

Royal Fine Art Commission Thames Study

IN 1988 the RFAC published *A New Look for London*. In this study, the author Judy Hillman outlined a host of practical suggestions for improving the public spaces of the capital city.

A complete chapter of the study was dedicated to ideas for improving the Thames. In her introduction to the chapter entitled "The Thames for Pleasure", Hillman wrote: "The greatest opportunity for creating a chain of open space and transforming an under-used thoroughfare into a place for people lies of course in the Thames. This broad waterway provides the city with its largest open area, not firm beneath the feet, as in the traditional park, but offering a tremendous sense of freedom from the congestion and tension of urban life and a backcloth for individual buildings, bridges, spaces and human activity of grey living water, constantly changing according to tide, wind and weather."

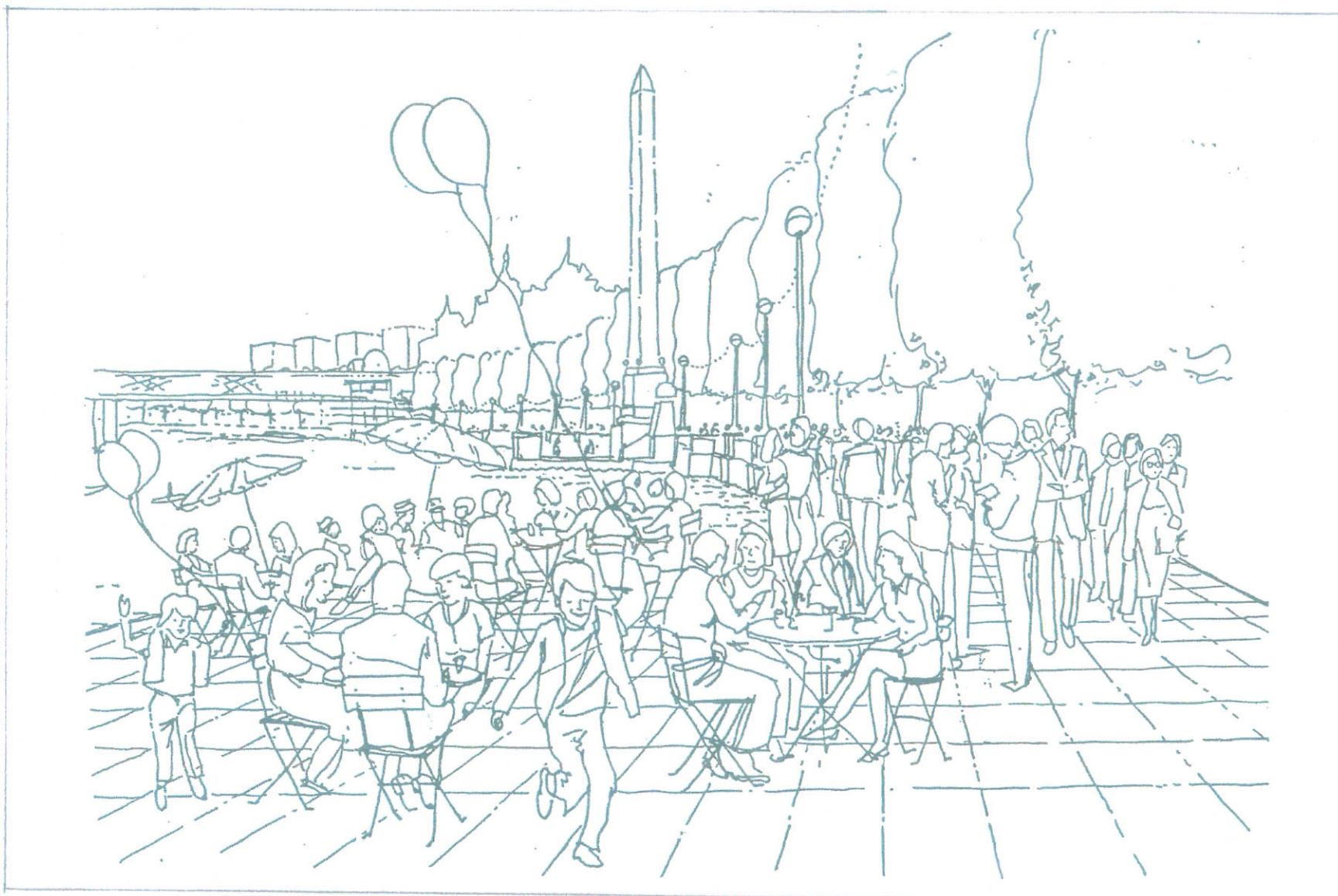
This exhibition builds on Judy Hillman's vision for the Thames by describing a number of imaginative projects for various sites on the river.

The Thames is the capital's great neglected asset. Opportunities exist along all its length for local and riverside improvements:

- to stop pollution;
- to encourage wildlife;
- to replant its banks;
- to secure riverbank paths;
- to provide access to the riverbank;
- to give access on to the water;
- to make places for leisure;
- to make places to swim;
- to make places for boating;
- to make places for fishing;
- to control the tidal current;
- to provide alternative transport routes;
- to improve lighting;
- to floodlight the bridges;
- to floodlight the buildings on its banks;
- to make a place to celebrate.

Real projects of improvements can be built along, beside, around, in and over the Thames, not just in these three to areas, but all along from the estuary to the first locks which will improve the Thameside environment. The really valuable opportunities or improvements need not be specifically architectural, and indeed the architectural and conventional development solutions (which will happen by public or private initiative in response to specific needs and uses) should be supplemented by, and indeed often inspired by, broader more environmentally-based improvements. These could range from temporary and low-cost ideas (better access along South Bank) to permanent solutions, requiring heavy investment (new lagoons and islands).

What is demonstrated here, we believe, is that ideas and the imagination

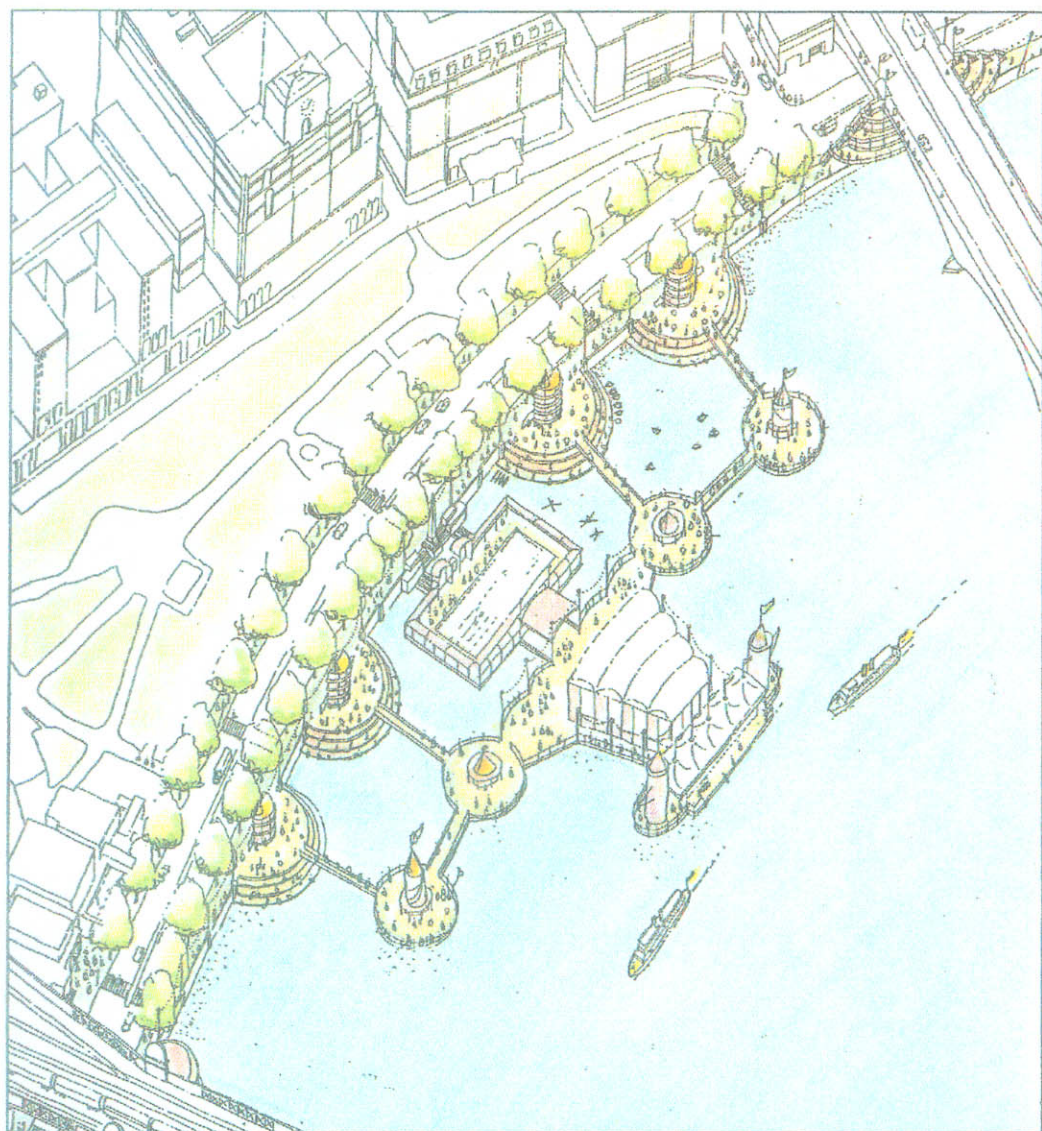


Improved pedestrian links will break the riverside's isolation.

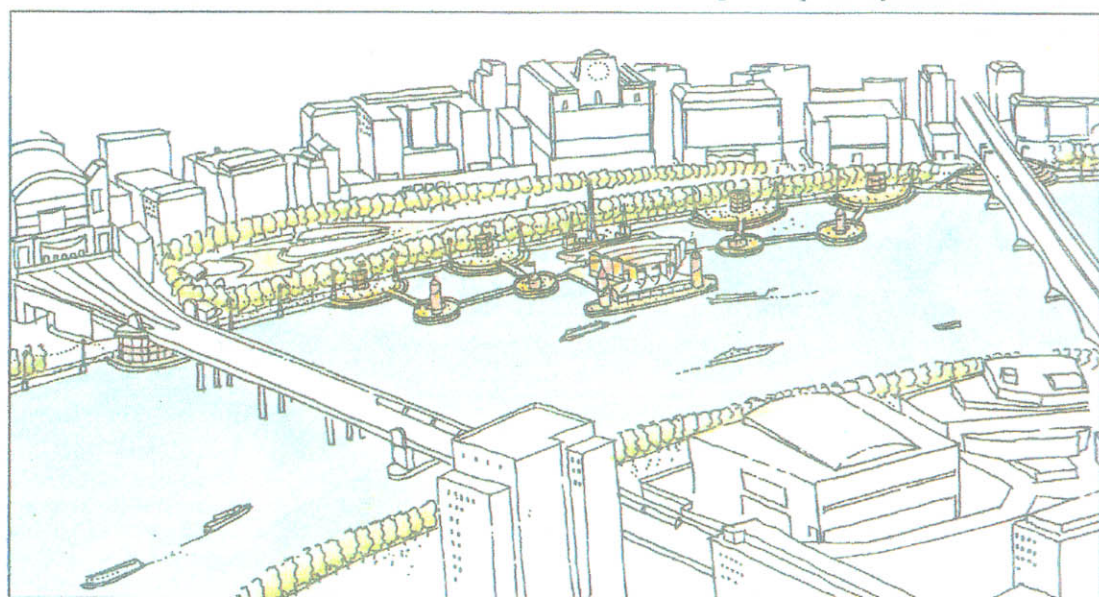
CAPITAL ASSET

tion are the starting point. We should begin with the question "What can be done to make the Thames a greater environmental asset?" We should then follow by raising the sights from the mundane to the kinds of environmental projects we find elsewhere in other cities, on other rivers, and on the Thames in the past.

London is a great and wonderful city and its greatest asset is the Thames. With a very low budget and a little time, a handful of small practices have shown some of the things that are possible and which would have striking results if implemented. With greater investment and much wider based involvement of public and private individuals, it is the conviction of the RFAC and all involved in the exhibition that the Thames could once again be one of the marvels of London, a real asset to all who live, work and visit this great capital city.



Cafes, bars, markets and theatres can flourish on pontoons off the Embankment.



David Quigley Architects, Reconnecting the West End

THE cultural, recreational and social activities London's West End provides rarely touch the banks of the River Thames. It is as if the West End has turned its back on its major artery.

The purpose of our project is to reconnect the two, by improved pedestrian links, and to provide a new riverside promenade for cafes, bars, restaurants and other cultural and social activities to flourish, so that the river's unique potential can be revitalised and its present isolation broken.

Traffic calming measures would be introduced along a stretch of the Embankment

from Westminster Bridge to Blackfriars Bridge to reduce and control the flow of traffic, and break down this barrier which isolates the Thames. The main focus of our study is the Embankment between Hungerford and Waterloo Bridges.

An improved pedestrian network of new connections is proposed, including new road crossings along the embankment carriageway, new open staircases and walkways which will link the Embankment riverside promenade with the elevated pavements of the existing bridges that cross the river. These links will also connect

newly pedestrianised Villiers Street to the riverside promenade.

The wall which currently blocks contact with the river will be partly dismantled so that new pontoons for cafes, bars, restaurants, open arts markets and floating theatres can develop and eventually flourish with the improved pedestrian accessibility.

New cultural buildings are proposed beneath the Hungerford and Waterloo bridges to take advantage of the shelter provided and the unique views these positions offer, while providing a base for new staircases linking the bridges to the promenade.