

# Annex 1 - Navigation service on the River Thames

We publish a River Thames Waterway Customer Charter each year. Alongside our lock keeping service targets, it gives a summary of the service standards we try to achieve with the funding available. These documents can be viewed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/river-thames-customer-charter>.

We also produce an annual report each year, setting out our performance against these service ambitions. View the latest report here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/river-thames-annual-report>.

In addition, the following summary will provide a better understanding of the extent of the activity that makes up our navigation service on the Thames, but it is still not exhaustive.

Our navigation service on the Thames is delivered by our River Thames Waterways team. This team is formed of 90 highly trained, well equipped, hugely experienced, passionate and dedicated full-time navigation specialists. This includes 60 full time lock and weir keepers, who between them, carry out duties at our 45 lock sites.

The team's role is to maintain the public right of navigation, and to facilitate safe boating on the 135 miles of navigable non-tidal Thames from Cricklade in Wiltshire to Teddington in south west London. With support from colleagues from a range of other departments, the team provides this service for the non-tidal Thames boating community 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Throughout the peak boating months of the summer, the team is assisted by as many seasonal lock and weir keepers as our budget will allow us to employ. We also have a very successful volunteer programme in place, with some 250 volunteers carrying out a wide range of duties. Their contribution enables us to provide a level of service far beyond what would otherwise be achievable within our budgets.

## Maintaining the infrastructure

Safe navigation of the non-tidal River Thames would not be possible without the network of 45 locks and weirs that stretch along it. Keeping them all in working order requires significant investment and is an extensive, year-round programme of work for us. We:

- constantly assess and monitor the condition of every structure
- plan, cost and prioritise any repairs, refurbishment or renewal works
- make sure all sites are compliant with the latest health and safety legislation, to keep everyone working at or visiting our locks, safe from harm.

We also maintain a wide range of other assets such as toilets and showers, welfare rooms for our staff, access tracks for emergency service vehicles and footbridges. We must also maintain our lock houses to a high standard, for the members of staff who live there.

### Managing water levels

The 45 locks which allow safe navigation of the non-tidal River Thames would not function without the adjoining weir complexes. We operate these weirs to manage water levels, to enable the locks to function, and also to provide a safe depth for navigation within the middle third, or 'fairway' of the river in each

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stretch between lock sites. This includes alleviating the impact of adverse weather conditions (extended periods of heavy, or very little rain) to the limits of what is achievable with the weirs.

## Service at our locks - assisted passage

Much of the work we do is focussed on providing the best possible levels of 'assisted passage' that we can. This is when we have staff available at locks to help boaters through them. Every year we work with our principal advisory group representing boaters on the River Thames - the Thames Navigation Users Forum - to develop our assisted passage targets. We then communicate these to boaters so that they are aware of the service levels we aim to achieve: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/river-thames-customer-charter>.

These targets take into account the manpower available, the amount of boat traffic at each lock, and any characteristics of a lock which might make it more difficult to use. They also recognise the other important duties that need to be carried out at some sites and may take the lock keeper away from the lock side.

## Enforcement and compliance

We have powers to enforce the legislation that governs many other boating activities on the river. These are mainly the Environment Agency (Inland Waterways) Order 2010 and the Thames Conservancy Acts 1932, 1950 and 1966, along with numerous bye-laws. Our priority when it comes to enforcement activity is boat registration compliance, to ensure we receive all the income we are owed from this important income stream, so that we can reinvest it in all aspects of the service we provide.

We carry out registration checks along the river and at our locks, taking enforcement action against all unregistered boats we find.

We use intelligence to target areas where we believe there are concentrations of unregistered boats.

We progress criminal prosecution against owners who do not bring their boats into compliance.

More information on this, and the wider work we do, is available in our 2018 to 2019 compliance plan: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/river-thames-enforcement-plan>.