames is part of a network of waterways with their own stakeholders. There has been an increased interest in recent years in the Thames tributaries and associated inland waterways. This increases the complexity of stakeholder relations for the Thames. The GLA's [London Waterways Commission](#) and [Blue Ribbon Network](#) are intended to address this diversity at planning level. The [Inland Waterways Association](#), [Thames21](#), Thames Strategies, [London Rivers Association](#), [Regent's Network](#), the [West London River Group](#), [Creekside Forum](#) and [Deptford City Challenge](#) are just some of the recent groups seeking to promote these waterways.

9. Is stakeholder consultation a genuine resource in planning or a hoop that has to be jumped through to gain consent? The evidence suggests that it can be both. Different types of consultation – from formal institutional and public consultation processes to informal and behind-the-scenes talks – result in a variety of outcomes. At one end of the spectrum are collaborative policy-making processes and partnerships, and at the other end are formalised box-ticking exercises. To assess the real impacts of consultation on policy in different areas requires detailed examination of specific circumstances.

10. Stakeholder consultation processes are more extensive and transparent than the policy networks of the past, but not necessarily more democratic. There has been a decline of the 'representative principle' within port and water resources management on the Thames since the 1960s and '70s. The implications of the shift from representative 'public corporations' to stakeholder partnerships in this arena are the subject of ongoing research at the GMI. There are still important questions to be asked about how competing interests are most effectively and democratically incorporated into decision-making processes.

11. Stakeholders have obligations as well as rights. The nature of their obligations and rights always need to be considered in specific contexts.

12. The impacts on future generations are a necessary part of the debate over current stakeholders' interests. Policy affecting the river and port affects the quality of the river and riverside environments for generations to come, especially in long-term projects such as the TE2100's flood risk management plan and the Thames Tunnel. Educating stakeholders and the public on the long-term implications of current policies is seen by managing organisations as a key function of stakeholder engagement.

13. There can be a fine line between education and public relations. The experience of the TE2100 and Thames Estuary Partnership suggested that people were often suspicious of what

smacked too much of PR. Glossy presentations to local communities could be counter-productive; more spontaneous forms of communication were more positively received.

14. PR is integral to stakeholder consultation. Stakeholder consultation is, in part, about establishing which policies are socially and politically acceptable. It can also be about seeking to win political arguments. Wider political debates and negative public perceptions of organisations can shape responses to specific projects, as in the case of criticism of Thames Water policies in the context of anti-privatisation arguments. One of the functions of stakeholder consultation is to address public pre-conceptions. Public relations exercises are part of the political debate and a long-standing feature of democratic processes.

15. Development policies for the Thames and its port are part of an ongoing political dialogue. There have always been competing views about what is best for river. Although the Thames Tunnel, for example, can be presented as the natural successor to Bazalgette's Victorian sewerage system, the history of infrastructure projects on the Thames, as elsewhere, suggests that these are never simply 'natural' developments based on straightforwardly technical considerations. Today, as in Bazalgette's day, they are rooted in political debates and economic constraints.

16. There is a long-standing tendency towards integration in the governance of the river Thames, but the river still resists integration. A move towards larger organisations and greater co-ordination between organisations has been going on since the Port of London Authority replaced the private dock companies in 1908. The Thames Strategies, Thames Estuary Partnerships and GLA's London Waterways Commission and Blue Ribbon Network are only the most recent attempts to achieve coherence in policy-making for the Thames. The creation of a single governance framework – such as A.P. Herbert's 'wise grandmother' – has so far proved impossible for this 'mongrel river'. In the meantime, the key issue is how adequately stakeholder and public interests are represented within specific governance frameworks.

17. New groups of stakeholders will continue to emerge. This is part of the evolving democratic life of the waterway. The internet has created more favourable conditions for smaller organisations and civil society groups to make their voice heard than in the past. How much difference this makes to their influence on policy remains open to question.

18. The virtual Thames is as fragmented as the governance of the river. There is a lack of clear information on the governance structure for the whole river. If individual stakeholder mechanisms and consultation processes are more well-documented and transparent than in the past, the governance picture for the whole river and port is perhaps more complex and difficult to understand than it was fifty years ago. Governance bodies and consultation processes have proliferated. A single web-based portal giving clear information on how the river is managed would be a valuable resource for the public and anyone interested in policy-making for the river.

WHAT NEXT?

☞ This event provided valuable insights into the changing nature of governance, public participation and stakeholder engagement on the Thames. These will be incorporated into research published by the GMI team and shared with the event participants and other interested groups, and made available on the [GMI Website](#).

☞ The pilot project, of which this symposium formed a part, ended in July 2010. The Thames Governance research team will continue to explore the changing role of interest groups, stakeholders and the public in relation to the environmental management of the Thames and its port since the 1960s.

☞ The Thames Governance team has begun an oral history project: Thames Governance: Oral Histories 1960-2010 (running Sept. 2010 to July 2011). This focuses on people's experience of working in Thames-related groups and of the role of different individuals and groups in decision-making.

☞ A social networking site on Ning.com (<http://thamesgovernance.ning.com/>) has been created as a forum for discussion on issues raised by the Thames Governance project, and to provide up-to-date information on the ongoing work of the research team. Information will also be posted on the [GMI Website](#).

FEEDBACK

We would like to hear your views on any issues raised by this report or the symposium. Please contact Vanessa Taylor (V.J.Taylor@greenwich.ac.uk) or sign up and comment on our networking site: <http://thamesgovernance.ning.com/>.