

**Welcome** to this Newsletter, with updates of existing issues and accounts of new ones.

### **Essex Wharf: Application for Planning Permission to build housing**

We have until the end of this month to register comments on a new housing application which, if approved, will break the continuity of our open Park space and set a dangerous precedent for future losses of green space in the Lea Bridge area.



Before and after: proposed development at Essex Wharf from North Millfields (top) and Lee Valley Ice Rink car park (bottom)

The latest application, the third in three years, is to build 124 residential apartments on Essex Wharf. Essex Wharf is a very important site between Millfields and Leyton Marsh – both areas of Metropolitan Open Land, recognised as significant open spaces and deserving of protection. The LVF believe Essex Wharf should become part of the Park's leisure facilities, and not developed for private housing.

The first planning application in 2007 for 167 flats, was rejected by LB Waltham Forest and the Planning Inspector dismissed the appeal against refusal. A second planning application for 144 flats, was refused in May 2010. The third application proposes slightly fewer apartments and minor alterations to the heights of the four individual blocks. It is almost identical to the second scheme, and so LVF objections are the same as to the previous one: no housing should be built on this site due to the site's great importance in the open spaces of the Park; its isolation from transport and other services for residents also makes it a bad site for housing; and there are also objections to design details.

The issue of the value of open space in this part of the Lea Valley has centred round the concept of “visual permeability”, introduced by the Planning Inspector in his refusal of the appeal on the first scheme. The Inspector said that it was important to maintain views from Millfields to Leyton Marsh. The LVF believe that “visual permeability” demands that a viewer have sight of Leyton Marsh from all of Millfields, and that a viewer on Leyton Marsh should also be able to see Millfields.

This makes any medium-rise, high-density proposal unacceptable here, because such a proposal must produce massive development and “visual impermeability”.

Supporters of the LVF's position can comment to Waltham Forest with wording such as:

“I object to the planning application ref. 2010/0934 on the Essex Wharf site. No housing should be built on this site because it is very important to the Lea Valley Regional Park; because of its isolation from transport and other services for residents; and because its presence will create a wall of development between two important open spaces, Millfields and Leyton Marsh, which should remain visually linked to each other.”

The period for comments on the scheme runs until the end of September. Development Control officer dealing with this is Jon Price, email: [jon.price@walthamforest.gov.uk](mailto:jon.price@walthamforest.gov.uk)

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The address to write to is: London Borough of Waltham Forest  
Environment and Regeneration  
Waltham Forest Council  
Sycamore House  
Forest Road  
London E17 4JF (for the attention of Mr Jon Price)

### **Park Plan Update**

As we reported in our last newsletter, the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority (LVRPA) is reviewing its Park Plan which sets out its proposals for the Park over the next 10–15 years. The existing Park Plan was completed in 2000 and can be downloaded from the Authority's website at

[http://www.leevalleypark.org.uk/en/content/cms/about\\_us/park\\_plan/park\\_plan.aspx](http://www.leevalleypark.org.uk/en/content/cms/about_us/park_plan/park_plan.aspx)

The Park Authority originally proposed to replace the Park Plan with a “Park Development Framework” (PDF) setting out broad principles to be followed in taking the Park forward but not actually committing the Authority to say what it actually proposed to do, how it expected to improve specific areas within the Park, nor how it would respond to planning threats (such as the Essex Wharf proposals described in this Newsletter). We consider that the PDF by itself is a rather vacuous document – all things to all men – and also quite sinister in giving the Authority a lot of scope to give “pragmatic” agreement to proposals for development in the Park. We argued that the Authority is required to complete the Park Plan Review by setting out its proposals for each part of the Park and consulting with the public on its proposals.

For any one interested, the PDF can be downloaded from the Authority's website at

[http://www.leevalleypark.org.uk/parkframework/archive/lee\\_valley\\_park\\_development.pdf](http://www.leevalleypark.org.uk/parkframework/archive/lee_valley_park_development.pdf)

Good news – the Park Authority, after considering our representations, has decided that it agrees with us! The Authority is going to be developing area by area plans to show how it hopes to develop and improve the Park over the next 10–15 years and will be consulting on its ideas. This is really important, not least because it requires the Park Authority to lay down in specific terms how it intends to defend and improve the Park rather than taking refuge in generalities. The Park Authority may not be able to achieve all its aspirations (and it is under ferocious pressure at present to reduce the precept it takes from local authorities) but a proper Park Plan commits the Authority to setting out clear ideas and a direction of travel.

We have also told the Authority that we very much hope that the new Park Plan will include a commitment to preserve and improve the Park – between Forest Road Walthamstow in the north and the Olympic site in the south – as an area of undeveloped open space. We think that this vast area should be defended and enhanced as a place to wander and enjoy nature – truly the “green lung” for London that the Park was always intended to be. We would like to see landscape improvements, new footpaths, and improved access. We would like, for instance, to see better access to the reservoirs and the flood relief channel and improved access between Low Hall area of Walthamstow and the rest of the Park. There are exciting possibilities in the air such as the possible release of West Warwick Reservoir (that's the one facing you looking out from the Rowing Club) for leisure use and a new path and foot-bridge linking Markfield Park with the reservoirs and Walthamstow Marsh.

These projects are not impossible pipe dreams; but they will require commitment from the Park Authority to make this project a priority, support from local authorities, and co-operation from a variety of statutory bodies such as Thames Water and the Environment Agency.

And what's more, the Park Authority has decided to use the Lea Bridge Road area “*as the initial pilot that will help us refine the process*” and it has offered to work with the Lea Valley Federation in developing its ideas for this area. The Authority is working up a document with the snappy titles of the “*Park Development Framework Aims and Objectives Assessment*” which will cover the Lea Bridge Road area defined as “extending from Forest Road in the north to Ruckholt Road in the south”. More news will follow soon!

Whilst this is all excellent news, we are a long way from achieving our objectives. There will be a long and grinding consultation process; pressure from developers (who will also be interested in this consultation) to develop land for housing and industry; foot-dragging by bodies such as Thames Water; lack of budget; and competing priorities. There is also a great danger that local authorities will give tacit support for development at the expense of the Park. BUT, we have achieved a promising start and for anyone interested in the future of the Lea Valley, these are going to be interesting, involving and hopeful times!

## London Plan Update

On 17th September, the Lea Valley Federation's Laurie Elks spent a pleasant day at the new GLA City Hall trying to ensure that a proper reference to the Lea Valley Park is included in the new London Plan.

The back story – briefly put – goes as follows. It is one of the functions of the GLA to set out its strategic plan for London, and the GLA is currently working up a new plan to replace the first London Plan which was published in 2004. The London Plan is important because the statements in it have to be considered, alongside the policies of the local London Boroughs, when considering planning proposals in London.

We think that the GLA *ought* to use this Plan to give ringing endorsement to the importance of the Lea Valley Park – not least to step into the shoes of its predecessor, the GLC, which sponsored the legislation which brought the Park into being. If the GLA Plan could include a firm and specific commitment to the Park, this would be quite a big win as it would constitute a strong additional planning ground for resisting proposals for development in the Park.

The Draft Plan is reviewed by a panel of Planning Inspectors at hearings called an “Examination in Public” (EIP) which has been going on for some weeks at City Hall. As you would imagine, the EIP is besieged with lobbyists from builders and developers pressing the Inspectors to support pro-development policies.

The Draft Plan includes various references to the Lea Valley Park, but we have argued (and so has the Park Authority) that the Plan should contain clear indication that the Mayor (be it Boris or Ken or whoever comes next) wishes to see the Lea Valley Park protected from development. Unfortunately, there are other lobbyists pressing for the Lea Valley to be recognised as a “development corridor”. The Park Authority has taken a rather ambivalent attitude – arguing for “flexibility” (dread word) in planning for the Lea Valley and also having membership of the North London Strategic Alliance – which takes a pro-development stance.

At present, we do not know the outcome of our representations to the EIP. What is very clear is that we need to participate in planning consultations of this sort to help defend the Park for the future.

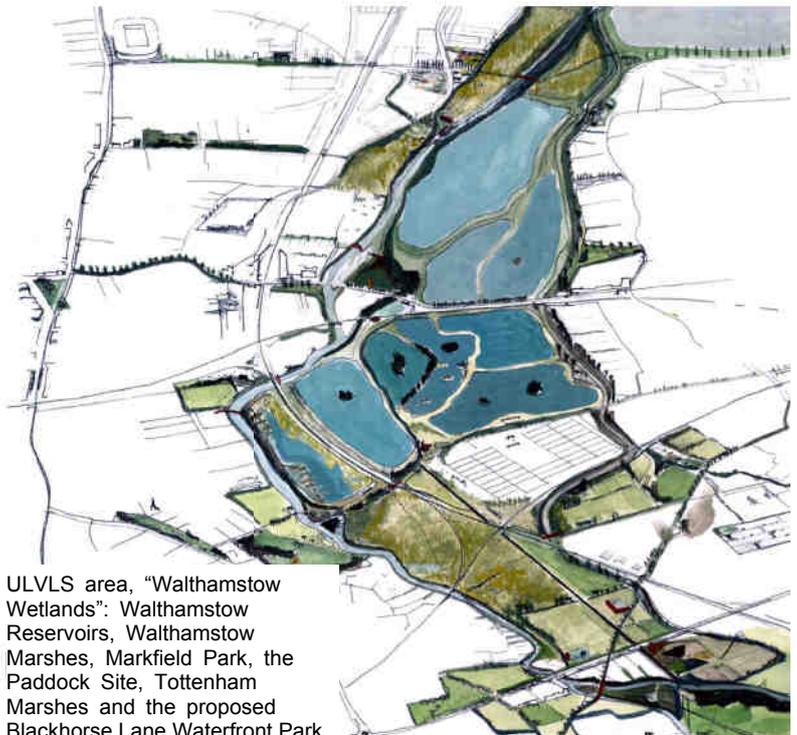
## Upper Lea Valley Landscape Strategy (ULVLS)

The LVRPA has recently made available a new consultant's report: “The Upper Lea Valley Landscape Strategy” (ULVLS). Commissioned by the North London Strategic Alliance ([www.nlsa.org.uk](http://www.nlsa.org.uk)), LVRPA has been involved on the project Steering Group alongside landowners and other stakeholders including British Waterways, Thames Water, The Environment Agency and neighbouring London Borough councils.

A landscape strategy of the Lea Valley from Lea Bridge Road to the M25, providing analysis and proposals, it will go on to form the basis of the Landscape Strategy of the Upper Lea Valley Opportunity Area Planning Framework currently being prepared by the GLA.

The document and indeed the project as a whole is an important one: to bring together the major stakeholders in what could be one of London's great Parks. Of course, there is a wider agenda here: to create an environment to complement new housing and business investment in the area; but the document itself is interesting on its own terms.

The Lea Valley inside the M25, although cherished by those that use it, appears as a fragmented landscape, dissected by roads, waterways, railways, and miles of fencing that divide a Park under multiple ownership. The ULVLS attempts to stitch some of these pieces together by improving access and connections across the valley.



ULVLS area, “Walthamstow Wetlands”: Walthamstow Reservoirs, Walthamstow Marshes, Markfield Park, the Paddock Site, Tottenham Marshes and the proposed Blackhorse Lane Waterfront Park

The Lea Valley Park and its adjoining land, south of the M25, is a difficult area to navigate. While some enjoy its secretive profile, many who live close by are unaware of its existence. It could clearly benefit from some joined-up thinking and, with luck, this document represents the beginning of a more collaborative approach between its various stakeholders.

The LVRPA has already taken some of these proposals forward, in its own, more localised report: “Walthamstow Marshes Landscape Design Framework and Detailed Proposals”, produced simultaneously by the same design team but released earlier in the year (draft, February 2010).

Hopefully, more collaboration with users and stakeholders will follow, and some of these proposals will be realised.

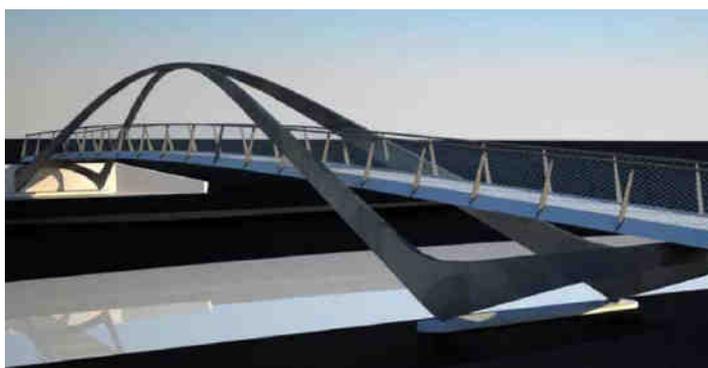
The document is available to view at the Waterworks Centre and, in low resolution, on the Lea Valley Federation’s website.

## Hackney Marshes

Despite repeated requests from Hackney Marshes User Group (HMUG) via the LB Hackney Liaison Officer, the Olympics Development Agency (ODA) have given no answers to our further questions relating to the proposed wind turbine on **East Marsh**. Meanwhile, a temporary car park is being installed there for the forthcoming football season (which proceeded without Planning Permission so as to be ready for the start of the season!). Many trees have been felled along Ruckholt Road; and it was let slip at a meeting with the ODA that the new road junction there might be retained – a point that was immediately queried, to the embarrassed looks between the ODA staff.

The sports hub building on **South Marsh** is well on the way to completion, after many attempts to persuade the Council that it could be built on the footprint of the original changing rooms. It now occupies former grassland on the Marsh, with the loss of many trees. As part of this project, the Homerton Road car park is being reconfigured. Owing to an oversight, no provision was made for the East London Community Recycling Project (ELCRP) that occupied a corner of the car park, which was hastily plotted to occupy part of the Community Tree Nursery. A massive campaign by HMUG resulted in this idea being squashed, and the ELCRP facility will now be moved to part of the adjacent Parks Depot.

On **North Marsh**, the masterplan incorporated a number of new cricket pitches in addition to a new sports hub on the site of the derelict changing rooms. The plan would have resulted in the loss of a large proportion of the Meadow – a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) – adjacent to the Middlesex Filter beds. A revised plan, drawn up by the User Group, resulted in the loss of just 5 per cent of the area and the redistribution of some parts of the Meadow complete with its underlying subsoil to maintain its biological characteristics. Many more trees were felled to make way for the sports hub.



Artist's interpretation of the proposed foot-bridge across the River Lea, from Hackney Marsh to East Marsh (above) and the current unspoilt riverside area where the bridge would be located (right)..

Plans for a new **foot-bridge across the River Lea**, just 500 metres from the existing bridge to East Marsh and a similar distance from Homerton Road, are being opposed as being unnecessary and detrimental to riverside habitat. Also, the bridge would interrupt a sight-line from Ruckholt Road bridge, along the River Lea, and across to the north-west side of Hackney Marsh – this was identified by the landscape architect and Hackney Council’s Arboricultural Manager as being important to retain. Plans for this bridge, and details for upgrading Cow Bridge to allow vehicular access across the Lee Navigation for parking, can be viewed on the Council’s website at <http://www.hackney.gov.uk/hackney-marshes.htm>