



# *Thames Path*

## NATIONAL TRAIL

## **INTRODUCTION**

Despite being one of the original six long distance National Trails proposed under the Hobhouse Committee in 1947, The Thames Path from its' source in the Parish of Coates Gloucestershire to the Thames Barrier at Greenwich, was finally designated a National Trail in July 1996, under Section 86 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside act 1949.

The Thames Path National Trail provides the opportunity of a unique experience, that is to walk most of the 184 miles (210 miles including both sides of the bank in London and also the Thames Path extension running to Crayford Ness) length of a river from its source in the Cotswolds through the heart of London to end at the Thames Barrier in Greenwich.



The Thames Path sits within a family of fifteen National Trails. Of these, it is our only National Trail to follow a river for most of its length - with almost continuous access to the river bank and its amazing wildlife, peaceful water meadows, rural villages, historic cities and the cultural heritage along the iconic River Thames.

## **Current Situation**

When the trail was created there were fewer recreation cyclists and commuters choosing to cycle to work. Currently there exists a high demand for cyclists to be able to legally use some sections of the Thames Path. Cyclists it should be noted are as diverse as other user groups. Some types of users would like to use the trail as part of a commuting route, travelling at a faster pace, whilst others may want to use the route to access local services in good weather, others may choose to cycle purely for recreational purposes and at certain times of the year. These users might travel alone, in groups or with family and friends – including younger or less confident cyclists. This policy attempts to factor this in when making future shared use strategic decisions.

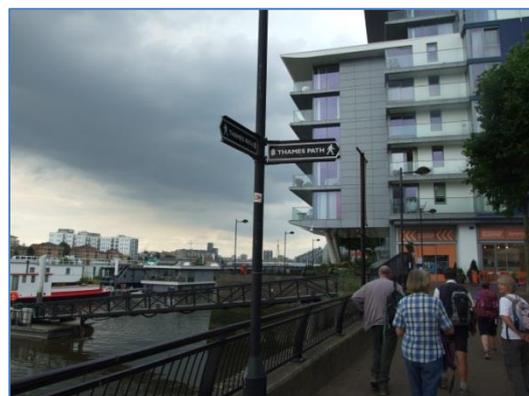


### **The National Trail Partnership**

The Thames Path National Trail Partnership formed in 2015 (Appendix 1) recognises the ever changing demands to the Thames Path National Trail and the riverscape that it follows, to allow cycling, where possible, to encourage best practice for shared use and to manage shared use conflict should it arise.

### **Cycling Policy 2006-2013**

The previous Cycling Policy was created by the then National Trails Management Group and ran from 2006 to 2013. The Thames Path National Trails Partnership has acknowledged that a new up to date policy is required, fit for purpose for the whole of The Thames Path, but whilst allowing for the diverse range of users and landscapes that the trail passes through.



### **Thames Path Cycling Working Group**

A Thames Path Cycling Policy Working Group was set up from volunteer representatives of The Partnership, (Appendix 2) to help shape a future Cycling Policy for the Thames. The Working Group met on several occasions throughout the year and held three site visits to investigate further how a modified Cycling UK, Dutch Model for Cycling (**Appendix 5**) could be adapted when assessing future shared use on the Thames Path National Trail in an urban, semi-urban and rural setting.



The findings of the Working Group were then presented at full Partnership meetings for comments and approval. All comments about proposals have been fed into the Cycling Strategy and can be found in Appendix 4.

In order to understand where cycling 'officially' takes place along the Thames Path, a GPX file has been

submitted to our website host to be uploaded onto the Thames Path National Trail interactive Map . [www.nationaltrail.co.uk/thames-path](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/thames-path)

## **THE CYCLING POLICY 2017**

### **POLICY STATEMENT**

The Thames Path Partnership is committed to enabling cycling on suitable sections of the Thames Path National Trail and along other sections to work with Partners using a wider corridor broadly aligned to the Thames. There is an aim for people to be able to cycle from source to sea staying as close to the Thames as is reasonably possible.

Because of its landscape diversity, a single prescriptive cycling strategy will not work along the whole of the Thames Path. The Partnership will work with stakeholders and Highway Authorities on a case by case scenario to assess any proposals to open up new areas of the trail for shared use, or when managing conflict between cyclists, walkers, landowners and land occupiers.

Any future cycling initiatives or projects that impact on the Thames Path will require them to be presented to The Partnership at as earlier stage as possible for comments.

Along land owned or occupied by the Environment Agency cycling is currently not allowed. The Environment Agency state that this will be the case in the future, unless a clear and separate route through sites, such as locks can be agreed upon.

All Partners will continuously raise awareness for good behaviour and for users including cyclists to follow the Countryside Code. Priority should always be given to the slowest and less able on the trail. Sensible use of cycle bells is to be encouraged.

The following points should be factored into any future proposals for shared use along the Thames Path National Trail with findings presented to the Partnership.

### **POLICY PART A**

#### **Factors to be Considered for Shared Use Purposes**

1. What are the reasons for considering shared use?
2. What type of users will benefit from shared use?
  - a. Commuter
  - b. Recreation (mostly weekends and holidays)
  - c. Sports
3. How does the Thames Path cycling section link into a cycling, sustainable transport or the strategic link initiative as a whole?
4. Do alternative shared routes exist based on The Dutch Model? (Appendix 5).
5. Does any documented historic shared use exist? (E.g. rowing coaches.)  
Has there been any documented evidence of shared use conflict in the past? (Please provide evidence).
6. Is the area prone to flooding?  
If so what measures will be put in place?

7. What engagement has taken place with community and user groups?  
(Including an assessment of impact).  
Do they support the proposal?
8. Has the landowner/occupier approved the scheme?  
Is there to be a legal dedication or permissive route agreement?
9. Has an environmental impact assessment been undertaken specifically for the Thames?

## **POLICY PART B**

### **The Determining Appropriate Physical Provision**

- A. The surface of the trail will need to be firm outside of the winter/spring seasons, but not necessarily surfaced if the aim is solely for shared recreation route users.
- B. For commuter routes, the trail will need to be surfaced with materials that are in-keeping with their surroundings.
- C. The trail needs to have a minimum of two metres flat surface width through enclosed sections when considering shared use.
- D. Any potential danger spots such as intersections and road crossings need to be identified with good sight lines for all users both cyclist and pedestrian.  
What mitigation has been put in place for the above to ensure safety and convenience for all users?
- E. Any erosion of the river bank along the proposed shared use route will require in-keeping repair.

### **Future Maintenance**

- F. Will there be a future increase in maintenance and liability?  
If so what legacy will be put in place to offset this?



## **POLICY PART C**

### **Dispute Resolution**

#### Current Policy Non Shared Use Sections

- Should conflict arise with users, try to manage this in the first instance through education and should the landowner require it, through as unobtrusive signs as possible e.g. No Cycling Thames Path Way markers. (75mmx75mm)



### **Future Resolution**

- The ultimate decision for additional shared use along the Thames Path National Trail, after policy A and B has been adhered to, lies with the relevant Highway Authority. However after presenting at a Trail Partnership meeting, the decision making process can be questioned by other members of The Partnership.

### **Delivery Timetable**

#### **Year One**

- To promote safe and sensible best practice for shared use on the Thames including non-offensive bell ringing and priority to the slowest and less able along current shared use section
- To produce an on-line map demonstrating current shared use.

**Who will Deliver: National Trails, Walk Unlimited, Cycling UK**

#### **Years One to Five**

- For sections of the trail unsuitable for cycling, to work with Partners to investigate further opportunities for a wider corridor Thames Path cycleway, broadly aligned to the Thames

**Who Will Deliver: Partners include Cycling UK, The Ramblers, National Trail Volunteers, Highway Authorities & Other Landowning organisations along the Thames.**

#### **On-going**

- For Partners to submit any future strategic proposals for upgrades to shared use along the Thames at Partnership meetings to ensure Policies A,B and C have been satisfied.

**Who will Deliver: Thames Path National Trail Partnership**

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

- Via Partnership feedback it is proposed to continuously monitor at quarterly Partnership meetings to gauge future proposals for shared use. Each shared use proposal will be evaluated according to this documents policies and where new shared use comes about, the on-line map will be updated accordingly.
- Cycle use will be monitored via feedback by the trail team, volunteers and partners.
- Delivery of the outputs described in the Delivery Timetable will be monitored and reviewed via the Partnership on an annual basis at the end of each financial year.

## **FURTHER GUIDANCE**

**For further Legal guidance for upgrading Footpaths to bridleways, Cycle tracks please refer to the following:**

### **Highways Act 1980**

Section 25 - Creation by Agreement.

Section 26 - Creation by Creation Order.

Conversion of Footways

Section 66 – Removing the Footway.

Section 65(1) After Section 66 then Constructing New Cycle Track.

### **Permissive Path Agreements**

Section 31

Land owner can enter into an agreement to allow cycling over their land and also protect against claims for Definitive rights under Section 31.

### **Liabilities Act 1984**

A user of a Permissive Path is a 'Visitor' under the Liabilities Act and so is owed a duty of care by the occupier (The occupier is not necessarily the owner of the land E.g. some Environment Agency lock track access).

### **Cycle Tracks Act 1984**

Section 3 – Conversion of a footpath to a cycle track.

Section 3(2) The requirement of consent.

Section 4(1)(2)(3) Refers to Maintaining barriers, separating cycle tracks with other Public Rights of Way and altering or removing barriers.

### **Road Traffic Act 1984**

The right to restrict the use of highways or limit the kind of user which may be permitted, either permanently or for a specific time period.



## **Appendix 1**

### **Thames Path National Trail Partnership**

Natural England, Environment Agency, County Councils of Buckinghamshire, Gloucestershire, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire, Surrey, Wiltshire, Borough Councils of Reading, Swindon, Windsor & Maidenhead, Wokingham District Council, West Berkshire Council, Transport for London, Corporation of London, City of Westminster, London Boroughs of Greenwich, Hammersmith & Fulham, Hounslow, Kensington & Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Richmond upon Thames, Kingston, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth. Other organisations; National Farmers' Union; River Thames Alliance; River Thames Society, The Ramblers, Sustrans, Cycling UK, Thames Estuary Partnership.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Thames Path Cycling Strategy Working Group**

Oxfordshire County Council.  
The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council.  
The River Thames Society.  
Cycling UK.  
The Ramblers.  
Thames Path National Trails Office.  
National Trail Volunteers.



## **Appendix 3**

### **Current Thames Path Shared Use Designations**

Refer to interactive map <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/thames-path/plan>  
(when populated)

## **Appendix 4**

### **Partners Responses to The Cycling Working Group's Recommendations**

*My only comment is that the discussion should include the owner as well as the occupier of the land. We as the Environment Agency do not allow cycling on our sites and would not in the future unless very clear and defined routes could be agreed.*

*We also need to recognise historic/traditional use and consider if this is appropriate. A good example of this would be rowing coaches and their need to keep up with crews on the water.*

Environment Agency

## Thames Path National Trail Cycling Policy 2017-2022

*The document itself makes a number of recommendations, which seem fairly reasonable. These are:*

- *....open up new areas to cycling, or managing conflict between cyclists/walkers and occupiers. A one size fits all approach will not work along the whole stretch...”*
- *Raise awareness of good behaviour for all users of the trail, including cycling via media campaign...”*
- *Consideration required on a number of points when proposing shared user scheme, including trail widths, surface type, sight lines, any documented shared use information, increased maintenance etc.*

*Overall, I agree that we cannot take the same approach along the full stretch of the Thames, and indeed the section of the Thames Path the PLA are interested in can accommodate cycling in places, albeit there are stretches of the Thames Path where we have a considerable amount of conflict between cyclists and pedestrians. The Central London stretch cannot accommodate cyclists due to these obvious conflicts; however I agree that there may be the possibility of diverting cyclists of the Path in these problematic areas. An approach that differentiates between those areas where shared use might be feasible and where – such as in London or through operational areas where there is not sufficient space, is reasonable.*

Port of London Authority



**Appendix 5**  
**Cycling UK's - Dutch Model for Shared User Routes/Trails.**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Cohesion</b>	<b>Directness</b>	<b>Safety</b>	<b>Comfort</b>	<b>Attractiveness</b>	<b>Inclusivity</b>	<b>Pedestrians</b>
Define Route or Section	Can cyclists connect to other routes and destinations with no interruption? Is route continuous?	Deviations from desired route? Do cyclists have to stop often or long? Any hills? Delays due to other users?	Are there hazards on the route? Are there hazards from traffic?	Is surface comfortable on: Any bike? A Tourer? A Mountain bike? Is there width to pass others?	Does the route feel safe, even at night?	Is the route usable by disabled cyclists?	Do pedestrians feel safe and comfortable?
Overall route							
Section 1							
Section 2							
...							

## **Photograph Acknowledgement**

Cycling UK  
Thames Path National Trail Office  
Transport for London  
Visit Thames

## **THE THAMES PATH NATIONAL TRAIL PARTNERSHIP**

**Natural England ▪ Environment Agency ▪ County Councils of Buckinghamshire, Gloucestershire, Hertfordshire, Oxfordshire, Surrey, Wiltshire ▪ Borough Councils of Reading, Swindon, Windsor & Maidenhead ▪ Wokingham District Council ▪ West Berkshire Council ▪ Transport for London ▪ Corporation of London ▪ City of Westminster ▪ London Boroughs of Greenwich, Hammersmith & Fulham, Hounslow, Kensington & Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Richmond upon Thames, Kingston, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Wandsworth ▪ Other organisations; National Farmers' Union; River Thames Alliance; River Thames Society, The Ramblers, Sustrans, Cycling UK, Thames Estuary Partnership ▪**

