

## Reclaiming the Lee Valley Park – A short Outline Paper

1. The Lee Valley Park is supposed to be preserved and managed as a green wedge:  
*It shall be the duty of the Authority to develop, improve, preserve and manage or to procure or arrange for development, improvement, preservation and management of the park as a place for the occupation of leisure, recreation, sport, games or amusements or any similar activity, for the provision of nature reserves and for the provision and enjoyment of entertainments of any kind. S12 Park Act*
2. The Park Plan has a special planning status:
  - S14(2) of the Act – local authorities obliged to include in their development plans *such part of the [park] plan...as relates to their area*
  - 14(3) provides that local authorities are not required to approve the park plan and may make representation to the minister with respect to any part of the plan they disagree with.
3. The current Park Plan was adopted in 2000 (although there are various processes in motion within the Authority to amend it for the future).
4. These are a few statements extracted from the Park Plan  
*In order to provide for the leisure, recreation and nature conservation needs of the region the land resource must be safeguarded and protected so that it is available for appropriate Park related purposes. The land resource encompassing all aspects of water, buildings and other elements of the Park can be used to meet the entertainment, leisure or recreation needs of the region. The long term availability of the land resource for Park related purposes involves proactive action to ensure that development pressure is minimised, inappropriate uses are relocated and that vacant and derelict land is enhanced.” Policy L2.1 (emphasis added by me)*

*It is important to create a clearer landscape structure so that those entering and using the Regional Park can orientate themselves within the landscape, know where they are and where they can go in relation to the rest of the regional park and enjoy the full richness and variety of landscape. A legible landscape structure promotes the concept of an integrated regional park and establishes continuity between sites through a range of physical links....Clear entrances help people to locate themselves, know what the regional park stands for, and know where they are within it. They are therefore essential in promoting a positive image.*  
Policy LS 2.1

*The Authority has a statutory duty to protect and develop the Park for leisure, recreation and nature conservation....The Authority also has a role*

*to play in the development control process. Local Authorities must consult the Authority on all planning applications which they consider may have an effect on the regional park. Through this process the Authority can influence planning decisions to benefit the recreational, leisure or nature conservation opportunities for the regional Park.” Chapter 15: Introduction to Implementation and evaluation*

*An attractive and sensitively designed waterside leisure facility at Essex and Eastwood Wharf to be developed as a new focal point and visitor attraction with the decontamination and opening up of the infilled oxbow immediately to the north to create a new waterside location for recreational use. Proposal WC7*

*The waterways are the key connecting feature that reinforce the continuous nature of the regional park. Their ecological interest and informal recreational value should be protected and promoted. The character, environmental quality and visual amenity of the Waterway corridor varies throughout Section Seven [i.e. the Clapton to Stratford section of the park] often due to the nature of the route itself but also as a result of the impact of land uses, and the effect of rail and road crossings. Improvements to water quality, the waterside environment and towpath would help to strengthen the character of the corridor whilst the protect and enhancement of historic features and existing habitats would retain the individuality of each of its parts.*

*More emphasis needs to be placed on the recreational potential of the waterways. Redevelopment of Essex and Eastwood Wharf, for example, would provide a key opportunity to establish water related recreational activities. Explanation of Proposal WC7 (emphasis added by me)*

Note that there is a great deal more in the Park Plan in the same vein.

5. At the moment, the Park is being totally eclipsed because:
  - The local authorities are under huge pressure from the mayor and the government to develop land; especially for housing – and the Lee Valley comprises the largest area of open land in Hackney. In Waltham Forest there are areas of open land on the outer margins of the Borough but Epping Forest is presumably “off limits” to development – whereas the Lee Valley is not.
  - The Park Authority has given up (it would seem) on its planning role and is mostly looking for opportunities to develop its own estate and lever in investment from other public bodies.

- The importance of the Lee Valley as an open wedge has been forgotten – in no small measure because the Park Authority has failed to follow its own good precepts and forge the Park into a recognisable and unified entity.
6. The Essex Wharf situation exemplifies the situation we have got into:
    - Pre-existing use – light industrial has come to an end.
    - The site has been specifically ear-marked in the park plan for recreational use.
    - It is an extremely important gateway site.
    - Intensive development would create an appalling precedent – the Lee Navigation forms the western boundary for most of the Park and we have all seen the development pressures on the west bank – if development leapfrogs over to the east bank – then what is there left to protect.
    - Housing development of any kind on the Thames Water site would be equally objectionable for the same reason.
  7. History shows that when open spaces valued by the people of London have been preserved (Hampstead Heath and Epping Forest are two good examples) it is because people have fought to save them. Nobody is fighting for the Lee Valley now – least of all it would seem the public body set up to protect it.
  8. I have homed in to some extent on Essex Wharf both because of the scale and immediacy of the threat and because it so vividly exemplifies the threats we should be fighting.
  9. I think that the Waltham Forest planning consultation; and the Essex Wharf issue in particular could be the catalyst for a principled fight back to protect and preserve the Lee Valley in its lower London stretches. I would suggest:
    - That there should be a federation of interested groups – with HMUG, Millfiels Users and Lammas Lands Protection Group as a nucleus but adding membership as it goes on (with a link to Tottenham Marshes especially desirable).
    - That there should be some kind of statement/manifesto wrapped around a response to the Waltham Forest consultation.
    - That the leitmotif of the campaign statement is that the lee Valley should be protected as intended by Parliament and not developed.
    - That Hackney and maybe Haringey should be strongly pressed to launch similar integrated area policies to protect the Lee Valley.
    - That a meeting be sought with the park Authority
    - That local members – Christine Boyd in Hackney and her opposite numbers in other authorities – be pressed to support this campaign.