

River Thames set for £4.75 million upgrade

The River Thames is getting a £4.75 million upgrade this winter with 19 locks benefiting from major repairs and improvements, the Environment Agency announced today.

Better mooring facilities, new lock gates, improved walkways and refurbished locks are just some of the renovations being carried out from Rushey Lock in Oxfordshire to the last lock at Teddington, from November 1 to the end of March 2007. Other improvements include new shower facilities and public toilets.

The largest project is at Bray Lock in Maidenhead where £700,000 is going towards major repairs and refurbishment of the tail layby, providing boaters with wider and safer walkways. Upstream, where the riverbank is severely deteriorating, the head layby is being extended as part of the bank protection work. Other improvements include a safer and more accessible canoe portage and refuse disposal point. Fish are also set to benefit with new reed beds and habitats being built with recycled wood from recently felled trees nearby.

Further upgrades include a £500,000 refurbishment of Days, with new lock walls, repaired walkways and lowered lock chamber steps; a £350,000 new tail layby at Clifton, and new lock gates at Osney and Pinkhill. As part of the Environment Agency's drive to provide more facilities for boaters, 'out of hours' power is being installed at Osney, Abingdon, Caversham and Bray locks to allow boaters to open gates automatically when the lock keeper is off duty.

Paul Power, Environment Agency engineering manager for the River Thames, says: *"Thanks to extra money from Defra we are continuing to maintain, develop and modernise the River Thames in line with the needs of today's river users. I'm sure boaters and other visitors will enjoy the improvements next summer and for many years to come."*

The work is all part of the Environment Agency's contribution to the Thames Waterway Plan – a strategy to rejuvenate the River Thames. The Plan is being delivered by the River Thames Alliance, chaired by the actor and boating enthusiast, David Suchet.

To help boaters plan their journeys on the river this winter the Environment Agency has produced a handy map, detailing what work is taking place and how long locks will be closed for. For the latest version please see www.visitthames.co.uk/winterworks. For electronic updates email visitthames@environment-agency.gov.uk or call 0845 988 1188 and when prompted press 1.

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For more media information please contact Madeline Leahu on 0118 953 5744 or madeline.leahu@environment-agency.gov.uk (not for publication).

Notes to editors

Images of work taking place on the River Thames will be available throughout the winter as work gets underway from November 1.