

Green Recovery Challenge Fund



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Father Thames Trust Thames Landscape Strategy REWILDING ARCADIA Evaluation Report





Rewilding Arcadia Evaluation Report June 2023

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**REWILDING
ARCADIA**

A Message from our Patron

Known for centuries as the Arcadian Thames, the short stretch of the river between Weybridge and Kew, has been shaped by successive generations of royalty, local people and conservationists. This Arcadia is a countryside in the city – a multi-layered landscape where people, water and wildlife have all co-existed for centuries.

Climate change however has started to alter the delicate balance that sustains this remarkable place. If we don't act now and start planning for the changes that we know are coming, much of what we cherish today could be lost as flood risk increases throughout the coming century.

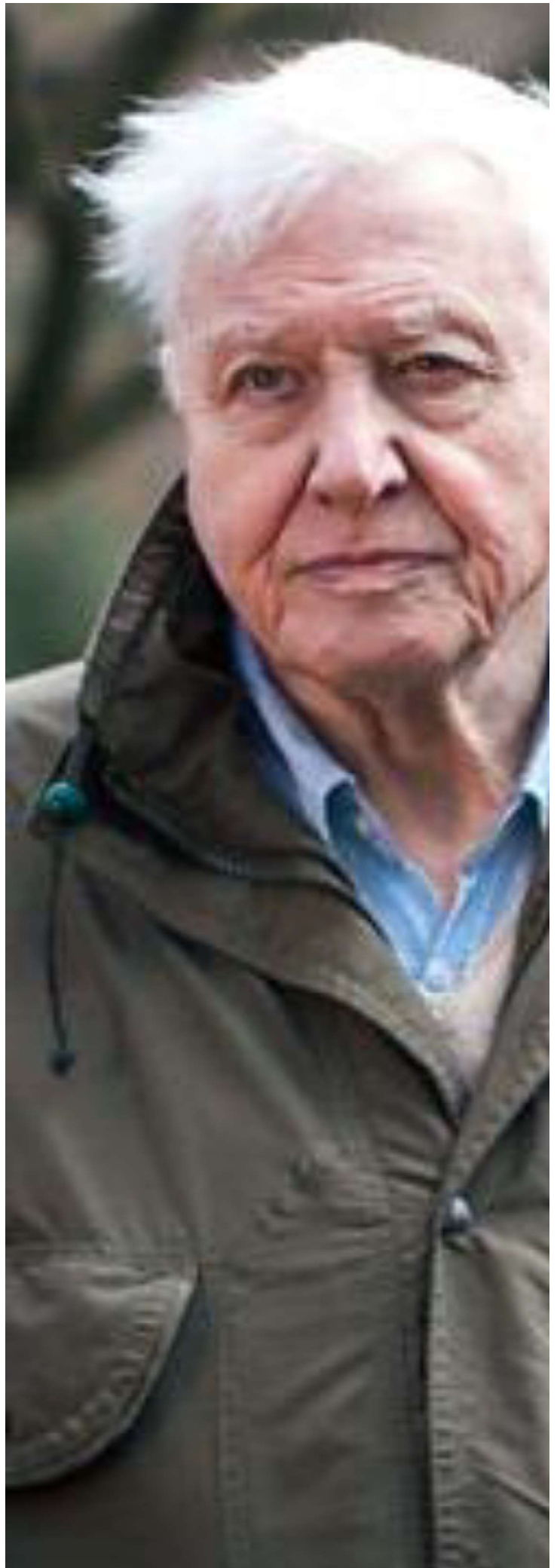
Rather than constructing large new flood defenses though to fight the forces of nature a different approach has been proposed by the Thames Landscape Strategy called Rewilding Arcadia. The nature-based scheme offers a new way to live with water, one that re-connects people and wildlife with the lost floodplain of the river itself.

Every day that we sit by and do nothing is a day wasted. If we don't act now, it will be too late. We must use the opportunity offered by Rewilding Arcadia to create an environment that is in harmony with nature rather than fighting it. Our motivation should be hope not fear of change. By acting now, we can conserve and enhance the unique heritage, wildlife and recreational opportunities that this most special stretch of the Thames offers. What is proposed is remarkable considering that this floodplain sits within the largest urban area in the UK. It offers a real opportunity to restore the lost floodplain to reconnect people with the natural world whilst delivering so many other benefits at the same time.

We thank the Green Recovery Challenge Fund for their support and look forward to next phase in the delivery of the project.

Sir David Attenborough

Patron Thames Landscape Strategy



I Summary

Rewilding Arcadia set out to deliver a series of education and outreach events, linked to small-scale nature based conservation management projects with the aim of demonstrating how nature based solutions could, in the future, create a sustainable and resilient floodplain in response to climate change.

The Green Recovery Challenge Funded project formed the first phase in a longer term initiative that will take many years and millions of pounds to achieve. The project was first proposed in 2020 but had been put on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic. At the time, a need had been identified to promote the approach proposed by Rewilding Arcadia in order to ensure that the hearts and minds of communities and statutory agencies were engaged before any detailed projects were developed.

To deliver a sustainable approach to floodplain management, within a predominantly urban environment (that is cherished by local people) will necessitate changing spaces that are currently managed as dry places to a wet environment. People need to understand what the reasons for change are and what the possible solutions may involve if support for the approach proposed by Rewilding Arcadia is to be supported. This was the primary aim of the first phase of the scheme.

Following a successful launch event and recruitment of staff, the education, outreach and demonstration projects began. These were successfully carried out with the aims of the project more than delivered. Details of engagement and volunteer projects are set out in the Rewilding Arcadia Engagement Spreadsheet. Both the number of people engaged through the Outreach Programme and the amount of volunteering far exceeded our original expectations: Rewilding Arcadia successfully achieved its primary aims and delivered its agreed purposes.

Total number of Volunteer Hours – 7035.5

Total Number of People Engaged – 2087

Although Rewilding Arcadia delivered its agreed outcomes through the creation of wetland areas and riverbank naturalisation, as the project was rolled out it was important for the way that schemes were delivered to evolve. Continuing Covid-19 concerns needed to be considered and many of the priorities identified before Lockdown had changed considerably once the delivery phase commenced. Structures and agreements that were in place before Lockdown had disappeared – all these needed to be accounted for. The death of the Late Queen and the cessation of the KickStart programme also impacted the delivery of certain aspects of the project.

The delivery of the demonstration projects took place on two or three key sites rather than across a multitude of different places. This allowed for the delivery of projects in a way that could be better linked to the outreach and volunteer programme and for greater conservation outcomes to be achieved.

This approach also ensured a far greater understanding regarding what Rewilding Arcadia (RA) was trying to achieve to be maximised with stakeholders and particularly communities. Secured funding for the delivery of those schemes that did not ultimately form part of the GRCF programme has been carried forward by the Father Thames Trust (FTT) and will be delivered by the Thames Landscape Strategy (TLS) over the coming years.



The Rewilding Arcadia conference and workshop provided valuable feedback to inform the next phase of the project. The Rewilding Arcadia film narrated by Sir David Attenborough has also proved a considerable success and alongside the camera obscura and other consultation tools will ensure that engagement can continue.

The primary aim of increasing understanding regarding flood risk and a need to manage the Arcadian floodplain differently in response has been fully met.

Rewilding Arcadia Phase Two has already started. Funding has been secured to ensure that the aims and lessons learnt from the first phase are weaved into partner strategies and community aspirations through the Joint Review of the Thames Strategies. This funding has ensured that the Rewilding Arcadia staff can continue to deliver the project through the review process.

Funding has also been secured to continue the demonstration projects including for example, the Garden for Ann (a nature-based tidal garden at Teddington) and the Surrey Care Trust Swingbridge Volunteer Programme.

Funding bids for the delivery of the two identified priority projects – the Naturalisation of Canbury Gardens Riverbank and the Recreation of a Freshwater Tidal Floodplain in the Richmond Old Deer Park are already progressing.

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund has ensured that the Father Thames Trust working with the Thames Landscape Strategy emerged from the Covid-19 lockdown in a strong position with a real legacy that should ensure delivery of its aims in the long-term. This is an exciting prospect and has the full support of the Thames Landscape Strategy partnership.



2 Aims of the Project

(September 2021)

Humans have always tried to find ways to control the River Thames, measures that over the last century have seen much of the London Metropolitan area protected from a flood event. Between Weybridge and Kew however, the river landscape (known as The Arcadian Thames, meaning 'rural paradise') is characterised by large tracts of relatively undefended land, where the flood defences are set a long way back from the water's edge. As such, many parks, open spaces, wildlife sites and towpaths (that characterise these reaches) are effectively within the functioning floodplain.

By their very nature, these spaces should be resilient to flooding. Previous land use decisions though have seen much of the dynamism and wildness of the Arcadian floodplain lost through historic modifications. As a result, the floodplain's natural capacity to function during a flood has been greatly reduced. At the same time, public perception towards the purpose of 'floodplain' has shifted as spaces that were historically regarded as 'wet' were increasingly managed as 'dry' environments. To a large extent, this loss of the natural floodplain has not been a problem. Climate Change however, has altered the balance. The river is reclaiming its lost floodplain back; putting cherished landscapes, recreational opportunities, heritage and wildlife at threat as flood risk increases. The purpose of the floodplain and our relationship with it needs to be revisited and the imbalance between water, people and the natural world restored.

The purpose of Rewilding Arcadia is to deliver and explain a series of nature-based flood risk management projects within the lost floodplain to increase public understanding about flooding and the need for long-term evolution of the landscape as climate changes. Rewilding Arcadia is not setting out to create large new areas of floodplain or to improve the existing flood defences. It looks to identify those changes that will be necessary to achieve a functioning natural floodplain for places that would flood already. By acting now, we can conserve and enhance the unique heritage, wildlife and recreational opportunities that Arcadia offers. Time is running out though, models predict that unavoidable variations in the operation of the Thames Barrier will be needed that when combined with an increase in peak flood events will put the Arcadian Thames floodplain at particular risk. What is wet now is likely to get a lot wetter, we can no longer sit back and do nothing.

By explaining the process of restoration to communities and authorities, resilience to flooding can be maximised, strategic policy can be understood and natural flood risk can be achieved on the ground – delivered in a way that ensures river users and local people have a real stake in shaping the future of their river. The restoration of the lost floodplain can bring many multiple benefits above those of just increasing resilience to flooding. Carbon can be stored, trees planted and pollution managed. Recreation can be maintained, volunteering opportunities maximised, wetland habitats and historic landscapes restored and traditional management practices re-found.

What Rewilding Arcadia proposes is remarkable particularly when it is considered that the floodplain sits within the largest urban area in the UK. By acting now, we can plan for those changes that will be needed whilst conserving those characteristics of the Thames landscape that are so cherished.



3 Rewilding Arcadia Project Outcomes

Each project outcome is listed in turn. The 2021 anticipated output, impact and action is detailed. Following this, new information is provided, setting out how the outcome was delivered, what was achieved, and the legacy.

Heritage Will Be In Better Condition

Output 1: To Achieve Riverbank Naturalisation to Create and Promote the Need for Climate Resilient Natural Riverbanks. There are opportunities to return river margins to a more natural condition but the current lack of knowledge and confidence to use natural techniques is hampering progress. RA will demonstrate how low carbon techniques can deliver future multiple environmental and social benefits that puts nature first.

Impact: To create or restore wildlife rich habitats and corridors through riverbank spiling that support rare habitats/species and are resilient to climate change. These demonstration sites can be used to educate on the future benefits of managing riverbanks through nature-based solutions.

Action: To naturalise 100m of riverbank as a demonstration project to show how rewilding can solve problems such as riverbank erosion, declining biodiversity and access restrictions. Outreach.

Project Delivery,

The riverbank naturalisation was delivered over the winter / spring 2021 / 22. Volunteers worked with the project team, coming from the local community and target groups. Volunteers from older age groups were targeted (as an identified need had been established that many people from this sector of the community were nervous about coming back out into public places following Covid-19 restrictions). The Kew Towpath, working on the foreshore is particularly suited for this purpose – contact with people outside the established groups could be kept to a minimum.

The willow spiling took two forms

- The repair of spiling carried out in 2007
- New willow spiling creation

The repair of the 2007 willow spiling was particularly successful. Very little maintenance work had been carried out to ensure its long term viability and as such long reaches were in an advanced state of decay. The posts had grown into tall and unstable willow trees whilst the withies had all but disappeared. Volunteers (working alongside council tree contractors) coppiced the willows to an appropriate height – this letting light onto the understory. Withies were then weaved into new posts that were hammered into the foreshore mud.

New areas of spiling were also created. One key aspect of this work was to manage over grown Willow Osiers along the Thames nearby in Richmond. Volunteers and contractors coppiced / pollarded the trees and the posts / withies were transported to site by boat. This not only demonstrated the viability for a productive riverbank system but also overcame the post Covid issue of securing suitable materials (that were almost impossible to purchase).



Project Achievements

In total 130m of riverbank were naturalised through the willow spiling along the Kew Towpath. Most of this work was carried out through volunteer action. Survey work in the summer 2023 has shown that much of the spiling has taken and already species are starting to colonise the backwaters behind. In addition, the spiling is known seen as a crucial habitat for juvenile aquatic species during periods of low flow and flood. Refinements have been made to facilitate this function.

Lesson Learnt and Legacy

The work was used to inform stakeholders and local groups on the importance and relevance of introducing nature based solutions to naturally manage the riverbanks. This involved walks, site visits and talks / lectures. Representatives from local interest groups, special interest groups, council officers, elected members and the local MP all joined volunteer days to learn about the technique. The work was also linked with the citizen science hydrological monitoring programme.

Many of the revetment walls along the Arcadian Thames are in need of considerable repair or replacement. As flood risk increases, nature based management techniques could be employed instead of more traditional stone revetments and sheet piling. As RA moves towards phase two, the GRCF riverbank naturalisation project has successfully demonstrated that this aim could work whilst supporting a range of species and community support. In addition, the work has been used to inform emerging research the restoration of Freshwater Tidal habitat. The use of boats to transport material also greatly reduced carbon use.

Output 2: To Create Backwater and Wetland Habitat Creation to Enhance Wildlife Benefit. To use nature-based techniques to enhance two small areas of existing but degrading wetland areas to demonstrate how rewilding can have wider multi-site benefits that show how these low carbon techniques can deliver a multitude of environmental and social benefits across a wider area. There are many opportunities to create or enhance backwater and wetland habitats that have increased biodiversity (including refuges for fish) and are resilient to increasing flood risk. The current lack of confidence to change existing habitats however, and a lack of understanding as to how increasing flood risk and climate change could put existing environments at future risk is leading to a do-nothing approach and a subsequent degradation in biodiversity.

Impact: To restore two small wetlands that support rare habitats/species that are resilient to climate change as demonstration sites to promote the wider benefits of rewilding, leading to a greater confidence that change is necessary and beneficial.

Action: To restore at least two small wetland sites to use as demonstration projects. Outreach.

Project Delivery

The restoration of Hunter's Pond in Ham involved the repair and creation of new wetland areas in a location that had considerably decayed over the past decade. Tree growth didn't allow for sunlight to penetrate to the ground layer and the increasing flow rate of tidal inundation was washing away native plants before they could establish. The tree growth was managed and the banks of the wetland area were stabilised. Behind these, native wetland species were planted.



In addition, the muddy floor of the wetland (the pond is tidally fed being dry during the neep tides and wet during the spring tides) was cleared of accumulated debris and planted with native reedbeds.

The restoration of a wetland area within the Old Deer Park ha-ha was chosen to demonstrate how nature based solutions complement historic conservation by re-opening the lost vista line from the Thames to the Kings Observatory. Willow spiling and backfilling was used to stabilise the riverbank and to provide a refuge for species to establish during periods on inundation. The backfilled habitat was planted with a variety of native wetland species. Volunteers were involved in the planning and delivery of this project.

A third wetland area was created on the Longford River. The opportunity for this work arose during the GRCF period, facilitated by a grant from the Heathrow Communities Fund. Small pockets of freshwater habitat were restored and / or created along the watercourse in the Home Park at Hampton Court and in small pocket parks located in the London Borough of Hounslow.

Project Achievements

Three areas of tidal backwaters were restored at

- The Old Deer Park ha-ha (Meridian Line)
- Hunter's Pond Ham
- Wetland Creation along the Longford River

The work was used to inform stakeholders and local groups on the importance and relevance of introducing nature based solutions to naturally create wetland areas. This involved walks, site visits talks and lectures. Representatives from local interest groups, council officers, elected members and local MPs joined volunteer days to learn about the technique.

Lessons Learnt and Legacy

The three wetland creation sites provided three different scenarios for future work to be demonstrated – tidal, backwater and freshwater. The projects were so successful in engaging with local communities and achieving the desired outcomes that it was decided no other wetland creation was needed. The project was used to show to local people that flood risk is increasing and that much larger areas of the undefended floodplain will be inundated as time moves forward. Importantly the project was used as a vehicle to demonstrate the need for change but through a sensitive and incremental approach to managing the impacts of climate change, a resilient floodplain could be created. It is anticipated that the approach will continue in the three locations and be expanded as Rewilding Arcadia is rolled out across the region.





Output 3: To Restore a Section of Naturally Functioning Floodplain for Improved Climate Resilience and Access.

A nature-based solution that creates and restores a functioning floodplain can help to manage the release of water back to the main channel after a flood event, can sustain a mosaic of different wet habitats whilst being used to capture carbon. To use the multi-site rewilding projects to create small pockets of naturally functioning inter-connected backwaters to show the wider benefits when delivered on a greater scale.

Impact: Rewilding enables climate adaption, reduces urban cooling, and increased flood storage by returning modified waterbodies into a more natural river system that are able to adjust to climate change. Managing the flow of water across the backwaters and between these places and the main channel can have significant environmental benefits leading to greater diversity, creating a resource that can be enjoyed by the public.

Action: To restore at least one small backwater as a demonstration project. Outreach.

Project Achievements

Establishing project work in the post Covid era was not easy. As the restoration of Hunters Pond and the Kew Meridian at the Old Deer Park progressed however, it became clear to the RA team that work could be concentrated at these locations that could be used to achieve this output. This was directly linked to the education programme to change people's hearts and minds that as climate change accelerates, existing habits will need to change (to be managed as a tidally fed wet habitat).

Lessons Learnt and Legacy

The associated education work demonstrated that there is still a significant level of misunderstanding towards climate change and the need for established habitats to evolve in response. The delivery on the ground with an associated education programme needed to change its messaging if this was to be fully understood at a community level. It was realised that attachment to established landscapes was strong and this led to a miss conception that the floodplain is already a wild and natural place so does not need to change. Simple messaging such as 'what is wet now is going to get a lot wetter' and 'should this be a dry or a wet environment?' were rolled out to increase understanding that the established habitat will start to decay as flood risk increases. Wetland can only be found in wet places! This was explored in length during the Rewilding Arcadia Conference at Hampton Court and has formed an integral part of the project as it moves forward.

Output 4: To be the Thames Champion for the Internationally Rare Tidal Wet Woodland and Associated Wetlands. To deliver a series of outreach projects to demonstrate the significance of tidally fed wet woodland and inter-connected wetlands as one of the most important but threatened habitats in Western Europe.

Impact: The upper Thames estuary has been identified as one of only a handful of locations suitable for this habitat to be increased in size to improve conditions for fish spawning, molluscs and invertebrates. To increase understanding about the importance of wet wood land and associated wetlands including their associated benefits for carbon capture, climate resilience and, as a habitat for molluscs, invertebrates and fish.

Action: Wet Woodland Habitat Action Plan, education.



Project Achievements

Consultation with a variety of different environmental professions at the start of the project indicated that a different direction should be chosen. Rather than focussing on individual habitats in isolation such as wet woodland or reedbed, a far greater impact could be had by championing the unique ecosystem that was once found at the very top reaches of large tidal estuaries.

This zone is known as the Freshwater Tidal Zone and is now one of the most endangered and lost habits in Western Europe. It is also one of the least understood as it was an ecosystem that was lost a long time ago due to its location at the top of tidal estuary. Throughout the RA Phase One project, information on the management of these special places has been gathered and the biggest area of Freshwater Tidal habitat in Europe– the Biesbosch National Park in the Netherlands was visited to gain further understanding about what could be achieved on the Thames.

Lessons Learnt and Legacy

The potential for the championing and subsequent restoration of Freshwater Tidal Habitat along the Arcadian Thame is high – there being many undefended floodplain sites that are still formed by open spaces. These places however, are largely managed as dry rather wet places.

To champion and put in place a plan for their restoration however was outside the scope of the first phase of the GRCF Rewilding Arcadia scheme. The habitat is very poorly understood (at a global level) and more research is needed. Phase two of the Rewilding Arcadia project will see the work carried out in the CGRF phase continued through the Joint Review of the Thames Strategies that will provide the means and funding to do so. A new section within the Thames Landscape Strategy Masterplan will be included setting out the need to champion Freshwater Tidal habitat.

Without the GRCF funding the potential to restore this nationally important habitat would not have been realised. It is intended to host a one day workshop later this year to discuss ways forward, bringing together the right people to inform how works should proceed. That many local people and environmental organisations are now referring to the significance of Freshwater Tidal habitat is an achievement in its own right!

Learnt About Heritage

Output 5: Complete the Rewilding Arcadia Partnerships, Outreach and Education Programme to Increase Engagement and Participation with a Diverse Group of Stakeholders. Rewilding Arcadia will put in place a series of outreach, education and volunteer opportunities that will encourage a range of communities and those dis-connected with the Thames to have a greater understanding of why nature-based measures to increase natural floodplain management are needed, achieved through the Partnerships, Outreach and Education programme.

Impact: Communities will have a greater understanding about the connection between people and their floodplain including its historic development. Local people will re-discover and value its function in helping to manage flood water set within a wider framework that water has in shaping the identity of place; at a local, regional and global levels. In addition, communities and local people will be given the opportunity to help shape the future of their local environment to increase buy-in to RA and wider flood risk strategies. Statutory agencies will engage to so that they can better understand local needs and aspirations that are often lost or over-looked when strategic, top-down policy is written.



Action: The Partnerships, Outreach and Education Programme

Project Achievements

The outreach work needed to evolve as the scheme was rolled out. It was anticipated to use the camera obscura for example in many of the education projects. Although this was launched at the start of the RA project and subsequently kitted out, many members of the public were unsure of sealing themselves in a closed environment (that the tent necessitates) for fear of catching Covid-19. In addition, the hot summer of 2022 also meant that use of the tent had to be reduced. This said, when used it has proved a valuable and essential method of engagement. A series of tools have been developed such as a series of transparent layers to overlay the observation table and also the use of blank sheets of paper for users to record (and alter) what is projected.

Another outreach project that had to be postponed was the proposed Rewilding Arcadia play. A read through of a draft version was to be performed with specially commissioned music at an event in Syon Park. This was to include audience involvement to inform the final version of the play by Keiron Knowles. Although all tickets were sold for the event, it had to be cancelled with one day's notice due to the death of the Late Queen two days before the chosen date. It was hoped to rearrange the event however, it depends on a particular tide taking place at the right time. There has not been a suitable opportunity for this but it is hoped that the event will take place in the following autumn when tidal conditions return.

A full breakdown of engagement activity is enclosed in the attached engagement Excel spreadsheet.

Total number of Volunteer Hours – 7035.5

Total Number of People Directly Engaged – 2087

Lessons Learnt and Legacy

Although the direction that the education and Outreach Programme took evolved, it has been a considerable success. The main aim of this outcome was to facilitate a change in the hearts and minds of stakeholders, authorities and communities regarding the need to manage the floodplain in a new way, (using nature based solutions). The reasons for this, the need for change and the potential for change have all been widely understood and considered by a variety of different user groups and stakeholders.

The next stage of the project including the Joint Review of the Thames Strategies has been considerably enhanced by the GRCF project.

The camera obscura tent is fully kitted out and will be used many times in the future by the Thames Landscape Strategy.



Output 6: To Increase and Strengthen the Link between Communities and Statutory Agencies. Rewilding Arcadia will engage with planners, flood risk authorities, communities and users to find ways to make strategic policies (concerning flood risk and climate change) relevant to demonstrate how they can be implemented on the ground. Impact: Strategic policy concerning flood risk is often confusing and hard to understand. Through the Rewilding Arcadia process, planners and practitioners will have a greater understanding on community concerns regarding flood risk policy whilst communities will better understand the benefits of flood risk management strategies and subsequently get behind and support their delivery. Statutory agencies will engage to so that they can better understand local needs and aspirations that are often lost or over-looked when strategic, top-down policy is written.

Action: The Partnerships, Outreach and Education Programme

Project Achievements

The GRCF outreach work has included 26 meetings with target authorities. This has included planners, flood risk practitioners, architects and users.

Lessons Learnt and Legacy

Of particular note is the way that the Environment Agency has engaged with the project and has set out the aims of Rewilding Arcadia as a priority within its 10-year review of the Thames Estuary 2100 flood risk management strategy.

To fully achieve this aim however it became clear that a review of the Thames Landscape Strategy 2012 masterplan report was needed in order to fully engage and consult with all the different authorities. As such, a funding bid was submitted to the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee to review the Thames Landscape Strategy. This is known as the Joint Review of the Thames Strategies and has been successful in securing funding from April 2023. Funding will facilitate the retention of the two existing RA members of staff to ensure that the priorities identified in RA are weaved into partner policy documents and ultimately the production of a riverside strategy for each partner borough.

Greater Well-Being

Output 7: Rewilding Arcadia will work with people with a range of mental health problems to nurture skills and confidence through volunteering activities, fostering a greater sense of well-being and belongingness with the river landscape.

Impact: Evidence shows that engagement with people with mental health problems through environmental projects can turn people's lives around, contact with nature is known to increase mental health. It is often not the number of people attending any particular event that is important rather, it is important to ensure that the experience is suited to individuals. For many of the people with mental health needs, the existing TLS Swingbridge programme is of huge significance in their mental well-being, their time on Swingbridge is often what keeps them going. Without funding this programme will cease to continue.



Action: The GRCF monies will allow the TLS to continue to work with the Surrey Care Trust's community narrowboat Swingbridge II (accredited as a training centre by the National Community Boats Association). Without funding this work will more-than-likely have to stop. Referred through the Surrey Care Trust, volunteers will have a range of issues including alcoholism, drug addiction, veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression and people who have been long-term unemployed due to mental health problems. Specialist care and training is provided by the Surrey Care Trust who manage the volunteers, working from the fully equipped narrowboat in the boroughs of Elmbridge, Spelthorne, Richmond and Kingston. The TLS works alongside the Trust, setting the conservation tasks, providing specialist conservation skills training and gaining permissions.

Project Achievements

The project successfully engaged, through the work of the Surrey Care Trust with identified groups working from the community narrowboat Swingbridge Two. The work was carried out between November 2021 and March 2022 and again from October 2022 to March 2023. Details of completed work and groups reached are detailed in the Engagement Report.

Lessons Learnt and Legacy

Following Covid-19 it was uncertain whether the Swingbridge programme would continue. The GRCF funding not only allowed the work to proceed but also to flourish. A funding bid is being explored to purchase and kit out a further community narrow boat that would be dedicated to working on the Arcadian Thames through the work of the Thames Landscape Strategy.

Output 8: To Engage with Communities to Inform the Creation of New Quiet Spaces where an Intimate Relationship with Nature can be Experienced. We will engage with at least 10 groups and 200 'lone' voices to establish what type of spaces would facilitate a greater intimacy with the natural world. From this research a series of specific measures can be included in the future Rewilding Arcadia scheme.

Impact: To identify ways that quieter spaces can be created during future landscape restoration where an intimate connection with the natural world can be had. Engagement will explore what measures would connect users with heritage, wild or natural features and the ways that rewilding can help people understand what it is they are experiencing. The healing power of water should not be underestimated. Rewilding Arcadia is all about restoring our relationship with water – places can be created where the sound, movement and rhythm of the tides or the flow can foster mindfulness, understanding, better mental health and contemplation. The TLS has always believed that landscape is not just seen by the eye, it is felt in the heart.

Evidence: During the Covid-19 lockdown, the Arcadian Thames experienced high visitor numbers as a place for exercise and to connect people with the natural world in an uncertain time. This coincided with a new appreciation towards nature experienced by many people. Feedback to the TLS demonstrated how important the river was for people's mental and physical health yet also showed how disconnected from the natural world many people felt - often through a lack of knowledge.



As the lockdown continued, riverside users started seeking out quieter spaces where a more intimate relationship with nature and heritage could be achieved. Visitors to the river had the time to discover and notice new things – often things that had always been there, it is just that they had not appreciated them before. The need for quieter spaces that offered natural intimacy with nature was highlighted as particularly important to those people with mental health problems and the elderly who were afraid to use open spaces during Covid.

Project Achievements

Throughout the education and outreach work, the RA team continued to ask riverside users and residents whether this was still a priority. It has been established that there is still a need for such spaces to be created and that these spaces are an important element in people's enjoyment of nature and importantly their connection with the natural world.

As the project was rolled out, a further need for 'cool walks' was established on the back of the research carried out for the quiet spaces. A cool walk is in response to summer heat and an identified need for shady, cool walks for people to escape the heat. The towpath lends itself particularly well to this use. A grant from the Port of London was secured and a programme of walks developed for the summer of 2023 and 2024. The walks have also identified target groups for delivery – of note is the visually impaired community that find access to the riverside challenging.

Lessons Learnt and Legacy

To ensure that as site specific project work is carried out, quiet spaces will be created where users can experience an intimate connection with nature. It is considered that this element will form a separate piece of guidance within the review of the 2012 Thames Landscape Strategy masterplan and that each site specific project delivered in the future will include at least one quiet space. The Cool Walks programme will be delivered over the summer 2023 and 2024.

Wider Range of People

Output 9: To deliver an Outreach Programme Associated with the Development of Rewilding Arcadia: The Play. **Output:** Through the Partnership, Outreach and Education Programme, to deliver a series of events and activities in partnership with the development of 'Rewilding Arcadia: A new play by Kieron Knowles'.

Impact: For at least 250 people from diverse backgrounds to be involved in the creation of the play through a series of workshops, readings, musical events and activity. The RA team will work with communities to learn from their experiences whilst watching excerpts of the play and being part of its development. To be fed into the final RA report.

Action: Part funding is being sought for the TLS to work with playwright Kieron Knowles. An Arts Council bid has been submitted by Kieron for the staging and production of the play. Funding will be used for Kieron to carry out engagement work associated with the play with the RA POE Officer. Kieron will work with folk group Megson to deliver an experience that will explore five very personal relationships with the river, floods and potential future scenarios to tackle the impact of climate change. Ultimately, the play to take place in an outside riverside space to coincide with a predicted high tide that will slowly surround the stage during the performance before ebbing away as the play concludes.



The production will be used as a vehicle for engagement with the community and will take place throughout September 2022 as part of the Totally Thames Festival.

Project Achievements

Keiron Knowles was commissioned to write a first draft of the play which was completed. An outreach event was arranged for September 2022, to take place on the Syon House Flood Meadows that was included as part of the Totally Thames Festival. Tickets to event sold out on Eventbrite. The evening read through and subsequent discussion that would have informed the subsequent development of the play had to be cancelled however, due to the death of The Late Queen (two days before the scheduled event). As the event was tidal dependent, it was not possible to reschedule the play during the period of the remaining GRCF.

Lessons Learnt and Legacy

It is intended that the play will be rescheduled for a future date – Keiron, the playwright has continued to refine the play having carried out a series of smaller consultation activities at TLS events concerning Rewilding Arcadia.

Output 10: To change Hearts and Minds through the Production of a Film using TLS/FTT Champions and Advocates including Sir David Attenborough. To engage with people who may not usually become involved in local environmental projects through the production of a short film with the TLS patrons Sir David Attenborough, HRH The Duke of Gloucester, Kim Wilkie and Dr Janina Ramirez. To complete the film, celebrating RA. To share on social media, at events and on the partner/TLS websites with a target of reaching 10,000 hits.

Impact: By using the TLS Patrons as champions and advocates for the Rewilding process, the film can be used to change a diverse range of people's hearts and minds about why nature-based solutions are important. No-one does this better than Sir David, this output can bring the aspirations of the project directly into people's homes in a way that other initiatives cannot. The film can also be used to help ensure that further match funding is secured.

Action: The TLS patrons have already agreed to making the film. If funding is secured this can be completed using Covid-19 compliant methods. To include contributions from local people and river users.

Project Achievements

A film production company was commissioned to film and edit the film. (Chris Baines Productions). Chris agreed to work for a much reduced fee alongside his wife Helen Shepherd (who produced and directed the film). Helen recently won a BAFTA for her production working with the BBC. Sir David Attenborough introduced and narrated the film. The film was launched at the Rewilding Arcadia Conference at Hampton Court – Sir David was in attendance.

Lessons Learnt and Legacy

The film has already been used extensively during TLS / FTT outreach events. It has also been shared with local interest groups who have screened it at their own events. On writing this report, there have been 2,800 views on You Tube.



Output 11: To work with Older People Who are Cautious to Return to Riverside Parks and Gardens Following Covid-19

Impact: Older people will be targeted through special events and activities that are designed to provide a safe space among peer groups to encourage local people that may be to afraid to return to the riverside to participate.

Evidence: Feedback to the TLS during the Covid-19 pandemic has shown that there is a considerable group of older people who previously used the riverside for recreation who are now scared to do so. This is because of their experience of the riverside during Covid-19. Studies demonstrate that in some cases the area was up to nine times busier than in normal years.

Action: The Partnerships, Outreach and Education Programme, to train volunteers to lead groups as needed.

Project Achievements

Older people were targeted at the start of the volunteer programme to help with the willow spiling along the Kew Towpath. This was successful in persuading 14 individuals to help who had previously been nervous about social gathering. As the year progressed however, and the fear from Covid 19 reduced, the need for this type of activity was greatly reduced as people returned back to normal life.

Lessons Learnt and Legacy

This action was very much focussed on a particular Covid- 19 concern.

Local Economy Boosted

Output 12: Communities, businesses, Chambers of Commerce and riverside users will have increased understanding about how climate change and increasing flood risk could affect economic activity and tourism and, how rewilding projects can provide solutions to these threats that sit harmoniously within a restored naturally functioning floodplain.

Impact: Stakeholders will understand that local nature-based solutions can provide a suitable solution to increasing flood risk that can be developed in a way to sustain economic activity and tourism along the River Thames corridor in normal times, drought and flood.

Evidence: This output is about engaging, listening to and, enthusing a range of stakeholders about why rewilding schemes that offer long-term, multiple benefit, nature-based approaches to manage the floodplain/flood risk/climate change are needed. This need has been identified during the development phase of Rewilding Arcadia based on considerable stakeholder consultation.

Project Achievements

The project successfully interacted with over 30 riverside businesses and user groups (see engagement spreadsheet for details). Of particular note were those based within the functioning floodplain many of which did not know that flood risk was going to increase.



Lessons Learnt and Legacy

The scope of the GRCF RA project needs to be expanded for a fuller engagement to be achieved. This theme will be explored at greater depth during Phase Two funded through the Joint Review of the Thames Strategies.

Output 13: Ensuring Climate Resilient Access, Recreational Use Through Rewilding along Vulnerable Riverside Footpaths, Cycle paths and Open Spaces. RA will engage with communities to demonstrate how rewilding, wetland creation and the goal to change environments from being managed as 'dry' places to 'wet' can still provide multiple benefits such as ensuring dry access during inundation through the installation of sensitively designed dry routes, that when considered as part of a holistic package of measures also increase biodiversity, carbon storage and resilience to flood risk.

Impact: Communities and riverside users will have increased understanding about how climate change and increasing flood risk could affect recreational use and, how rewilding projects can provide solutions to these threats that sit harmoniously within a restored, naturally functioning floodplain. Local communities will understand that local nature-based solutions can also provide multiple benefits including a suitable solution to increasing flood risk that can be developed in a way to sustain recreational use in normal times, drought and flood. People will have greater well-being in using the floodplain following long-term improvements as they will have the confidence that they will not be cut off by high tides or floods. In addition, dry routes can be used to increase access to and understanding of the natural world and riparian habitats.

Evidence: Environment Agency flood risk models indicate that as flood risk increases, recreational use of the towpaths and flood plain open spaces will be negatively affected, with a knock on effect to sustainable transport plans (including travel to work and school), carbon use and tourism.

Action: The Partnerships, Outreach and Education Programme, Dry routes

Project Achievements

This element of the project was of particular note to local communities and for statutory agencies who are developing sustainable transport strategies. Whilst Phase One of Rewilding Arcadia was able to introduce the challenges ahead, it will necessitate far greater engagement with partners through Phase Two to agree a series of policies to ensure long term access and multiple benefits are achieved.

The Royal Borough of Kingston is currently exploring how to deliver the first stage in the naturalisation of Canbury Gardens Riverside in order to achieve multiple benefits. This would necessitate the re-positioning of the formal Sustrans cycle route from adjacent to water's edge to a slightly higher path 10m away. The benefit of this action, would facilitate the riverside naturalisation whilst achieving the multiple recreational benefits that the project could bring.

Lessons Learnt and Legacy

Phase One of RA demonstrated just how important the multiple benefits that the project brings are in changing the way that communities perceive the function of floodplain and also in their support for the wider project. With many riverside users, it is the prospect of sustained recreational use, in light of increasing flood risk that are as significant as any nature based conservation enhancement.



Developed Skills

Output 14: To Deliver Community Engagement Through Volunteering. We will continue to deliver volunteer projects to foster engagement and to inform the public of the benefits of rewilding and, the need for landscape adaptation in response to climate change and, ensure that diverse voices have a greater connection with the floodplain environment.

Impact: Users and communities will have a greater knowledge and understanding of flood risk and nature-based conservation work and an increase in skills (intellectual, social and communication) that has been achieved through enjoyable and creative volunteer project work. In addition, volunteers will feel that they have a real stake in the future of the Arcadian Thames having helped to shape its future in a practical way on the ground.

Action: Through the Capital project work set out elsewhere in this application linked to the Partnership and Outreach work. To target young unemployed people, older people, veterans and local groups.

Project Achievements

Volunteering formed an essential element of each practical project. A volunteer team was created to help manage events and consultation activities. This team included many existing FTT and TLS volunteers and was an important step in emerging from Covid-19 lockdown. The team helped to organise and manage events ranging from the launch garden party to the conference at the close of the project. Activities included set-up, catering, managing the drinks area and also talking to wider stakeholders on the display stands. The volunteer team also assisted the RA staff at numerous outreach activities including the RA Roadshow. The team also organised the Syon House play event. Details of activity can be found in the Engagement Spreadsheet.

The RA partnered with a local environmental charity – Habitats and Heritage to deliver the conservation volunteering programme. Older people were targeted at the start of the volunteer programme to encourage those who had previously been nervous about social gathering to engage in a post-Covid environment. As the year progressed however, and the fear from Covid 19 reduced, the need for this type of activity was greatly reduced as people returned back to normal life.

Each nature based conservation project was designed to be delivered by volunteers – greatly reducing the need for additional capital costs. A regular group of volunteers was formed that has stayed with the project throughout its delivery. The conservation projects were chosen as demonstration schemes to promote the wider goals of Rewilding Arcadia. As such, volunteers were also targeted in one-off events from local community and civic societies working within their local area or delivering work that was related to their scope of interest.

The partnership with the Surrey Care Trust was particularly successful – ensuring that volunteers were recruited from our target groups including young people on the edge of exclusion and veterans with mental health problems.

In total 7035 volunteer hours were delivered – far exceeding our original target. Without GRCF monies, it is unlikely that the TLS volunteer programme would have stopped due to lack of funding and a cessation in activity brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.



Lessons Learnt and Legacy

Volunteering was weaved into each project delivered. Two core TLS volunteer teams were created, one for practical volunteering and another for events. These groups will continue in the future. In addition, links with local amenity societies, youth groups and special interest societies have been strengthened – it is fully anticipated that as volunteering is rolled out in the future these groups will continue to participate.

The Surrey Care Trust programme was especially successful – it has already been agreed for the Swingbridge Community Narrowboat to come to the Arcadian Thames over the winter 2023 / 4. Funding has been secured for the conservation programme. A funding bid is also being written to purchase and run a dedicated boat (and team) to work on the delivery of Thames Landscape Strategy projects.

The TLS also teamed up with Goldman Sachs during the Rewilding Arcadia project. It is anticipated that this relationship, to deliver corporate responsibility volunteering days will be a long term partnership. This partnership is important as it brings in much needed funding to deliver wider goals.

Output 15: Younger Unemployed People will be Engaged Through the Kick start Initiative. To help young, unemployed people increase their skills so that they continue to be engaged in a working environment through the Kickstart initiative.

Impact: For up to six younger people to be employed and provided with an opportunity to learn new skills in the environmental sector. Details of the posts are set out elsewhere in this application. The Father Thames Trust is committed to recruit from diverse backgrounds, targeting those groups that are traditionally under represented in the environmental sector.

Action: To employ up to six new Kick start workers over the lifespan of the project.

Project Achievements

The project started in September 2021. The local Kickstart delivery partner was not able to advertise the anticipated posts until December 2021 as their September round had already been closed. By this time, most young unemployed people in the local area had already returned to work – there were no applicants for the two advertised posts. The posts were to be re-advertised in the next round however, the programme was cancelled by the Government.

Lessons Learnt and Legacy

This action was very much focussed on a particular Covid-19 concern. As the country emerged from Lockdown, unemployment levels fell quickly. The FTT looked at other delivery methods to achieve this outcome but could not find a suitable way for a small environmental charity to deliver the project within the timeframe available. Training was given to all volunteers throughout the practical conservation projects but this could not form part of any organised or accredited schemes.



The Funded Organisation Will Be More Resilient

Output 16: To Put in Place a Mechanism that ensures the Thames Landscape Strategy Partnership working with the Father Thames Trust builds on the Success of the First Stage of Rewilding Arcadia in order to take the next stage forward.

Impact: To ensure that the TLS continues to lead the way in delivering innovative solutions to landscape problems across the Arcadian Thames. To have increased the resilience of the Thames Landscape Strategy's ability to deliver subsequent aspects of the Rewilding Arcadia Vision and other TLS priorities.

Evidence: During the Covid pandemic almost all of the Father Thames Trust's usual sources of income were closed down. Grant giving trusts diverted funds toward Covid support whilst funding partners were unable to contribute monies due to falling revenues. In addition, all corporate volunteering ceased and fundraising events came to a halt. As such, the ability to raise funds or start new schemes were severely limited – it was only legacy funding that increased, sadly brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic itself.

Action: Additional funds and project work

Project Achievements

This output has been especially successful. The need for the aims of Rewilding Arcadia to be weaved formally into partner policy and strategy was identified early in the project. This need was also identified by the Environment Agency. Funding has been secured to take the project forward – details are included elsewhere in this report.

The GRCF project also reengaged the existing and lost TLS partners. In response, the Royal Borough of Kingston re-joined the partnership as a full funding partner. A funding bid has been submitted to the Green Recovery Fund for delivery of the Old Deer Park floodplain scheme.

GRCF monies made this possible.

Lessons Learnt and Legacy

This action was very much focussed on a particular Covid- 19 concern.

Better Place To Live, Work or Visit

Output 17: To use the Lessons Learnt from the Rewilding Arcadia Demonstration Projects to Inform Best Practice as the Long-term Scheme is Taken Forward. Rewilding Arcadia sets out to deliver a series of measures to improve the physical state of the environment to support changing climate mitigation and increase resilience to the effects of increasing flood risk. Working through the Partnership, Outreach and Education Programme it is important that the lessons learnt from these small enhancements, linked to wider feedback from stakeholder consultation, are used to inform the long-term development of Rewilding Arcadia

Impact: To inform the end report that will inform the next stage in the role out of Rewilding Arcadia with local groups and people. To embed the lessons learnt and recommendations for RA into partner strategies and policy.



Action: Deliver the RA Partnership, Outreach and Education Programme

Project Achievements

The Outreach and Education Programme was successfully delivered and the lessons learnt will be used to inform the next stage of the project.

Output 18: To Have Created the Right Conditions so that Multiple Agencies and Communities can start to Create an Arcadian Floodplain Environment where natural processes dominate and, Water, People and Wildlife live in Harmony, that can be used as a Case Study by Partners and Agencies in Developing and Implementing Future Flood Risk Strategies.

Project Achievements and Legacy

Rewilding Arcadia, through its Outreach and Education Programme and small demonstration projects has created at a local level the right conditions whereby a nationally important flood resilient environment, where nature dominates and wildlife flourishes could be created in the future. In this new floodscape, people will live happily with water, even in times of flood. They understand natural processes having been involved in shaping its future and are confident that they can benefit from the landscape in a safe way as climate change increases.

The first phase also highlighted how a naturally functioning floodplain can sustain and even enhance social and economic benefits for tourism, the local economy and local residents.

The project engaged with communities to demonstrate how rewilding can provide multiple benefits such as ensuring dry access during inundation, increasing biodiversity and resilience to flood risk. Demonstrating how rewilding can solve multiple problems such as riverbank erosion, declining biodiversity and access restrictions. The first phase has paved the way for wetland creation to manage pollution and to act as a carbon store within the setting of an urban environment. Before RA, many landowners along the Arcadian Thames for example, considered that planting trees was the only approach – RA has shown that wetland creation such as reedbeds can store more carbon and is the right habitat for a floodplain. This understanding would not have been achieved without the GRCF monies.

The project has also successfully engaged with flood risk schemes including the River Thames Scheme Datchet to Teddington and TE2100. In particular, the project has been weaved into TE2100 at all levels and has ensured that a nature based solution to manage flood risk in the Arcadian Thames can build resilience to climate change whilst maintaining access on a well-used public open space. This aspect of the GRCF project is significant and helps to ensure the long term legacy of the project.

The TLS partners have agreed to work with the Thames Landscape Strategy to complete a review of the 2012 strategic vision for the Thames between Weybridge and Kew. This review will include the findings from this phase of the RA project



How Will You Maintain The Outcomes of Your Project After The Grant Ends and Meet Any Additional Costs

Rewilding Arcadia is the first stage in the delivery of a long term set of ambitions for the Arcadian Thames. Landowners have agreed for projects to proceed and understand the implications of future maintenance. The following themes were identified to provide a legacy for the scheme.

- On-going TLS Volunteering Programme (this is updated annually)
- By developing and moving forward to the next stage in the implementation of Rewilding Arcadia through the RA Evaluation Report and conference.

By weaving the principles of RA into partner policy and practice to achieve greater community and statutory authority buy-in to the principles of Rewilding Arcadia.

Project Achievements

1 On-going TLS Volunteering Programme (this is updated annually)

- Volunteering was weaved into each project delivered. Two core TLS volunteer teams have been created, one for practical volunteering and another for events. These groups will continue in the future. In addition, links with local amenity societies, youth groups and special interest societies have also been strengthened – it is fully anticipated that as volunteering is rolled out in the future these groups will continue to participate.
- The Surrey Care Trust programme was especially successful – it has already been agreed for the Swingbridge Community Narrowboat to come to the Arcadian Thames over the winter 2023 / 4.
- The TLS also teamed up with Goldman Sachs during the Rewilding Arcadia project. It is anticipated that this relationship, to deliver corporate responsibility volunteering days will be a long term partnership.

2 By developing and moving forward to the next stage in the implementation of Rewilding Arcadia through the RA Evaluation Report and conference.

- The conference was attended by 180 guests representing almost 100 different groups and societies. Sir David Attenborough attended and the Rewilding Arcadia film was launched. During the conference, the lessons learnt during the first phase of the project were discussed in workshop sessions and feedback was recorded. A series of priorities were agreed including:
- To focus on one or two large projects at a time during the delivery phase, one on the freshwater reaches and one on the Tideway. It was agreed that the naturalisation of Canbury Gardens Riverside and the Restoration of the Old Deer Park Floodplain were suitable schemes to take forward as priority projects.
- To continue the TLS / FTT Volunteer Programme in order to demonstrate to a wide range of different communities that the TLS is still delivering in their area. This should be linked to any strategic goals that may be emerging.



3 By weaving the principles of RA into partner policy and practice

- This has been recognised as the most essential element of the next phase in the

delivery of Rewilding Arcadia. Without priorities being embedded in partner strategies and plans much of what RA is trying to achieve could be lost.

At the same time, the Environment Agency were exploring the idea that the three Thames Strategies for the Tidal Thames could be jointly updated in order to work with riparian boroughs, communities and landowners to set out how flood risk management plans could be delivered on the ground. Funding was secured for the first round of this review (April 2023 – March 2024). It is anticipated that a further two years of funding will be secured from the Regional Flood and Coastal Committee to complete the project.

4 Next Steps

Rewilding Arcadia Phase Two has already started. Funding has been secured to ensure that the aims and lessons learnt from the first phase are weaved into partner strategies and community aspirations through the Joint Review of the Thames Strategies. This has ensured that the Rewilding Arcadia staff continue to deliver the project through the review process.

Funding has been secured to continue the demonstration projects including for example, the Garden for Ann and the Surrey Care Trust Swingbridge Volunteer Programme. Funding bids for the delivery of the two identified priority projects – the Naturalisation of Canbury Gardens Riverbank and the Recreation of a Freshwater Tidal Floodplain in the Richmond Old Deer Park are already progressing.

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund has ensured that the Father Thames Trust working with the Thames Landscape Strategy emerged from the Covid-19 lockdown in a strong position with a real legacy that should ensure delivery of its aims in the long-term. This is an exciting prospect and has the full support of the Thames Landscape Strategy partnership.





The Potential to Restore the Lost Freshwater Tidal Zone of the River Thames

At the very top of large tidal estuaries is a unique habitat known as the Freshwater Tidal Zone. These places support a diverse range of habitats and species but have been almost completely lost due to past human interventions.. During the first phase of Rewilding Arcadia, it was identified that the potential to promote and ultimately restore Freshwater Tidal Habitat along the Arcadian Thames was significant – being one of only a handful of rivers in the UK that would be capable of supporting this unique ecosystem. Significantly, the open spaces along the tidal Arcadian Thames provide the opportunity for restoration.

Previous modifications have seen the filling of backwaters leading to a disconnection between floodplain wetlands and the main channel of the river. Most of the floodplain is now managed as a dry rather than a wet environment with hard estuary edges. Rewilding Arcadia has promoted the concept that these dry places need to evolve as they become wetter as flood risk increases.

The likelihood of summer droughts and increased flooding will also have an impact on aquatic species. Modelling has shown that during a flood, fish in the freshwater river above Teddington will be washed into the Freshwater Tidal Zone in increasing numbers. This causes stress to the fish as there is little refuge for them to adjust and recover before swimming back up the river as flooding reduces. The fish passes at Teddington Weir are not of sufficient size to facilitate this passage. In the estuary, juvenile fish species cannot find refuge to ride a flood out – they become exhausted or get washed out to sea.

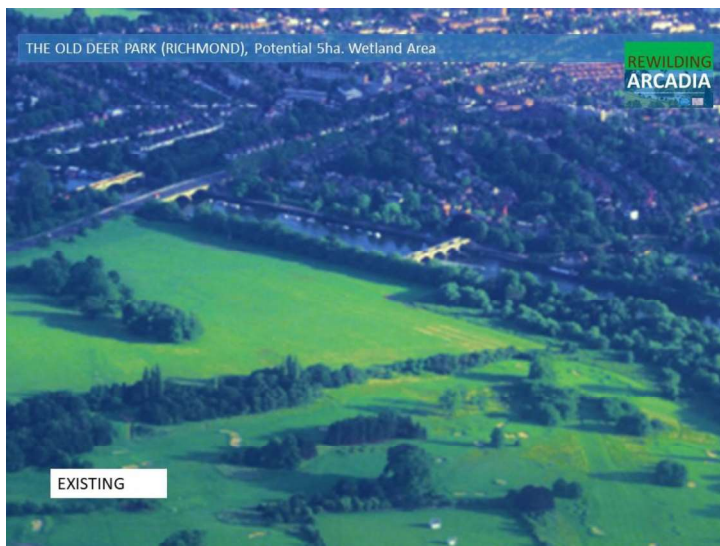
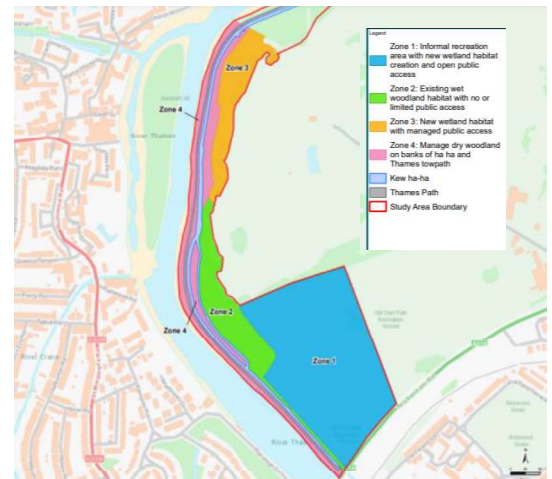
The restoration of the Freshwater Tidal Zone could re-create a functioning floodplain providing a refuge for fish, supporting a diverse number of endangered species. Pockets of habitat that remain on the Upper Tideway could form the base for habitat restoration. including: tidal wet woodland, reedbed, standing water (for saproxylic Invertebrates and fungi habitat) and grazed wet meadows. These tidally fed habitats (being at the top of the Tideway are predominantly freshwater) provide a nursery ground for juvenile fish on the gravel and muddy foreshores (including smelt, sea bass, eel, flounder and potentially the North Atlantic Sturgeon) Through riverbank naturalisation, refuge along the water's edge can be enhanced – particularly through the use of willow spiling. Fish passes that are suitable for the passage of large salmonoid species could provide passage between the Tideway and the freshwater river. These restored natural riverbanks would function as a green corridor, directly linked to creeks and backwaters on the floodplain. Boardwalks and viewing places would provide an opportunity for humans to experience this lost habitat.



The Restoration of the Old Deer Park Floodplain

The GRCF has facilitated the scoping stage of this exciting proposal. The funding has provided the opportunity for ideas to be both refined and presented to stakeholders. This has been achieved through the education and outreach programme linked directly to the two demonstration project sites on the Kew Towpath and the Kew Meridian Ha-ha. The GRCF (matched by Environment Agency funding) also facilitated a hydrological and ecological survey of the area that could potentially be restored (through citizen science volunteers). A series of scenarios have been proposed that bring on board the potential for restoration identified by the freshwater Tidal research.

Phase Two of Rewilding Arcadia will continue to develop the proposals to work on the ground. Further research is needed regarding archaeology. It is important that the proposal is incorporated into the Thames Landscape Strategy Review that began in June 2023 to ensure that the scheme has the full backing of all stakeholders, the community and authorities. Funding is already being sought (from sources such as Biodiversity Net Gain Offsetting schemes and the Green Recovery Fund) to enable more detailed design and for modelling to ensure that proposals help to build resilience to flood risk across the Tideway. Without GRCF this would not have happened.



A Garden for Ann

Phase Two of Rewilding Arcadia will also implement small schemes that incrementally will help to shape a sustainable and resilient future for the Arcadian Thames. Nature based solutions will be at the heart of each proposal.

An example of this work is the Garden for Ann. Funding has been secured to take the project forward. It was intended that it would form part of the GRCF demonstration projects however, essential repair work to the adjacent footbridge meant that the implementation of the scheme has been temporarily postponed.

Once the footbridge repairs have been completed, work will progress to create a beautiful place that is complete harmony with its surroundings. The interpretive panels will provide a unique opportunity to showcase how Rewilding Arcadia could help to restore the unique character of the Arcadian Thames.

A Garden for Ann

Teddington Draw Dock

In 2020, Ann Sayer MBE, GB Olympian, long distance walker and rower, member of the Teddington Society and founding member of the Thames Landscape Strategy passed away. In memory of Ann, it is proposed to restore a riverside garden next to her beloved Thames in her home town of Teddington.

Working in partnership with the Teddington Society and the Environment Agency, Ann's Garden will be unique. A small seating will be repaired, above a tidal riverbank full of purple loosestrife, angelica, sedges, native reeds, flag iris and other riparian species. The garden will provide a quiet space, overlooking Teddington Lock where the natural beauty and dynamism of the Tidal Thames can be appreciated and understood.

Alongside the garden, two interpretation panels will tell the story of Teddington's river heritage and the importance of the Lock and Weir as the junction between the freshwater and tidal river. Linking up with the DEFRA funded REWILDING ARCADIA project, the impact of climate change and increasing flood risk will be explored and potential measures to build resilience over the coming decades explained. In this way, the garden will act as a way of engaging with local people and visitors.



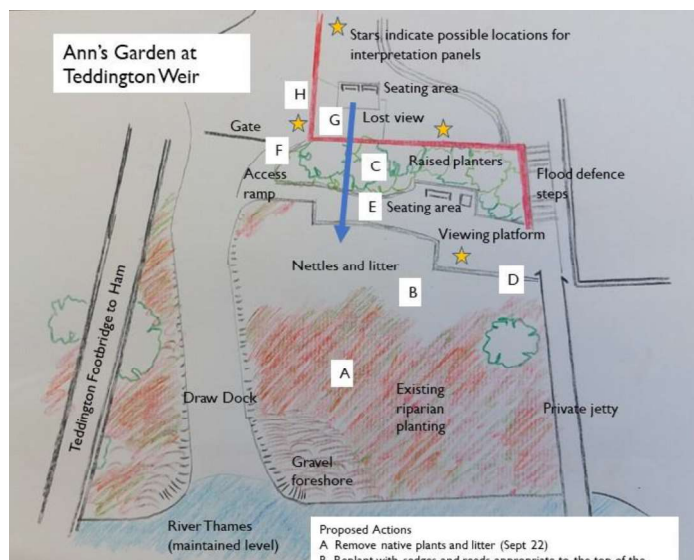

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Green Recovery Challenge Fund

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REWILDING ARCADIA





The Thames Landscape Strategy Partnership

Written in 1994, and updated in 2012, the Thames Landscape Strategy (TLS) provides a comprehensive 100-year guidebook to conserve and enhance the remarkable River Thames between Weybridge and Kew (known as the Arcadian Thames meaning 'rural paradise').

The Strategy however, is as much about the day-to-day link between the landscape, the community and the authorities as about the long term vision. To achieve this, the TLS partnership brings together the main organisations that own or manage the riverside, 250 local groups, users and residents. Since 2000, the small TLS team has completed over 440,000 conservation volunteer hours and over £23m has been raised to enhance the world famous landscape.

Rewilding Arcadia

The 1994 TLS vision provided a comprehensive appraisal of the character of the landscape and set out how humans have always tried to find ways to control the River Thames. These measures have over the last century seen much of the London Metropolitan area successfully protected from a flood event. Between Weybridge and Kew however, the river landscape is characterised by large tracts of relatively undefended land, where the flood defences are set a long way back from the water's edge. As such, many parks, open spaces, wildlife sites and towpaths are effectively within the functioning floodplain.

By their very nature, these spaces should be resilient to flooding; however, previous land use decisions have seen much of the dynamism and wildness of the Arcadian floodplain lost through obsolete modifications. As a result, the floodplain's natural capacity to function during a flood event has been greatly reduced. At the same time, public perception towards the purpose of 'floodplain' has shifted as spaces that were historically regarded as 'wet' were increasingly managed as 'dry' environments.

To a large extent, this hasn't been a problem. Climate Change however, has altered the balance. The river is reclaiming its lost floodplain back; threatening cherished landscapes, recreational opportunities, heritage and wildlife as flood risk increases. The purpose of the floodplain and our relationship with it needs to be revisited and the imbalance between water, people and nature restored.

As such, the TLS launched a ground breaking project called Rewilding Arcadia to develop, explain and ultimately deliver a series of nature-based flood risk management projects to increase understanding of flood risk and introduce possible long-term term solutions to make the floodplain resilient to climate change. Rewilding Arcadia is not setting out to create large new areas of floodplain or to improve the existing flood defences. Rather, it looks to identify changes that will be necessary to achieve a functioning natural floodplain in places that are at risk already. By acting now, we can conserve and enhance the unique heritage, wildlife and recreational opportunities that Arcadia offers. Time is running out though. Models predict that unavoidable changes to the operation of the Thames Barrier will be needed and when combined with an increase in peak fluvial flood events the Arcadian Thames floodplain is at particular risk. What is wet now is likely to get a lot wetter, we can no longer do nothing.

By explaining the process of restoration to communities and authorities, resilience to flooding can be maximised, strategic policy can be understood and natural flood management can be achieved on the ground – delivered in a way that ensures river users and local people have a real stake in shaping the future of their river. The restoration of lost floodplain can bring multiple benefits, carbon can be stored, trees planted and pollution managed. Recreation can continue, volunteering opportunities maximised, wetland habitats and historic landscapes restored and traditional land management practices re-discovered. Significantly, the proposals would also be the catalyst for the restoration of one of Europe’s most endangered habitats – the freshwater / tidal zone, an almost lost environment that is only found at the top of an estuary. By acting now, the character of the Arcadian Thames, identified in the 1994 report can be conserved and saved for future generations.

A DEFRA Green Recovery Challenge Fund grant was secured in 2020 by the TLS to complete the first phase in the Rewilding Arcadia project – to scope future priorities and to pave the way for the next stage. This will include the continued development of exciting projects to be delivered on the ground in the boroughs Kingston, Richmond, Hounslow, Elmbridge and Spelthorne.

Joint Review of The Thames Strategies

As well as developing project work, a need has been identified in the first phase of Rewilding Arcadia for a review of the 2012 TLS document to bring it in line with emerging planning and flood risk practice and policy.

A funding opportunity from the Thames Regional Flood and Coastal Committee has opened the door for a review of the Thames Landscape Strategy to ensure that the opportunities offered by Rewilding Arcadia can be set out. The review will be carried out in partnership with an update of the other two Thames Strategies for London’s river – the Thames Strategy Kew to Chelsea (TSKC), and Thames Strategy East (managed by Thames Estuary Partnership TEP). These strategies were written in the early 2000’s along similar formats to the TLS, but have not yet been updated. In this way, a simultaneous review of all three Thames Strategies can be achieved.

Whilst each Strategy is based on the individual character of its reaches, there are many common threads and priorities running through all three visions. This joint approach can act as an umbrella, bringing the strategies together whilst allowing for each strategy area to retain its autonomy (like chapters in a book).

Over the course of the next year, the TLS will be working with the TEP and the TSKC West London River Group, our partners, boroughs, community groups and consultants, to scope the amount of work needed to ensure up-to-date continuity with emerging local and national plans and policy. The aim is that by 2025 the Thames Landscape Strategy will be reviewed in a format that can be used to help inform riparian boroughs in the development of their Riverside Strategies. Following the completion of the Joint Review of the Thames Strategies the river will have a comprehensive handbook for the Thames from Weybridge to the sea that sets out how climate change and flood risk can be managed whilst conserving the character of each reach.

Find out more by watching the Thames Landscape Strategy Rewilding Arcadia film, introduced by Sir David Attenborough, by clicking on the following QR code

