

Keep King Edward Park Green (KEMP) public meeting

3 June 2011

7 pm

St Peter's London Docks Primary School

Meeting notes

Attendees:

KEMP campaign team: Carl Dunsire (Chair); Emma Puosi (Vice-Chair); Toni Davey (Community Liaison)

Guests: Councillor Alibor Choudhury (Shadwell, LB Tower Hamlets); John Biggs (GLA member, City and East)

Notes: Robin Millward

Members of the public: as per signature sheets: well in excess of 100 attendees

Apologies: Jim Fitzpatrick MP (Poplar and Limehouse)

1. Welcome and introductions

As Chair, Carl welcomed everyone to the meeting, outlined the agenda and introduced the speakers. He set out his background as an engineer and mentioned several of the major infrastructure projects which he had been involved with professionally; he was bringing this knowledge and expertise to help the campaign. Thames Water (TW) would arrive at 8.00, after presentations from the campaign and key supporters.

2. Background

Note: The following material can also be found on the KEMP website, and therefore is not set out in detail here.

Carl's presentation covered the following topics:

How a combined sewage system works. There are 57 CSOs in London and most of the water passing through the storm drains is storm water, not "poo". Of the total volume of 39 million tons going into the river annually, less than 2% is from the CSO in our park although TW says that our CSO is one of the largest when clearly it is not.

TW's proposals. The new tunnel will run from west London across to the east and will intercept 30 of London's 57 CSOs. TW's proposals for our park include a massive dam into the river larger than a premiership football field. The CSO shaft will be 82' wide and 216' deep. After the works are completed, a sizeable promontory will be left extending into the Thames.

History of the project. Milestones include: 1995 – EU Treatment Directive passed in UK; 2001 – Thames Tunnel Strategic Study; 2005 – Super Sewer option agreed; 2006 – OFWAT commissioned an independent report from Jacobs Babbie which identified better value alternatives and advised DEFRA accordingly.

Campaign alternatives. The purpose of the campaign is to protect the park from the damage which would be caused by TW's proposals. The campaign has put forward alternative proposals – a selection of brownfield sites around the Limehouse DLR station, Butcher Row and The Highway where land was unused or poorly used. TW seemed to like Heckford Trading Estate (not a proposal put forward by KEMP) and had said that the main site and large shaft could be sited there with a connection to a small shaft and site in the park. KEMP has suggested the tennis courts, which could be reinstated on completion of the works without damaging the park, but TW prefers to be further into the park.

3. TW's revised plans

Emma Puosi (EP) said that TW were still keen to use the park foreshore and to keep to their original preferred route. This meant that the park would lose the memorial benches and the bandstand; the playground would be relocated to a fenced area in the centre of the park, which meant that the area for small children to play football would be lost. The main football pitch would become TW's car park and offices, with a big road across the park (as TfL had told TW they could not access the park directly from The Highway) and onto the foreshore. 85 mature trees along the path from Glamis Road would be lost, together with all the vegetation around the rotunda, the mature trees along the river front, and the area where the February event, in collaboration with Trees for Cities and PTES, "Planting for stag beetles" had taken place.

The view of the river would be lost forever and the ventilation shaft would discharge untreated sewage air into the park when it rained. The campaign had until September to fight and to put across to TW that this park was all the green space we had for the whole community: there was no other green space in Shadwell.

4. LB Tower Hamlets update – Councillor Choudhury

Alibor Choudhury (AC) thanked the campaign for the work done and the effort and energy put in, and thanked everyone across the borough who had contributed. He stressed the (LBTH) Mayor's involvement with the campaign and that the Mayor was being proactive in trying to protect the park and find alternatives for TW's plan, after meeting KEMP to agree a strategy. The motion to the full Council, unanimously supported, had made the position clear. When the Mayor met with TW in March, it had been made clear that a proposal involving building on the foreshore would not be accepted. TW had been asked to come back with alternatives.

As promised, Dr. Legge (an independent expert) had now joined the Council and will work with the campaign team, officers and other members. The Mayor had asked all his officers to work with the campaign; there will be a meeting on Monday 6 June chaired by Councillor Stephanie Eaton with TW to discuss the way forward.

Tower Hamlets was developing a Memorandum of Understanding with other boroughs affected by TW's plans to co-ordinate action and deal with issues. At the last Cabinet meeting, it had been agreed an updated report to Council setting out where the administration stands: nothing to be built in the park or on the foreshore.

TW had come back with three alternatives, which it presented at a meeting with AC last week. These were:

- The Chambers Wharf (or any other brownfield site across the river option) – SaveKEMP's proposal for a connected tunnel in the NW of the park leading to Chambers Wharf. TW said that this was not feasible due to technical issues related to hydraulic and pneumatic aspects of the project. TW was asked to work with Dr. Legge and LBTH to verify whether TW's objections are valid.

- Their own preferred option, as explained by EP earlier in the meeting, with some slight changes. This was rejected.
- The Heckford Green option – building the shaft on the Heckford Business Park site (where Screwfix is) on The Highway. Developing this option would require more work but it was feasible and doable. At the end of the development, TW would need only 2000 m sq of the 7000 m sq on the site, and TW would be asked to give back the remaining 5000 m sq to the Council as a green space. A local impact assessment would have to be carried out to look at the social and economic consequences of this development.

AC concluded by saying that TW appeared to be listening, but that this had to be measured in terms of progress. The Mayor and Council of Tower Hamlets would not allow building on the park foreshore.

5. GLA update – John Biggs

John Biggs (JB) said that several people had been caught napping on TW's proposals – Boris Johnson had not originally included the park as one of London's crown jewels in his response to TW. The campaign needed to keep up the pressure on TW locally and create a "path of most resistance". It might be a year before the final decision is made. Taking the petition to the Mayor of London and the GLA had led to both revising their petition.

JB then read a statement from Jim Fitzpatrick MP in support of the campaign (attached as Appendix A).

The Heckford Green option had been discussed at City Hall last week. It shouldn't be forgotten that there will be people in Heckford Street who will be affected. However, the park affected thousands of people, including people who use the park infrequently and was treasured in a borough where most people didn't have a garden.

The previous and current Governments had set up the Infrastructure Planning Commission to deal with major infrastructure projects such as the super sewer. The Council is a consultee. Boroughs all along the Thames had concerns about the project and a single voice was needed on behalf of London. JB said that Boris Johnson was available for meetings if needed and other mayoral candidates would be happy to be involved, too. Everyone should keep up the pressure on TW, which was looking for a way to build within the timescale set for the project but with community support. This would be a great victory for Tower Hamlets, a borough of people with all sorts of interests and backgrounds who had come together to protect the park.

6. Councillors' contributions

CD then opened the floor to councillors to make their statements. Please note that only highlights are given here: fuller statements may be viewed on the video being posted on the KEMP website.

Cllr Peter Golds (Leader LBTH Conservative Group) (Blackwall and Cubitt Town) – TW would not dare to build in a park in Richmond or Westminster. JB's point was significant: there were few gardens in the borough and only 5 green spaces in a borough where the population was rocketing. It was a particular disgrace that TW would take away the bandstand, which had been requested by East Londoners when the park was built and had long been a place where East Enders could enjoy themselves. If Heckford was an alternative, we should grab it. We must stay on TW's back to make sure they don't "wobble" and this should be the first of many regular meetings with them.

Cllr Denise Jones (Labour, St Katherine's and Wapping) – All 51 elected members agreed at full Council to support the campaign. The park gave one of only 3 views of the river in Shadwell and Wapping. When open space was taken away, it was never replaced. The campaign should aim for 500,000 signatures, like the campaign to ban fox-hunting.

Cllr Motin Uz-Zaman (Deputy Leader, LBTH Labour Group) (Mile End East) – Irrespective of individual political beliefs, all councillors stood beside residents in this campaign and would work collectively with the GLA and our MP to ensure a clear resolution that was satisfactory to the community.

Carole Swords (Chair of Respect) – The park is our legacy and the jewel in our crown. Our community is saying to Thames Water that this is something we don't want and we won't pay for it.

Cllr Emma Jones (Conservative, St. Katherine's and Wapping) – Thanks to Carl, Emma and Toni for their absolute dedication to the campaign.

7. Community Liaison update – Toni Davey

Toni (TD) told the meeting that she had organised “a beautiful party in our lovely park” on the 25th June to celebrate the park's birthday. It would take place every year; this year's highlights would include a bouncy castle; face painting; live music; a reggae band – all for free. The event was being supported by the DLR, London Fire Brigade and Knight Frank.

TD then made an impassioned call to action, saying that the fight was more than a fight to keep our park but to protect the rights of a diverse community that would stand together to protect its heritage. (Please see the video on the KEMP website.)

8. Thames Water's proposals

CD introduced Phil Stride (PS), the head of the Super Sewer project.

PS said that he fully understood the concerns of the meeting but wanted to give a short background as to what TW was doing and why before opening the floor to questions. He said that TW had been listening to what people said and had modified its plans.

TW had to act now because 39 million tons of sewage was being discharged into the river, and the river and its users had to be protected from health risks including plastics and refuse associated with sewage. TW had been instructed in 2007 to proceed with the Thames Tunnel scheme as soon as possible and this had been confirmed by Caroline Spellman, Secretary of State for DEFRA in 2010.

PS admitted that TW could have managed the public consultation better and that they had not reached all the people they should have done. They had missed lots of people who enjoyed and used the park; they would learn the lessons and this was an apology. They would do better in Phase 2. TW had nothing to hide and had never refused to go to a meeting (it was pointed out that they had “forgotten” the meeting with KEMP and LBTH Councillors arranged for 20 May) and had done over 250 external presentations.

In terms of process, the first phase was complete. September was the planned date for the second phase and the target for planning consent application was 2012.

Questions from the audience:

Q: How far and wide was the consultation done? Was there proof? If everyone within 250m of the park was consulted, had that been measured from the centre of the park?

A: TW used a site selection methodology which had been shared with all the London Boroughs before implementation. 250m was measured from the edge of the park. 175,000 letters had been sent out and TW had also taken out two ads in the Evening Standard. TW would have no problem showing all its policy documents and how it had complied with Government best practice guidelines.

Q: I'm a university professor and I couldn't understand your consultation document. TW should look at what it is presenting.

A: TW worked hard to ensure that correspondence was understandable and clear. (Audience response – it wasn't!)

Q: Why, when you started the consultation in our area, did you hold meetings as far away from the park as possible?

A: TW looked at what venues were available. For future events / exhibitions, TW would be more than happy to take suggestions.

Q: A lot of people haven't received letters. Why don't you start again?

A (John Biggs): The proposals in the autumn will lead to a new consultation. Nothing has been finally decided and TW should now be well aware of the anger and concerns about their current proposals.

Q: Of the 175,000 people consulted, how many would have to say "no" to make you [TW] go away? If everyone said no, would you still do it?

A: We have a Government instruction to implement the scheme. We can't make it go away, but we are listening. If 175,000 people said no, we would have to tell the Government that these people have said they don't want the scheme.

PS then continued to present his slides and to describe what TW saw as the problem in delivering the project. The intercepting sewer had been built in 1860 and went under housing and under the park to the foreshore. The sewage came from North London and central London. The system's second largest gravity discharge came from this point and a large amount of sewage was going into the river. (PS was reminded that this was only 2% of the total.) The overflow had to be intercepted; 800,000 tons of sewage went out in a "dry" year and this could be 3 times as much in a "wet" year. (PS was reminded that a large proportion of this was storm water.) The flow had to be taken to the Thames Tunnel and to East London for treatment.

PS apologised for having used photos of Holloway Road and saying that this was the KEMP sewer.

Chamber's Wharf option: Boris Johnson, the GLA, John Biggs and LBTH had asked TW to look at KEMP's alternatives and give a view. TW's view was that the Chamber's Wharf option would not work because there was too much flow at a single location and the hydraulics would be inadequate to control surges and forces in the system. Butcher Row was another site which discharged sewage into the river and that had to be controlled, too. (A member of the audience asked about the Limehouse site, which discharged more than the park, and which was being left alone.) The Chamber's Wharf option could not be implemented by the project deadline of 2020 and would cost £30,000 more.

KEMP proposals: there were several potential sites for a main drop shaft north of The Highway but there would still have to be some construction in the park. KEMP had suggested 3 brownfield sites but the only brownfield site large enough for the necessary works was the concrete and aggregate factory site on The Highway, but this was a very important business which it would be very difficult to relocate and the company would not be prepared to sell.

Heckford Street: this was the most viable site, which would require the main tunnel to be realigned so that the main shaft was on the main tunnel at Heckford Street. It would be a large construction site, just under 2000 m sq where a shaft would have to be constructed deep enough to pick up the discharge. EP said that TW's plan would compromise the memorial stone, which was not acceptable. PS said that if the interception shaft were further from the memorial, for example, in the tennis court,

TW would have to dig a trench across the whole of the park and this would cause more lasting damage. EP said that just by changing the orientation of the site, the memorial could be left alone. PS, together with TW tunnelling expert Derek Arnold, agreed that this could be done. TD said that KEMP had not suggested Heckford Street and it should be clear that this was one of TW's options.

PS reiterated that in terms of a viable alternative site, this was technically feasible and comparable in terms of costs. Whichever site was chosen would have an impact on business. TW would be working at two sites, one remote from the discharge sewer and the other "somewhere in the park". Neither site had access to the river which would mean that TW could not use the river to move plant and equipment; in terms of site traffic, this option would be more disruptive.

Comments and questions from the audience

Q: TW doesn't understand the history of the park and why it is there. 40-50% of Tower Hamlets is unemployed and people will occupy the park.

Q: There is a problem with the way the issue is framed. TW must start from the point that we don't want to spoil the foreshore because we will never get it back and the strategic damage will never be repaired.

A: TW understands that you don't want the work in the park and the foreshore, but this has to be balanced with the Government's instruction to promote a scheme to intercept sewage going into the river. We are trying to reduce the permanent site. The ventilation shaft could be reduced to 4m high and could be integrated into some structure in the park. By moving some of the construction and storage areas into the football pitch, damage will be reduced. TW will not make the area unusable and there will be a crossing to keep accessibility to the Thames Path.

Q: There's a lot of detail about what you will do after the works are done. Have you made up your mind that you're doing it in the park? The road will be 4 m wide for the duration of the construction.

Q: We are your customers, listen to us.

Q: The business park is not viable, it's not Stratford City.

Q: As youth workers, we work with groups that use the park and the football pitch. We have already lost the "sand pitch"; this football pitch is an alternative and it's very important. We can't tell the lads that we won't have the pitch any more. We can't go through losing this pitch as well.

A: No decisions have been made.

Q: My dad's ashes are scattered where you are going to build. I have a 2 bedroom flat with four kids and no garden. You are going to take the park away from the little people.

Q: The park is a community benefit for half the borough. You wouldn't do this where rich people live, but you think you can get away with it in the East End.

Q: We must prepare for the new consultation now. Thames Water, don't come to sheltered accommodation and ask vulnerable people if they are on electronic machines and then tell them that they will be at risk with the new tunnel. Give us the right facts.

Q: If this development was within 50 yards of your back door, would you be in this hall or doing what you're doing?

Q: You have said that regardless of this meeting, you are still going to do it.

A: That's not true. TW has to deliver the overall project. We have consulted on 20 sites. There are 3 sites in parks and 2 more sites where there is an access road through the park.

Q: I live over the park in Free Trade Wharf and I can see how well it's used. I had no letter of consultation. You are talking about the works taking three and a half years, but 2020 is seven years away.

A: The main construction will be between 2015 and 2020.

Q: I found out about this consultation by accident. Why did you hold the consultation meeting where you did? How much profit will TW make from this project?

A: Locations were chosen without local knowledge and we should have chosen closer sites. The commercial arrangements for construction are being discussed with OFWAT and DEFRA so we can't say. TW haven't sought to do this to make a profit but has been instructed by the Government to progress the project.

Q: Look at the range of people here. There will be more and more meetings, and even larger ones. Take this back and listen to the people of this borough.

Q: Why don't you dig the tunnel and make the interceptor north of Wapping and Shadwell? In Beckton there is a sewage works and it stinks. The same will happen in the park.

A: Further north will cost more money and only intercept half the flow. Beckton is a sewage treatment works. This project will ensure that air in the tunnel is changed every 24 hours and you won't get bad smells emanating.

Q: If this is an EU directive, which other countries have followed it?

A: Vienna; The Rhine; Paris; a number of schemes in North America and Asia.

9. Conclusion

The audience thanked Emma, Toni and Carl for all their hard work on the campaign and for getting all the councillors to work together.

CD said that it was very important to get the community's views across, and asked Phil Stride if the TW scheme with an alternative to works on the foreshore would be included in the September consultation. PS said that TW would consider it.

The meeting closed with a reminder about the party in the park and a request from TD for help from all the community to make it a success.

Ends: 21.38

Appendix A

Statement from Jim Fitzpatrick MP

I am sorry I cannot be with you today, but my efforts continue in support of you, the KEMP campaigners, to ensure your views are fully acknowledged, registered and considered.

Hopefully you will all be aware of my own activities in respect of King Edward Memorial Park and Thames Water's plans for the construction of a new sewer shaft – the Thames Tideway Tunnel. I've raised the matter in Parliament; I've joined demonstrators on the City Hall protest in Central London; I attended the fundraising event back in March, and I continue to liaise with Thames Water, Tower Hamlets Council and other agencies on behalf of campaigners.

Just recently, I've pressed Thames Water in respect of the meeting being called for by KEMP supporters, and I've also called for information to be provided by Thames Water to campaign officers. I've been in touch with Mayor Lutfur Rahman and his team, to follow up a number of issues, too.

In a recent statement to the local press, I referred to how impressed I've been by the high level of organisation and commitment of campaigners, as evidenced by the many and varied ways in which you have drawn attention to this issue. It shows the strength of feeling that a green space can engender in a community.

I shall continue to do all I can, and I know I can rely on you to keep me up to speed, too.

Good luck – let's work together to bring about the best possible outcome for local people.

Jim