

CLEAN THAMES PLAN

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



INTRODUCTION

Our Thames Vision for 2050 is of a clean river, free of sewage, waste and other pollution, supporting greater biodiversity and recreational use. The Clean Thames Plan consists of 10 Priority Areas that outlines the actions and strategies that will drive the positive change needed for this to be achieved.

Tackling pollution in the tidal Thames requires holistic action from the many organisations and networks involved in improving water quality in the river.

This annual report outlines the continual progress being made by the PLA and our 25 partners against the 71 actions identified in the Clean Thames Plan. This will allow us to recognise and celebrate the milestones we have already achieved, monitor the effectiveness of our current delivery and identify the next steps that need to be taken to continue to move towards our future vision of a clean Thames.

Of the 13 actions listed for the PLA to achieve, 6 are complete, 5 are ongoing and 2 have not been started (but is due to start in 2026). Out of all 71 actions outlined in the plan, 55 (77%) are either completed or in progress.



PLA ACTION UPDATES

ACTION	YEAR	PRIORITY AREA	ACTION STATUS	ACTION UPDATE
Convene a strategic working group with the three water companies to find ways to go faster and further on sewage discharge reductions	2023	6	Complete	Through the Clean Thames Manifesto, the PLA convened Anglian Water, Southern Water & Thames Water who have each committed to bringing forward targets in sewage reductions. Thames Water have outlined their intention to run a public forum presentation following confirmation of their asset investment programme in 2025.
Facilitate access to environmental water quality data	2024	2	Complete	Thames Living Atlas was published in 2025 which presents litter and water quality data.
Set up a Thames Litter Challenge encouraging the public to engage with the issue of plastic pollution on the Thames	2024	3	Complete	Clean Thames Challenge was piloted in 2024 with great success. 154 participants collected over 3063 pieces of litter over the 1-month challenge with the PLA providing free litter pick kits. The PLA also secured a match fund donation of £3000 from DP World London Gateway for the 2025 challenge which engaged over 200 participants.
Expand the Thames Litter Forum to include highway agencies, landowners, farmers, and businesses	2024	5	Complete	The Clean Thames Partnership is now made up of 25 partner organisations.
Introduce General Direction 10 which prohibits the discharge of sewage from commercial vessels in the Thames and promotes investment in alternative sewage disposal facilities	2024	8	Complete	General Direction 10 went live in July 2024 with now the majority of vessels on the river compliant.
Commission an independent study on remediation methods for embedded wet wipes in the Thames in consultation with the Environment Agency and Thames Water	2024	10	Complete	Study was completed by ABPmer in 2024 suggesting mechanical removal of the wet wipes as the best option. Thames Water agreed to provide a portion of funding for the wet wipe removal works which took place in August 2025. The project removed 114 tonnes of debris from the foreshore.
Map out opportunities to increase biodiversity in line with Net Gain requirements in the tidal Thames	2025	1	In Progress	Five boroughs have been completed (Bexley, Barking & Dagenham, Havering, Newham, Greenwich)
Create a platform for partners to easily share project updates and communicate	2025	5	In Progress	First Clean Thames Partnership meeting was held in March 2025 to get updates from partners on their actions within the plan.
Work with the water companies and academia to develop a costed proposal for a public platform for water quality data at key sites in the Thames	2025	2	In Progress	The PLA are exploring water quality monitoring platforms and have funded innovative technology trials through the Thames Environment Fund.
Partner on a study on forever chemicals and non-pharmaceuticals in the Thames	2026	7	Not Started	To start in 2026.
Undertake pollution input modelling in collaboration with academia.	2026	7	Not Started	To start in 2026.
Provide funding for projects improving water quality through our Thames Environment Fund	Ongoing	4	In Progress	To date the PLA has provided £61,514 in grant funding for water quality projects in the Thames.
Facilitate the trial of new technology that reduces pollution	Ongoing	6	In Progress	The PLA has been involved in the development and deployment of both a passive litter collector in the outer estuary, in partnership with DP World and funded the development a microplastic collector with UCL which is being tested in Summer 2025.

CLEAN THAMES PARTNERSHIP ACTION UPDATES

1 Seek opportunities for nature restoration

TOTAL ACTIONS IN PRIORITY AREA	STATUS PENDING	IN PROGRESS	COMPLETED
6	1	5	-

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS:

ZSL

Launched the Transforming the Thames coastal habitat restoration plan, a major new partnership involving Essex Wildlife Trust, including co-creating a pathway to addressing pollution pressures to intertidal seagrass in the Greater Thames Estuary.

Queen Mary, University of London

In partnership with Affinity Water, monitoring freshwater invertebrates and river flow in Thames tributaries to assess the impact of river restoration efforts on water quality, ecology, and flow conditions.

3 Engage with the public to access, understand and value the river

TOTAL ACTIONS IN PRIORITY AREA	STATUS PENDING	IN PROGRESS	COMPLETED
11	2	8	1

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS:

DP World

Introduced driver sanctions and zero-tolerance training to tackle on-site littering; issued reusable mugs to cut coffee cup waste; hosted staff awareness talks on seal conservation.

Essex Wildlife Trust

Engaging the public through events and campaigns and monitoring recreational impacts on seagrass habitats at four sites along the Thames Estuary.

2 Collect, use & share meaningful data and research

TOTAL ACTIONS IN PRIORITY AREA	STATUS PENDING	IN PROGRESS	COMPLETED
10	3	6	1

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS:

Environment Agency

Monitoring bathing waters and storm overflows in London, publishing data and supporting river improvement projects with partners.

British Rowing

Launched *Thriving Waters* scheme in May; now 2 Thames projects running and supporting clean river campaigns with Putney Town RC and River Action.

4 Seek funding opportunities to enable innovation and technological development

TOTAL ACTIONS IN PRIORITY AREA	STATUS PENDING	IN PROGRESS	COMPLETED
3	-	3	-

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS:

British Plastics Federations

UKRI funding is available via the funding portal. The BPF also promotes UKRI funding via webinars and seminars as well as mentioning relevant ones during group meetings.

CLEAN THAMES PARTNERSHIP ACTION UPDATES

5
Partner with businesses to co-develop best management practices to reduce pollution

TOTAL ACTIONS IN PRIORITY AREA	STATUS PENDING	IN PROGRESS	COMPLETED
9	3	2	4

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS:

Cory Group
Working in close collaboration with local councils to educate communities on best practice in relation to recycling and reuse. Launched the Rework and Reuse programmes.

British Rowing:
Held 5 webinars on clean water, invasive species, events and policy, alongside publishing guidance for rowers when water quality is poor.

7
Combat pollution pathways into the river

TOTAL ACTIONS IN PRIORITY AREA	STATUS PENDING	IN PROGRESS	COMPLETED
14	3	8	3

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS:

Queen Mary, University of London
Completed an EA part-funded PhD revealing the eroding Tilbury landfill as a significant source of pollutants including microplastics and heavy metals.

Thames21
Mapping where road pollution enters rivers and launched an easy-to-use tool to help communities tackle pollution from busy streets.

6
Thames is an evidence-based exemplar for sustainable solutions to river pollution in the UK

TOTAL ACTIONS IN PRIORITY AREA	STATUS PENDING	IN PROGRESS	COMPLETED
3	1	-	2

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS:

Thames Water and Tideway
The Thames Tideway Tunnel will be fully operational in 2025 reducing storm sewage spills into the tidal Thames by approximately 95% in central London.

8
Co-produce holistic and enforceable legislation

TOTAL ACTIONS IN PRIORITY AREA	STATUS PENDING	IN PROGRESS	COMPLETED
4	1	-	3

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS:

British Plastics Federations
The BPF hosted its Parliamentary Reception on 4 March 2025, welcoming 16 MPs and peers alongside over 90 members, with further events planned later in the year, including a reception in Scotland. The Federation also played an active role in key international negotiations and continues to engage closely with government departments such as DEFRA and DBT on environmental agreements and policy development.

Ongoing dialogue with DEFRA supports the advancement of recycling initiatives, including Deposit Return Schemes, Extended Producer Responsibility, and Simplified Recycling.

CLEAN THAMES PARTNERSHIP ACTION UPDATES

9

Understand the plastic lifecycle to tackle sources of litter



TOTAL ACTIONS IN PRIORITY AREA	STATUS PENDING	IN PROGRESS	COMPLETED
3	1	1	1

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS:

Active360/ In the Drink

A survey of 250 riverside pubs from Kingston to Gravesend found that around 69% are using single-use plastic cups. A strategy is now being developed, including a Digital Deposit Return (DDR) scheme for reusable beer cups. ReLondon, In The Drink, Thames21, Re-Universe, and the PLA are working to secure funding for a large-scale DDR pilot.

10

Remove existing litter in the river



TOTAL ACTIONS IN PRIORITY AREA	STATUS PENDING	IN PROGRESS	COMPLETED
8	2	1	5

PARTNER HIGHLIGHTS:

Thames21

Published an Action Report in November 2024 highlighting environmental and social benefits, including a volunteer-led roadmap for tackling river litter covering legality, safety, training, collaboration, and data sharing.



LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026

1. Seek opportunities for nature restoration

PLA: Complete biodiversity surveys across all tidal Thames boroughs

Environment Agency: Identify and support river restoration projects

Essex Wildlife Trust: Research and deliver restoration and nature-based projects

ZSL: Monitor water quality impact from beaver populations

QMUL: Study effects of historic landfills on aquatic environments

2. Collect, use & share meaningful data and research

Environment Agency: Share WFD and water quality monitoring data

ZSL: Deliver State of the Thames 2 report. Write up findings of 2025 so far.

QMUL: Review and improve uptake of Thames data portal

Thames21: Run 3-year Tideway Tunnel impact study, share learning and project data

British Rowing: Continue Thriving Waters Scheme and water testing projects in Henley and Fulham.

3. Engage with the public to access, understand and value the river

Essex Wildlife Trust: Public engagement on river access and natural value

Bywaters: Educational activities with schools and universities on plastic pollution

Drinkable Thames: Youth engagement and support for local user groups

Friends of the Thames: Build Thames Guardian network; school catchment mapping

British Plastics Federation: Primary education and volunteer beach cleans

Thames21: Youth Skills Programme, focus on increasing representation

4. Seek funding opportunities to enable innovation and technological development

QMUL: Seek funding to expand data delivery and public engagement

PLA: Continue to provide funding for water quality projects via the Thames Environment Fund.

5. Partner with businesses to co-develop best management practices to reduce pollution

British Plastics Federation: Support companies with eco-design;

Medway Swale Estuary Partnership: Partner with retailers on trolley storage

Environment Agency: Support pollution reduction initiatives with local partnerships

DP World: Enforce litter policy for lorry drivers and site visitors

6. Thames is an evidence-based exemplar for sustainable solutions to river pollution in the UK

ZSL: Launch Transforming the Thames project

Thames21: Share project findings and evidence across the sector, using data to drive action and solutions.

PLA: Trial emerging water quality tech and monitor project outcomes

7. Combat pollution pathways into the river

Cory Group: Install pipework to divert blackwater from vessels

Environment Agency: Tackle known pollution pathways into the river

Essex Wildlife Trust: Develop plastics and pollution mitigation project

British Rowing: Promote SuDS with "SUDS Not Floods" initiative

ZSL: Continuation of annual delivery of Outfall Safari in Greater London

PLA: Partner on a study on forever chemicals and non-pharmaceuticals in the Thames. Undertake pollution input modelling in collaboration with academia.

8. Co-produce holistic and enforceable legislation

PLA: Enforce General Direction 10 for pollution reduction from vessels

ZSL: Collaborate with GLA on Clean and Healthy River Strategy

9. Understand the plastic lifecycle to tackle sources of litter

British Plastics Federation: Promote Operation Clean Sweep and circular design

Thames21: Contribute to the national plastic action strategy

QMUL: Improve understanding of legacy waste impacts

10. Remove existing litter in the river

PLA: Deliver the Clean Thames Challenge in partnership with DP World.

Thames21: Clean-up data and citizen science at 8 Thames sites

British Rowing: Plastic Blitz and clean-up campaigns

Friends of the Thames: Mobilise volunteers for local clean-ups



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SPECIAL THANKS

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2025 marks the first full year since the launch of the Clean Thames Plan, and we are encouraged by the progress our partners have made in delivering its actions. The Plan represents a vital step toward improving water quality in the tidal Thames—a priority shared by many. This year, the PLA has led innovative initiatives, including the first large-scale removal of wet wipes near Hammersmith Bridge in collaboration with Thames Water and Thames21. Our vision is a cleaner, healthier tidal Thames, and we will continue working with the Clean Thames Partnership to achieve it. Through ongoing innovation and investment, we aim to help the world’s greatest river thrive for generations to come.”

Grace Rawnsley
Director of Sustainability and Net Zero Transition.

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