



Save Lea Marshes

**Join Save Lea Marshes
in calling for the
Lea Bridge Waterworks
to be protected from development
and opened up to public access**

**Come to a public meeting on
16 September 2019 at 7.30pm
at the WaterWorks Centre, Lea Bridge Rd**

The site was closed after the new Coppermill Water Treatment Works were opened. The Lee Valley Park Authority eventually agreed to take over the Middlesex Filter Beds (after first suggesting they should be filled in to make football pitches!) and later took on the Essex and Leyton Filter Beds.

Today, the Middlesex and Essex Filter Beds are beautiful, important and secluded nature reserves. They show what can be achieved when industrial sites are sensitively managed to return to nature.

The whole of the site was designated as Metropolitan Open Land in the 1970s. Looking at this plan it is easy to understand why.

The trashing of the Lea Bridge Waterworks

In the 1980s, the so called Essex Number One Beds were retained by Thames Water as an operational site. Originally, Thames Water obtained planning permission to fill in the beds to create a temporary pipe store. From that starting point, Thames Water have gone on to occupy the site for a succession of uses including the project with Clancy Docwra to replace the East London water mains. In the process they have completely trashed the site without any regard for its status as Metropolitan Open Land. All this has gone on invisibly behind the high fences surrounding the site.

Thames Water also demolished the old engine houses although there are some characterful buildings surviving close by the Lea Bridge Weir, including the Sluice House.

All mouth and no trousers – neglect by the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority

The plan shows that the Thames Water site could be a connecting thread between Leyton Marshes and Hackney Marshes to make the open spaces of the Lea one continuous whole.

The Lee Valley Regional Park Authority is supposed to act as the Park's custodian, threading the different parts together to make a playground for London, and indeed the Authority frequently claims to have done precisely this. However, the reality is very different. In plan after plan they have committed to protecting the site as Metropolitan Open Land, but they have done absolutely nothing about it.

This is what the Park Authority propose in their current Park Plan:

Work with Thames Water, London Borough of Waltham Forest and other stakeholders to identify options for a development at the Thames Water Depot site that will bring this site into a Park compatible use. Appropriate uses would include (but are not restricted to) one or more of the following:

- *A waterside visitor hub incorporating leisure related uses*
- *A biodiversity based and/or heritage related visitor attraction*
- *Accommodation serving visitors to the Park*
- *'Community' related activity and uses as defined by the Authority's adopted Thematic Proposals*
- *New recreational or sporting facilities.*

The type, scale and design of any development would need to be appropriate in term of the sites designation as Metropolitan Open Land and its location within the heart of the Regional Park.

<https://www.leevalleypark.org.uk/media/viewfile.ashx?filetype=4&filepath=/Park%20plan/section3b.pdf>

The Park Authority even had the opportunity to realise its plan back in 2011, when it was offered this site as compensation for land that it was required to give up for the Chobham Manor housing development adjacent to the Olympic Park. It decided to take cash compensation instead; cash that has been spent on its large leisure facilities and not on improving the landscape. It then stood back and did nothing while the site was purchased for a purpose that is anything but Park-compatible use.

Corporate greed wins the day

Thames Water used to be a publicly owned utility, owned and operated for the public benefit. As we know to our cost, Thames Water has, since privatisation, had a series of owners bent on loading the company with debt and extracting as much money as they can.

When the last Walthamstow Planning Strategy – the so called Core Strategy – was being adopted, Thames Water lobbied for the site to be re-designated for a “commercially viable” development. They were unsuccessful. The Inspector at the Public Enquiry confirmed that the site’s status as protected Metropolitan Open Land should continue.

Undaunted, Thames Water found a willing, perhaps even gullible, buyer in the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government acting on behalf of the Education Funding Agency (now the Education and Skills Funding Agency and hereafter “ESFA”) who paid the vast sum of £33.3 million + VAT to acquire the site for a pair of free school academies.

ESFA must have been aware that the site was MOL but must have been (and still be) confident that a pliable Planning Inspector will approve the change of use.

Not wanted here

Waltham Forest Council were clearly not consulted about ESFA’s plans and do not support the proposed free schools. The site is far from those parts of the borough needing more school places and in effect, every pupil from Waltham Forest attending the school would have to travel down Lea Bridge Road, one of the most congested roads in London. It is just about the worst place in Waltham Forest to build a new school.

At the Planning Committee meeting on 25 March 2019, Waltham Forest Council rejected the application to build two free schools on the site, confirming its status as Metropolitan Open Land and making it very clear that the schools were inappropriate development for Metropolitan Open Land.

What happens next?

We all know – too well – the script ESFA are following. They will go to appeal, supported in the background by the Government (which has paid a grotesque sum for the site), and will expect the inspector to overturn the Council's decision. It has happened already at the Olive School site in Hackney.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Save Lea Marshes is confident that the case for two new schools is so weak that the - ESFA are deluding themselves if they assume they will eventually get planning permission.

There is another way and we have to make the case to protect this site.

- The Lea Bridge Waterworks is Metropolitan Open Land and its status as such should be protected
- The Lea Bridge Waterworks plays a critical role in connecting the marshes of the Lower Lea Valley
- The Lea Bridge Waterworks backs on to one of the most beautiful and unspoiled sections of the River Lea, the haunt of kingfishers, stretching from the mighty Lea Bridge Weir to Friends Bridge
- The Lea Bridge Waterworks contains significant remnants of its industrial heritage, adjacent to the weir, which can be interpreted to promote understanding of this important historical site
- The Lea Bridge Waterworks can be linked to the Essex and Middlesex Filter Beds and managed and re-wilded over time

There is also a point of principle to protect. Thames Water have knowingly destroyed the site. The ESFA have knowingly overpaid for this site, expecting compliant authorities to give them what they want. The Lea Valley Regional Park Authority has knowingly stood by, wholly disregarding its own Park Plan and making not the slightest attempt to protect the site, in dereliction of its duties to protect the Park.

DON'T LET THEM GET AWAY WITH IT.

SUPPORT SAVE LEA MARSHES IN CALLING FOR THE LEA BRIDGE WATERWORKS TO BE PROTECTED FROM DEVELOPMENT AND OPENED UP TO PUBLIC ACCESS.

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