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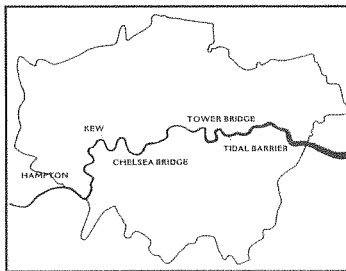
# Thames Landscape Strategy

## Hampton to Kew

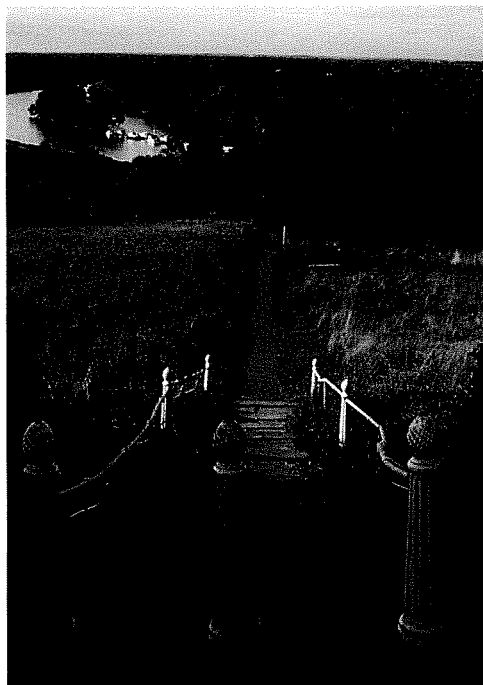
### PLACE DESIGN AWARD

*Landscape design and planning:* Kim Wilkie Environmental Design. *Sponsor:* Thames Landscape Strategy Steering Group (The Countryside Commission, the Garden History Society and the London Borough of Richmond on Thames).

*A landscape vision gives new focus to a segment of the Thames River and becomes a force for coordinating the actions of grass-roots groups and local, regional and national agencies.*



The Thames River is one of the most important natural and cultural assets of greater London, embodying both the region's ancestry and its capacity for renewal and evolution. But like many regional landscapes, its future has been fragmented among many agencies, and its sense of place has been disrupted.



The Thames Landscape Strategy is an endeavor to refocus the planning, development and management priorities of a host of local and national agencies to reflect the river basin's cultural and landscape heritage, as well as its evolving economic role. The project, which began as a visionary landscape proposal five years ago, has emerged as a hundred-year vision plan for an eleven-mile section of the Thames River, between Hampton and Kew, in south-west London.

The Strategy is as much analysis as a plea for action,

for creating identity of place that supersedes local political boundaries, and a demonstration of the many interconnected decisions that must be made to ensure that the river and the places along it thrived.

The plan analyzes the character of the river landscape and relates it to strategic planning issues — proposing more than 180 policies, projects and management practices. These proposals have been incorporated into the development plans of local authorities and are guiding the work of both national agencies and grass-roots community organizations. The strategy's steering group has become a body for maintaining a focus on the river as a regional place, organizing research, publications, public events and volunteer work.

The initiative for the strategy came from a 1991 exhibition of ideas for the London segment of the Thames, organized by the Royal Fine Art Commission. As part of the exhibition, environmental planner and landscape architect Kim Wilkie showed how the Hampton – Kew segment of the Thames is linked by a network of historic landscape vistas that provide a visual and civic structure for that part of the region.

The ideas caught the imagination of local groups and coincided with a growing concern about finding a way to carry the special character of the river into future conservation and development plans. Gradually, the project evolved into looking at how the river corridor

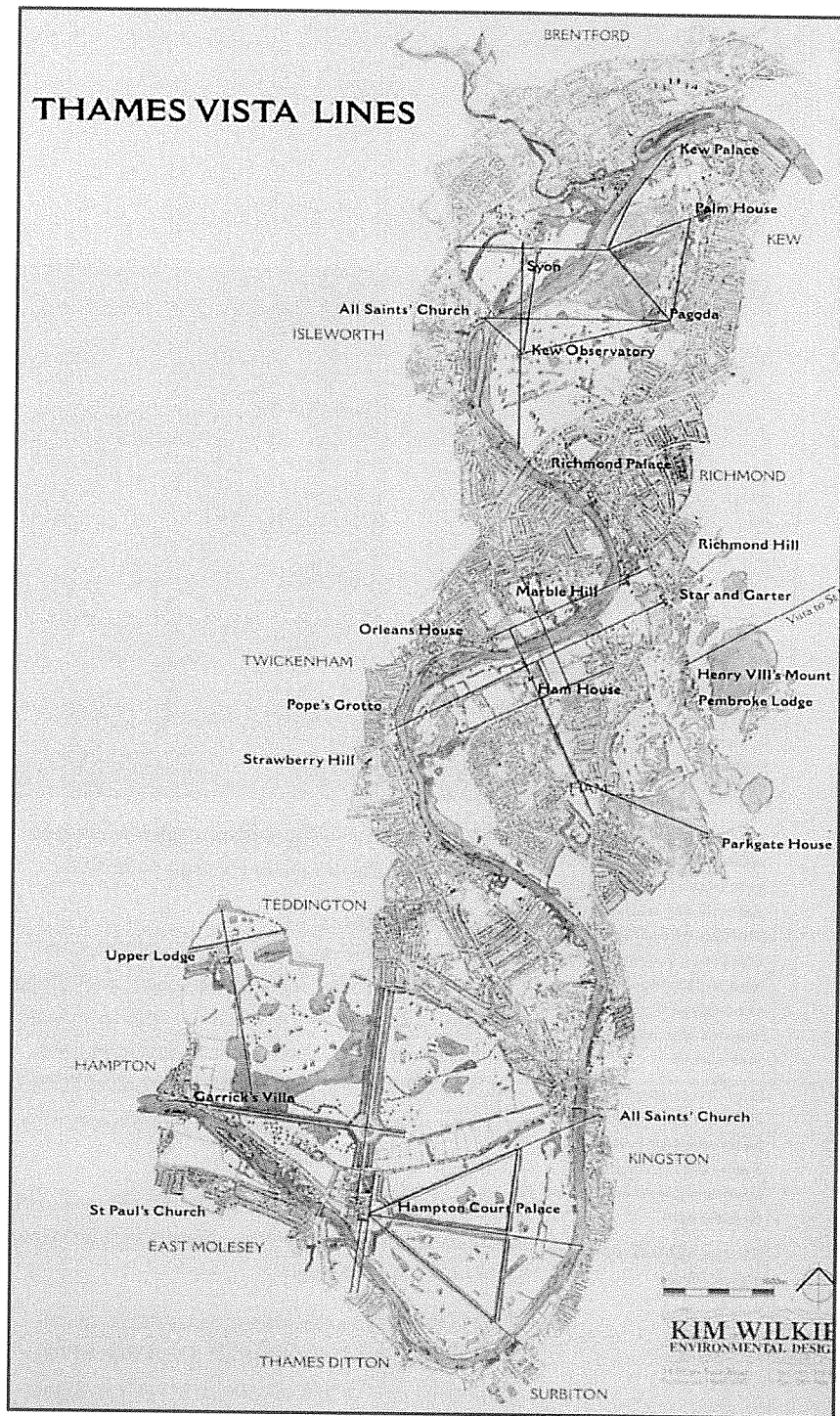
as a whole could be enhanced, reinstating parts of the natural and historic landscape to work with today's uses, and Wilkie was retained in 1992 to draft the hundred-year landscape management strategy.

The strategy, which was completed in 1994, operates at two levels. At the subregional level, it analyzes the structure of the landscape, examining how geological, social and political factors have influenced the way in which the river has been settled and suggesting policies for conservation, recreation and tourism. At the local level, the study identifies twelve reaches, or areas of local character and identity. It describes local history, townscape, nature conservation and public access networks, and offers proposals for development plans and land management practices.

The study and subsequent actions have been guided by the Thames Landscape Strategy steering group, a joint body of local and national authorities, and informed by consultations with national, regional and local organizations. The study was funded jointly by various national agencies, such as the Countryside Commission, English Heritage, the Royal Fine Art Commission, English Nature and the National Rivers Authority, as well as private benefactors. The Strategy is guided by a full-time coordinator, whose position is funded through sponsorship and contributions from steering group members. A national bank has assigned one of its staff members to work full-time as a project assistant for two years.

Already, the Strategy has inspired a range of planning, design and organizing initiatives. Design projects have included the restoration of an eighteenth-century temple and lawn, reconstructed towpaths, improved riverfront access in conjunction with a new housing development project, and initial steps with residents to create a new riverside nature reserve.

Locally based follow-up studies include a landscape plan for Old Deer Park (owned by the English royal family), a landscape master plan for a riverside park known as Radnor Gardens, and a nature conservation and management plan for woodlands on Eel Pie Island.



Grassroots projects include “walkabouts” held with local residents to assess possible improvements to the waterfront in Brentford and Isleworth, and numerous trash clean-ups supported by businesses and local communities.

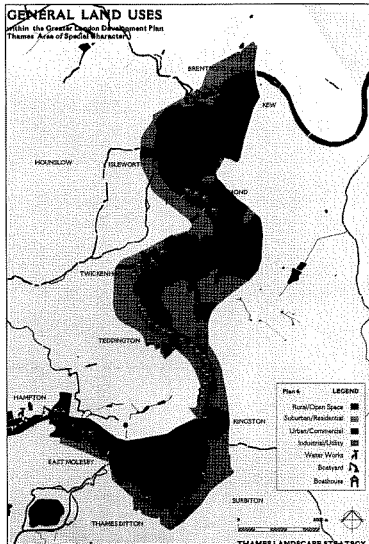
The Thames Landscape Strategy is being used as a model for a similar project covering the next downstream section of the Thames, from Kew to Chelsea. This approach to developing a long-range strategy and

Above: Diagram of sightlines and vistas along the river, an early phase of landscape analysis

Opposite page: Location of Hampton–Kew river segment in the London region

Opposite page, lower left: View from Richmond Hill, which helped inspire the English landscape movement

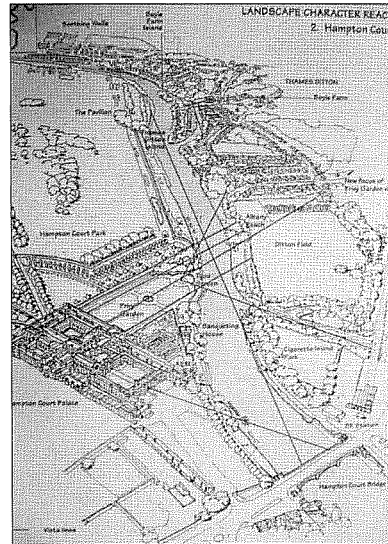
Graphics and photo: Kim Wilkie Environmental Design



Left: The landscape strategy was based on documentation of a range of physical factors and activities, such as general land uses (shown here), tidal zones, geological and topographical conditions, archaeological and cultural features, and nature conservation areas.

Right: The strategy subdivided the river segment into twelve reaches, presenting a more detailed landscape analysis and recommendations for each.

Graphics: Kim Wilkie Environmental Design



implementing it could be applied to other landscapes that fall under the jurisdiction of many authorities.

### Jury Comments

FRANCIS: This is an example of design at a regional scale—a vision for a large-scale ecological and cultural landscape. There is a lot of research—it even includes overlay maps about where poets and painters lived and worked in the landscape. But it is done with the purpose of guiding the future of this landscape. It's a management–design plan.

VERNEZ-MOUDON: I agree that they've put in a lot of resources, but the question is, where does it go? How does it serve as a model?

HALSBAND: This is galvanizing a population of millions of people into understanding that this river that has been their dismal back door is actually a wonderful place and they should get themselves behind it and do something about it.

The fact that every section has twenty or thirty proposals, and the pictures of people cleaning trash and weaving new willow edges and handicapped people trying out paths to see if you can get wheelchair access, makes me feel that we're looking at community action on an enormous scale. Not just for poor people but for all people. We have newsletters that show the beginning of successful projects.

FRANCIS: I would equate this to Ian McHarg's plan for the Valleys, which put forth a framework that had an enormous impact on that place and on the minds of other places. What makes this better is the cultural layer.

VERNEZ-MOUDON: I'm uncomfortable. Where is the social stuff? Where is the jurisdiction? Who is going to make the decisions? I see it as a nice study, complete but not at all a breakthrough.

FRANCIS: That this is exactly the kind of landscape work that we need to be doing in this country.

VERNEZ-MOUDON: We do thousands this way. The approach is being revived now, but nobody does a thing with these studies.

FRANCIS: The problem with the studies from twenty years ago is that they were unidimensional. This one take a much broader approach. It's talking to communities, to get them to do little actions that add up to a larger thing.

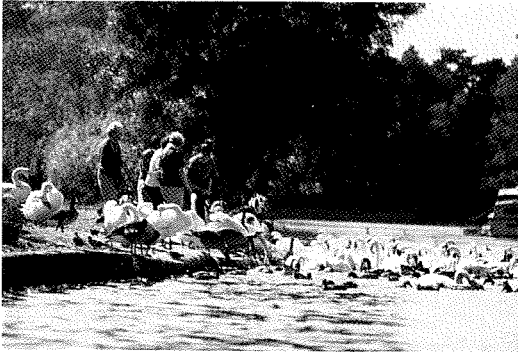
GANTT: It's like the McMillan plan for Washington, a framework for how you go forward. There are at least a million decisions that have to be made politically by citizens.

FRANCIS: There are so many design ideas in here, proposals, images—subtle ones, not big, not urban redevelopment, little actions that will add up.

VERNEZ-MOUDON: There are not very many master plans that have led to placemaking. They are always lacking the implementation.

FRANCIS: Here is a nature reserve project, a waterfront walkabout. This looks like a pretty active implementation process. This plan may be changed every ten years, but that's OK. The point is that they are looking at using a river as a way of organizing the future of the region.

HALSBAND: They've identified forty or fifty existing statutory bodies that have authority over pieces of this. So they have researched which groups have jurisdiction to do which things to make this start happening.



ZEISEL: They built a coalition of people who control implementation and they will keep that going with newsletters and so forth.

GANTT: If the river smells and things are trashy and dirty, little incremental changes are not going to change that.

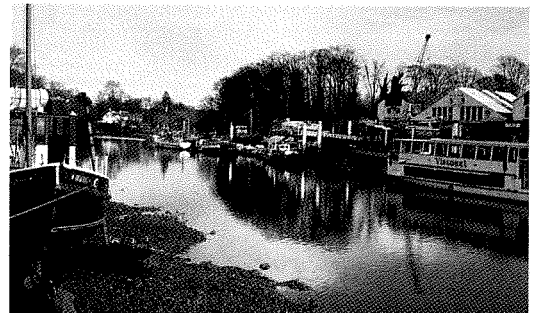
FRANCIS: They see the river as a framework for taking action in the local environments along it that will somehow will add up to more than they would if they were just small, local actions. The impetus for this is that the river has become as abused. The only way to do that was to get people involved, having a sense of ownership over it.

VERNEZ-MOUDON: It's not a watershed or a bioregion. The plan doesn't tell us about the people; are they poor, are they rich? We have to understand the larger landscape. We have to look at waterways and mountains.

HALSBAND: This project is about maintaining a visual corridor and a greenway, a natural corridor. You have to start somewhere. The project doesn't depend on a social dimension. It doesn't matter whether this person is rich or poor.

ZEISEL: In the past there used to be royalty; they are trying to democratize this river place. They are trying to define it as a cultural landscape.

FRANCIS: So it's being defined in a cultural and historical ways, rather than a biological way.



Upper left: **The strategy suggests enhancing people's connection to the natural landscape and local species of plants and wildlife.**

Upper right: **New development beside Richmond Bridge**

Above: **Tourist barges under Kingston Bridge**

Right: **The working landscape at Eel Pie Island, Twickenhan**

Photos: **Kim Wilkie Environmental Design**