

A charter for the
Lea Valley

A REPORT BY THE LEA VALLEY FEDERATION



East London's green lung

The Lea Valley is a green wedge of captive countryside penetrating right to the heart of the city of London. It is the lung of East London; a vital open space with a unique character existing within easy reach of thousands of city dwellers and offering great opportunities for both recreation and education.

But the Lea Valley is under threat. There is constant pressure for road schemes and other inappropriate forms of development from those who wish to exploit the area.

This report has been produced by The Lea Valley Federation, an organisation representing more than 20 groups, each campaigning in its own way to improve the local environment. At first sight the complexity of the issues can be daunting, so in this report we have endeavoured to simplify our views and present them as a unified strategy for action.

We identify threats to the area and propose solutions.

The members of the Lea Valley Federation represent people who live in the area and care deeply about its future.

We are not opposed to all development, but feel strongly that any development that takes place should be properly balanced so that it serves the needs of the whole community. We believe that this is the only approach which can genuinely benefit the environment, the economy and the people of East London.

The objectives of the Lea Valley Federation

1. To promote awareness of the environmental value of the Lea Valley
2. To discourage major new building on green sites
3. To improve pedestrian and cycle access in the Lea Valley
4. To promote public transport as the means of access to any Stratford Channel Tunnel Interchange
5. To discourage road construction and road-based development and to promote an overall reduction of traffic levels in the area
6. To promote rail-based alternatives
7. To act as a forum to represent members' views to national and European Government and all statutory authorities
8. To promote appropriate leisure and wildlife habitat management in the Lea Valley



Upper Clapton from Walthamstow Marsh S.S.I.

KARL WEISS

Our common inheritance

The Lea Valley is an important resource that should be kept and used for the benefit of local people. Various existing uses are set out here including a brief history of the valley. The land in the valley was once Lammas Land to which local people had common rights of access. We believe that those rights should continue and developers should not be allowed to enclose our common inheritance.

Leyton and Walthamstow Marshes

Walthamstow and Leyton Marshes are the only one of the ancient Lammas Lands of the Lea Valley to have survived. It was Lammas Land from time immemorial – until the grazing rights were extinguished by Acts of Parliament in 1905 and 1934. Walthamstow Marsh has survived virtually intact, keeping its original boundaries on three sides – the River Lea on the west, the Coppermill Stream to the north and the old Leyton boundary to the south. Out of the original 140 acres 90 have survived, protected from encroachment by the railway which simply sits on the ancient landscape dividing it into North Marsh, South Marsh and Triangle.

Many relics of the Lammas system still survive including several posts from the 19th century and an old drainage channel possibly of Saxon origin. The marsh is a living link with the pre-industrial landscape of rural Walthamstow. This historical continuity is of special value in an urban landscape where nothing seems permanent and everything is in a constant state of upheaval.

On the Marsh it is possible to read in the landscape traces of the Ice Age, the Lammas system, the Second World War and even a connection with aviation history. A.Roe's pioneering flight on the marsh in 1909 is commemorated by a blue plaque on the railway viaduct arches. Walthamstow Marsh is only there today because local people fought a bitter and prolonged battle to save it from the threat of gravel extraction (Save the Marshes Campaign 1979-1985). In 1985 this culminated in the marsh being designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest by the Nature Conservancy Council and in 1986 as a nature reserve by the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority. In 1991 the LVRPA formally adopted a management plan for "Walthamstow Marsh Nature Reserve".

The Lower Lea Valley

Natural tides in the Lower Lea were an important source of power to early industry. This was first developed for flour mills supplied with grain from the rich agricultural lands of the Upper Lea, but subsequently allowed the Lower Lea to become the birthplace of many new industries. The natural flow of the tides made the area particularly suitable for boatbuilding and the value of such industrial use led to the unique preservation of a delta of many individual tributaries left unchanged since the last Ice Age. Whilst other major rivers were drained and straightened, the commercial value of the Lower Lea forced the construction of a series of by-passes, including the Limehouse Cut, under a 1767 Act of Parliament.

Within the Lower Lea Valley key industrial areas include shipbuilding sites, such as that used for the launch of Brunel's "Great Eastern" in the Isle of Dogs and the once huge yards at the base of Bow Creeks. Associated iron and steel works in Millwall and Bow, produced the world's first tubular steel bridges, along with Hammersmith and Blackfriars Bridges over the Thames and the roof of Alexandra Palace. Ancillary boilermaking and engineering industries continued into the 1960s.

Monuments to public health include the Northern Outfall London Sewer, the associated Abbey Mills pumping station, and a series of water pumping stations along the entire length of the Lea Valley. Water power was historically used for many activities besides grinding flour and these included the preparation of gunpowder for the Woolwich Arsenal. The largest surviving tidal mill, the Three Mills site in the Lower Lea, includes buildings from the 18th century.

A long involvement with transport included the 1830s Hancock steam bus factory in Stratford, the construction of Britain's first petrol driven car in Walthamstow in 1892, and the immense Stratford locomotive works. A number of noxious industries were forced out to the Lower Lea when the London County Council, formed in 1889, took control of the west side of the Lea which was formerly Middlesex. Thus the eastern tributaries of the Lower Lea became important bases for the development and production of modern dyes and early plastics.

In the development of the major industrial products of the 20th century, the Lower Lea Valley is probably of more importance than Ironbridge Gorge which is already established as one of the most prestigious museum and heritage sites in Europe.

Sports and Recreation in the Lea Valley

There are many organised sports and recreational activities in the Lower Lea Valley. These are mainly based at Eastway, Lea Bridge Centre, Springfield Marina, Banbury Reservoir (LVRPA), Hackney and Leyton Marshes, Lee Rowing Club and Canoe Centre. Outdoor activities include football, rugby, hockey, cricket, sailing, horse-riding, rowing and canoeing, and boating. With over 90 pitches, Hackney Marshes is the largest area of football pitches in Europe. Indoor activities include ice skating, squash and basketball.

The lower Lea Valley is also popular with people who spend time in the area in less organised ways such as walking, cycling, fishing, bird watching, photography, flying model aircraft, or just watching the world go by.

Celebrating the past

The LVRPA has already completed some works to preserve important aspects of the industrial heritage of the Lower Lea but more should be done. The prestige offices developed within the old East India Company warehouses in Whitechapel and the popularity of warehouse conversions has demonstrated the value of our industrial heritage in the regeneration of an area. The restoration of the Three Mills complex is planned to provide a working tidal mill and a museum of 18th century social and industrial life including the National Fairground Museum.

There is clearly scope to expand this project to include the nearby Abbey Mills pumping station and even to establish a heritage trail along the course of the Northern Outfall London Sewer to link this with other important early industrial sites. The extensive waterways provide an opportunity to establish a unique canal based museum trip. Based upon The Ragged School Museum on the Regents Canal, the Three Mills Museum complex and the Barking Gas Museum, this could use canal barges to link the museums and provide a tour of the many remnants of our industrial heritage which litter the banks of the Lower Lea and its tributaries.



The old coppermill, Walthamstow was built in 1800 and is now a listed building.

The natural environment

Because the Lea Valley has been neglected for many years wildlife has been able to thrive and it is important that as development pressures increase the wildlife habitats are left undisturbed.

The River Lea

This river and its banks provide an important link for aquatic and mobile species (mammals, birds and insects) between inner London and the open countryside. Rising in Bedfordshire the Lea flows south through Hertfordshire and London to meet the Thames east of Limehouse.

Between Lea Bridge Road and Carpenters Road in Stratford the river has steep banks lined with hawthorn scrub and willow trees. Because the River Lea becomes unnavigable at this point, in 1769 the Hackney Cut was opened thus forming the triangle of land now called the Essex and Middlesex Filter Beds Nature Reserve.

Continuing along the bankside walk next to Hackney Marshes (the inaccessibility of the east bank affording protection to wildlife) Bully Point Nature Reserve is reached. The river is recognised for its importance to migrating birds with bankside vegetation affording cover to wildfowl.

Walthamstow Marsh

Walthamstow Marsh is all that remains of the once extensive marshlands of the Lea Valley. That it should have survived at all, so close to the centre of London, is nothing short of a miracle. It has never been ploughed and its surface still bears the imprint of Ice Age braided river channels – giving it an undisturbed continuity of some 10,000 years.

To step into the marsh is to step into an ancient, enduring landscape – something which is very rare indeed in the middle of a metropolis. The marsh was there before London was even thought of!

Nowhere else in London can people experience such a rich landscape of wetland habitats, all on terra firma. To be able to walk through wind rippled stands of sedges, dense reed beds, creamy masses of meadowsweet, lush meadow grassland and all manner of abundant marshland vegetation is an astonishing experience only 4 miles from the National Westminster Bank Tower and within sight of inner city housing and industry.

In the spring and early summer the air is full of the song of reed and sedge warblers, skylarks and cuckoos, kestrels hovering; in the autumn huge flocks of goldfinches can be seen; in the winter, when low lying tracts of the marsh lie under water, snipe are a common sight; overhead there are often skeins of geese flying low and herons drifting towards the reservoirs or coming down to feed; these are all common marsh experiences in this unlikely urban setting.

Leyton Marshes

Leyton Marshes stretch from the area just south of the reservoirs and Walthamstow Marsh to Temple Mills. They include Ive Farm, and Marsh Lane playing fields, a small golf course, the LVRPA riding school and the now overgrown Temple Mills marshalling yards.



WALTHAMSTOW MARSH SOCIETY

Canoeing on the River Lea.

The Temple Mills marshalling yard was Lammas Land which was enclosed under an Act of Parliament in the 19th century to allow the building of the railway to Cambridge. Apart from two running tracks the land where the Yard was has been cleared of tracks and is now recognised as an important wildlife site by various conservation organisations.

As most of this 46 acre site has been unused for many years it is now overgrown. The central section has long reverted to a birch and sallow woodland with large and dense tree growth. This is surrounded by scrub and tall herbaceous vegetation which is now an effective buffer area for the LVRP and provides both a haven for wildlife, and a green link between the banks of the Lea and the open spaces of Ive Farm and Marsh Lane.

Middlesex Filter Beds

On the west bank of the Lea Valley lie the Middlesex Filter Beds and on the east the Essex Beds. They were built by East London Waterworks Company to provide clean water for the people of East London.

When Coppermills pumping station came into operation they were no longer needed and were closed in the 1960s by Thames Water. They fell into disuse and the wildlife and willow trees took over.

In 1968 the LVRPA acquired the Middlesex Filter Beds after a long campaign by local people and now manages them as a nature reserve. They have done a great deal of restoration work repairing the beds and making them waterproof, rebuilding the wall and planting an area of Hackney Marshes outside the beds. The beds now provide varied habitats and are home to a variety of migrating and nesting birds, including reed warblers and coots.

LVRPA has also emphasised the archeological aspects of the filter beds and has even commissioned art work as part of renovations and views the beds as having a major educational and community function.

The Middlesex Filter Beds are open at weekends from 10am to 4pm.

The LVRPA has produced a booklet which outlines the history of the Middlesex Beds and their wildlife. The LVRPA see these filter beds as a sterling example of what sympathetic development can do given the right commitment and resources.

Essex Filter Beds

For many years the LVRPA has been negotiating with Thames Water to acquire the Essex Filter Beds. They have plans for a nature reserve and interpretation centre on the Essex Beds which are more open than the Middlesex Beds and their wildlife potential is greater. They have a variety of habitats including large stretches of water and are attractive to species who are unable to cope with the more disturbed environment of the Middlesex Beds.

This must be recognised in the management plan which should ensure that disturbance is kept to a minimum. The LVRPA has a management plan for the Middlesex Beds and has started a liaison committee to which local wildlife groups are invited to hear about and comment on the LVRPA's plans.

Hackney Marshes

Hackney Marshes are one of the largest areas of open space in the Lower Lea Valley which is common land and registered as Metropolitan Open Space. They are bounded on the east by the River Lea and on the west by the River Lea Navigation (Hackney Cut).

During the second world war the marshes had bomb rubble dumped on them, raising the level. Most of the marshes are laid out for football and other sports. There is also a cricket pitch on Arena Field and an all weather pitch on Mabley Green.

Hackney Marshes have an important nature conservation function; the river is used by birds such as cormorants, heron, tufted duck and teal for feeding and for shelter in the winter.

The grass areas are used by Canada geese, wood pigeons, starlings and swifts; the trees and bushes planted around the marshes give a home to many woodland birds such as owls, chaffinches, wrens and robins. The path along the River Lea provides an especially attractive walk.

Wick Field was the only area not heavily dumped on during the war. Although it is largely managed as recreational land, with good management it has substantial nature conservation potential because the flood plain and the water table lie close to the surface.

Eastway and Bully Point Nature Reserve

A large and attractive area owned and managed by the LVRPA, containing a valuable mix of scrub, grassland and wetland habitats, supporting an interesting diversity of birds and invertebrates. This is an excellent place to see migrant birds on spring and autumn passage; whinchat, wheatear, spotted flycatcher and several species of warbler can often be found.

The area is threatened by major roads designed to serve the Channel Tunnel terminal and other developments on the Stratford railway land. Plans to build on most of the area which would remain have also been made public.

The Lower Lea Rivers System

South of Carpenters Road the River Lea divides into a network of natural and artificial watercourses, the basic pattern of which dates back to the 11th century. These waterways and associated wasteland provide a valuable refuge for plants and animals in this heavily industrial area. Many areas have special interest, such as Stratford Marsh which has the largest population in Britain of dwarf elder. Places such as Mill Meads, which is inaccessible to the public from the footpath, and the River Lea towpath are also very important amenities for local people.

South of Mill Meads the Lea is tidal and known as Bow Creek. The Creek contains important areas of reed bed and inter-tidal mud. Over fifty herons regularly feed along the water's edge and roost on the roof of South Bromley gas works.

Mill Meads

Mill Meads is currently the most important open space area in this southern part of the Lea Valley. This area includes a recreation ground, a large area of Thames Water land overgrown with scrub and tall perennial plants, and an allotment site.

The area is at the top of tidal Bow Creek and the Channelsea River, and has the historically important and interesting Tide Mill and Distillery. This is the southernmost part of the current Lea Valley Park; an important amenity for local people, where they can enjoy nature and escape from the built environment.

Bromley by Bow gas works and Thames Wharf

Within the large British Gas site at Bromley by Bow are pockets of wildlife habitat; a small woodland, one of the few in Newham; an area of grassland beside Bow Creek, and a belt of scrub. With careful planning these areas could become key elements in a southern expansion of the Lea Valley open space network. Currently the whole area is scheduled for redevelopment leaving the future of these important sites in doubt.

Where the Lea meets the Thames is Thames Wharf and the Limmo Peninsular. This impressive site, adjacent to the final generous meander of Bow Creek, had remained largely undisturbed since the second world war and had developed into a wildlife site of Metropolitan importance. Much of the site was cleared in 1990 for construction of the Docklands Light Railway extension and the Lower Lea Crossing, but the most interesting section has survived.

It would seem appropriate that the whole site be retained and developed as an open space and wildlife site at the southern most point of the Lea Valley, in an area severely deficient in both. However, there is great pressure for commercial development of the area, which is the current objective of the owners, British Rail, as well as Newham Council and the LDDC.

The threat from development

Parkland is always a prime target for developers – better to deal with one objector, the park authority, than dozens of individual householders. The Lea Valley Park is particularly threatened because the park authority has actually supported many of these developments. Beyond the Lea Valley Park area, in Newham particularly, open spaces, potential open space sites and areas of importance for nature conservation are being promoted for development.

The threat from new roads

Leyton Relief Road

This road has been promoted by the L.B.Waltham Forest and would split the Temple Mills area. This will involve two major road junctions and allow exploitation of 80 acres of open land and in turn influence the siting of a freight terminal at Temple Mills.

It will also split Marsh Lane recreation ground away from Hackney Marsh and the putting green. Access to a peaceful and tranquil area of disused railway land which has already been reclaimed by wildlife will be blocked.

M11 Link Road

M11 extension to Eastway and Homerton High Street will destroy 500 homes, 13 acres of Epping Forest, 8 acres of the Lea Valley Park and 13 acres of Hackney Marsh. It is designed to allow 79,000 vehicles a day on to local roads but will need to be widened to take more traffic if a road based Channel Tunnel terminus was built at Stratford.

North-South Route

Originally the Department of Transport (DTp) planned to bring the M11 down the Lea Valley but it was eventually built in the Roding Valley. The option to come down the Lea Valley is still open, which means constant vigilance is required to ensure that no new road is built along this route.

Other development threats

Lee Valley Ice Centre

The ice-rink has not been a financial success so now the park authority wants to rebuild the area with cinemas, bowling alleys and rock music venues.

Eton Manor Rugby Club

Eton Manor Rugby Club has sought to fence off its ground and erect a two-storey club house with football stadium style floodlights.

Tent City

The people who run Tent City for overseas visitors, which is located around the Hackney Marshes changing rooms, wanted to erect a two-storey building for year-round tourist accommodation.

Temple Mills

British Rail wants to build a rail/road freight terminal. It would either be on the now overgrown Temple Mills sidings, widely recognised as a site of great importance to wildlife, or on 200 acres of adjacent parkland if the Stratford Channel Terminal is built.

Spitalfields Market

This development has increased day and night time use of the park and local residential roads by lorries and vans. Night time use is greater than expected.

Wick Field Recreation Ground

This was regarded as "wasteland" by the last Chair of Hackney Council's Community Services Committee. Cash-strapped leisure officers lost thousands of pounds promoting open-air cinemas and private parties, in spite of opposition from the Users Group, to this illegal use of the Common Land.

Heliports

The park authority has backed plans to build heliports by the Lea Bridge Road, and close to Stratford.

Channel Tunnel Rail Terminal

A Channel Tunnel Rail Terminal at Stratford would flood the Lea Valley Park with traffic and could destroy the Eastway Cycle Circuit, the Bully Point Nature Reserve, and the Lea Junction Railway Triangle.

The planned rail link from Stratford to Kings Cross would destroy yet more of Hackney Marshes and may cut through Victoria Park and damage the Regents Canal.

Stratford and Lea Valley Economic Regeneration

The L.B.Newham's City Challenge bid is based mainly on initiatives to raise land values and attract commercial, largely speculative, property development. This approach is a matter of considerable concern for the local economy and community, and also presents a substantial threat to open spaces and areas of wildlife importance.

A third of the sites in Newham, identified by the London Ecology Unit as of Borough Importance – Grade 1 for nature conservation are within this area. Every one of these sites is now threatened by development proposals.

Stratford's Regeneration

Newham Council, in co-operation with the DoE, are developing a strategy for economic regeneration in a large area of the Lower Lea Valley. The strategy is known as the Stratford Development Partnership (SDP) and is linked to Newham's City Challenge project. This covers only a small part of the Valley but will have an impact throughout the area.

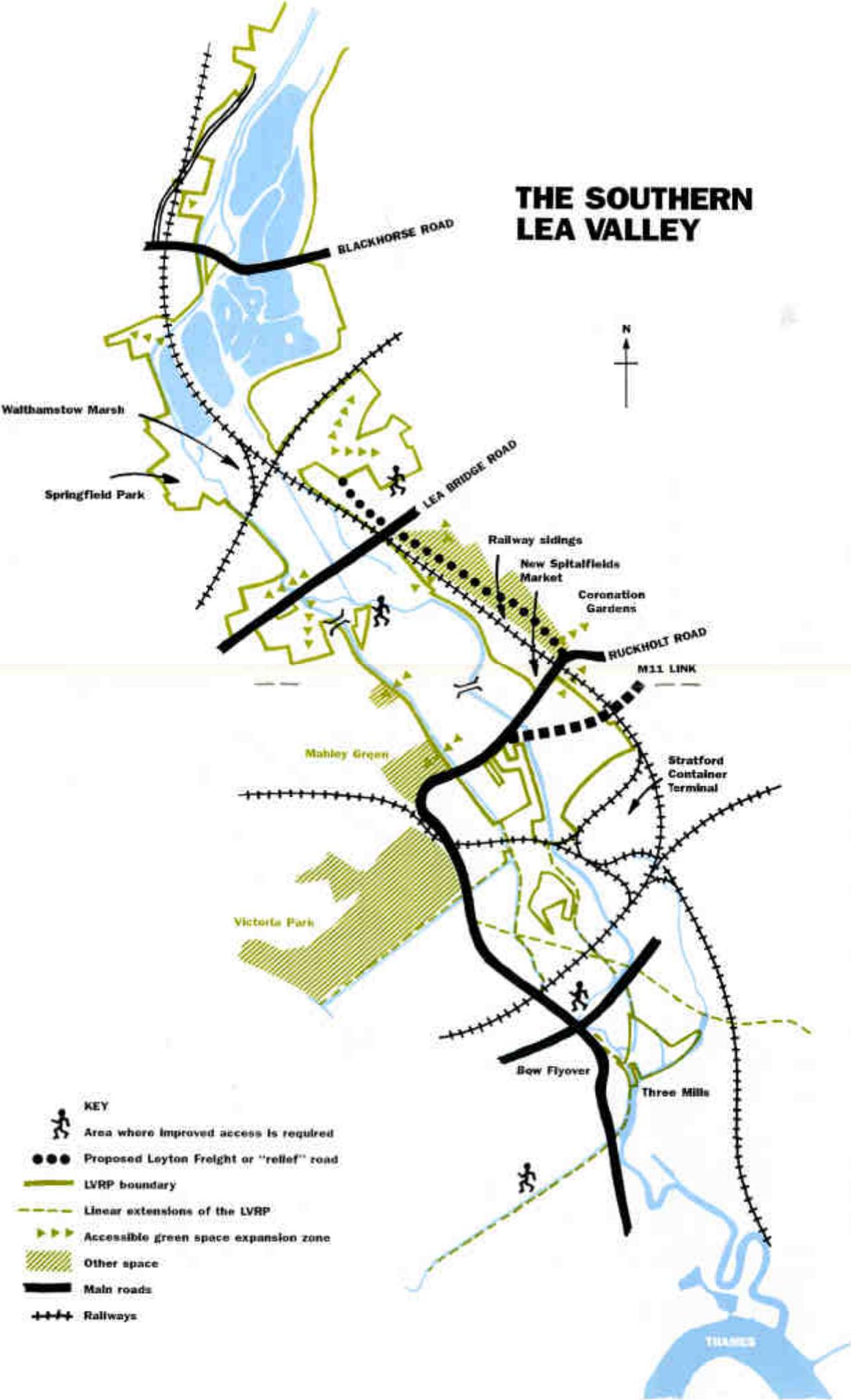
Mill Meads

There are proposals to build a new access road into this area and to build housing on a large section of the Thames Water land. The area is seen as key to the Stratford City Challenge. Work has started in clearing the site and a housing development is proposed.

Thames Wharf and Limmo Peninsular

Development proposals threaten the remaining area of nature conservation, and take no regard for the needs of an area severely deficient in open space and wildlife. If this site is developed it will mean loss of a great opportunity to create an appropriate culmination to the Lea Valley Park at the point where Bow Creek slides into the Thames.

THE SOUTHERN LEA VALLEY



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To view an enlarged version of the map,
[CLICK HERE](#)

The threat from roads and traffic

Over the coming years several new roads could be built in and around the Lea Valley area. Three factors will determine whether they are built:

1. What sort of development takes place in the area;
2. The Mill Link Road and the Leyton Relief Road;
3. What public transport improvements the area may see.

We deal with each factor in turn.

1. What sort of development takes place in the area

There seems no doubt that if a Channel Tunnel Freight terminal were to be located at Stratford there would be an unstoppable demand for, at least, the Mill Link Road to be built.

A Channel Tunnel Passenger Terminal, if it provided lots of car parking space and encouraged people to drive to it – would also require the new road. A Channel Tunnel Terminal would be expected to attract development to the Stratford and Hackney Wick areas. Such developments would need to be carefully selected if they were not to add to the pressure for road building in the area. If new developments did not generate huge volumes of traffic they could be accommodated without the need to build new roads.

2. The M11 Link Road and the Leyton Relief Road

The building of the Mill Link Road and the Leyton Relief Road would in itself bring pressure to build yet more roads in the area for two main reasons:

- The roads would result in 100,000 more vehicles each day pouring into the Lea Valley;
- The roads would act as magnets for car-based super-store developments.

The existing local roads could not cope with such a vast increase in traffic levels, thus creating pressure for further roads to be built. These would include extending the North-South route; or reviving the East London Assessment Study road all the way down the Lea Valley from the M25. Traffic levels would also increase if junctions on existing roads that cross the Lea Valley, such as Blackhorse Lane/Forest Road, were widened.

3. Public Transport

Car use could be curtailed if public transport facilities to the area were improved. Cross Rail and the Jubilee Line may be built, but much more could be done; services on both the North London Line, and particularly, the Barking to Gospel Oak line could be improved; there is scope for developing, at little cost, direct rail services linking Stratford to Walthamstow, Chingford and Tottenham (and Cambridge). The Hackney (or Chingford) to Chelsea line would provide additional links.

Rail services could provide a viable alternative to car use within East London. A Stratford to Walthamstow rail service would provide a speedy alternative to a trip by bus or car on the congested roads between these centres. A link to Cambridge, or via Cross Rail, to Chelmsford could compete well with the same trip by car.

Buses all over London are underused. To fulfil their potential, they need a comprehensive network of bus priority measures and to be run in an imaginative and coordinated way to properly serve old and new developments. Two additional factors could curtail car use in East London: company car taxation and road pricing. If the subsidy to company cars (together with the subsidising of parking spaces in Central London) was abolished traffic levels could be reduced and new roads would not be required; at the present time, 80% of cars entering Inner and Central London each rush-hour morning receive some sort of company subsidy.

The same effect could be achieved if road pricing were introduced for commuters and long distance road users, currently the subject of a 3 year Government study. This could bring about a noticeable shift away from road transport.

Certain developments – such as a road-based Channel Tunnel Freight Terminal – would still need to be excluded for they would generate unacceptable volumes of traffic.

Equally, building the Mill Link or the Leyton Relief road, would in itself add to the volume of traffic in the area. Indeed, were these roads to go ahead, it would be very difficult to reverse the trend of road-based development.

More cars and lorries are bad for us all

Pollution: Research is now slowly revealing the extent of the threat from traffic pollution to our health in much the same way as data slowly emerged about the dangers from smoking.

Road accidents: These will increase as planners try to speed up traffic flow – speed kills.

Divided communities: Communities are split by massive road schemes. Traffic moving at speed restricts pedestrians' mobility around their neighbourhood. Safe foot access to many open spaces is restricted because of road traffic.

Global warming: Road traffic is a major cause of global warming which according to the Greater London Plan could result in the flooding of parts of our area.

Loss of character: Few things seem beautiful when sited alongside a stream of heavy traffic. Ancient buildings, shopping areas, open spaces – the neighbourhoods in which we live – all become uninviting places till the traffic dies down.

Rat-running: Makes even small side roads dangerous and unpleasant to live in. Since the need for traffic calming is caused by traffic from outside the London Boroughs, Central Government should pay its fair share of traffic calming scheme costs.

Foundations: House foundations can suffer and need underpinning. Paving stones become cracked because of vibration from lorries and vehicles mounting pavements. Important small local features such as walls, railings and bollards can be damaged.

Street lighting: Street lighting changes to improve safety make feel more alien as if people were actually living on a motorway.

The threat from railways

There are proposals to bring a number of rail lines into East London. Whilst we are generally in favour of an expansion of public transport systems we are aware that some of the proposed lines could pose threats to the Lea Valley area.

Channel Tunnel

First and foremost, there is the Channel Tunnel rail link plans.

From 1993, when the Tunnel opens, all passenger trains will go along existing tracks to a terminal at Waterloo.

All freight trains will use existing tracks through south and west London to Willesden, from where London freight will be taken along the North London Line to a depot in the Stratford area.

In time a High-Speed Passenger Link will be built using an eastern approach to London, with a possible terminal at Stratford and another one at Kings Cross. It is also being considered for freight usage.

The Government has settled on neither the exact route of the high-speed link, nor the nature of the terminal.

Nobody knows how it is going to be paid for. In short, this report is being written at a time of great uncertainty. However, it is worthwhile looking at the possible effects both a freight and a passenger terminal at Stratford could have on the Lea Valley area.

Freight Terminal

The freight terminal could come in two forms; both would involve a massive increase in capacity to that currently available at Stratford.

One form would be a predominantly rail-based [terminal] with trains being made up by the transfer of containers or wagons to trains going to other parts of the country.

The second would be a road-based terminal and this would pose a much more serious threat. Here containers or goods would be transferred to road. This terminal could serve London and beyond. The existing road system could not cope with expected lorry numbers and so the pressure to build both the M11 Link Road and the Leyton Relief Road would be almost unstoppable. These roads would attract so many cars and car-based developments to the Lea Valley area that the pressure to build further roads would increase.

Passenger Terminal

A Passenger Terminal would bring job opportunities to the area, but it also brings threats. If the passenger terminal were to be built with large car parks, as for example in the scheme proposed by Colin Buchanan (in their report commissioned by Newham Council), it would create demand for new roads in the area. A car based Stratford Passenger Terminal could be expected to generate around 25,000 vehicles a day. Since there are no details of the route that any high speed link would take, it is difficult to consider the threats it may pose to East

KARL WEISS



Lorries and containers at Stratford container depot.

London. British Rails's own report into the original Ove Arup route acknowledges,

"Where the routes are in tunnel approaching Stratford, a risk of settlement and re-radiated noise impacts has been identified. Internal and external cracks which, though easily repairable, can cause distress to residents".

There is uncertainty as to what routes trains will take beyond Stratford. At present, the plan is for passenger trains to go on in tunnel to Kings Cross, but the North London Line may be used. This would restrict the development of local services and could cause environmental and social damage.

Other Developments

The extension of the Hackney to Chelsea line to Chingford could pose a threat to Walthamstow Marsh. Tunnelling in this area could damage the water table and destroy the wetland habitat. An alternative would be for it to emerge before it reaches the Lea Valley and run alongside existing rail tracks although this would cause unacceptable damage in the Clapton area where it would need to emerge from tunnel.

Conclusion

The rail threats to the area largely come from the Channel Tunnel. Because of the imprecise nature of Government plans, it is difficult to be definite about particular threats. It is clear that any development that results in thousands more vehicles pouring in to the Lea Valley area or the loss of services to the North London Line poses an unacceptable threat. However if the building of the high-speed link was associated with improvements to existing lines such as the North London line, Barking to Gospel Oak Line and the construction of Cross Rail, the Jubilee Line extension and the Hackney to Chelsea line would bring benefit to East London by greatly opening up travel opportunities and thus providing an attractive alternative to car travel.

Future planning strategy

New development plans need not be a threat. A new plan for the Lea Valley recognising its value as green open space is vital to the strategic development of North East London.

It is of particular concern that inappropriate development proposals often come from the very people whose job it is to protect the people's land, such as local councils or the LVRPA.

If the current trend of road building is allowed to continue, people living in rural areas will find their countryside slowly disappearing and at the same time towns will be badly degraded by increased traffic. We believe that the answer is to improve public transport facilities and to encourage developments that bring people's work and residential environments closer geographically.

Any green wedge running from open countryside to the banks of the Thames, with many attractive monuments to our rich industrial heritage, faces considerable pressure. The Lea Valley green wedge should be protected and expanded as the focus for a programme of environmental improvement. This can only happen if planners recognise that car based developments offer no real future for the area.

London's roads are already grinding to a halt. The M25 created so much new traffic that it was overcrowded almost as soon as it opened. New developments must be in recognised centres which can become a focus for improved public transport links.

Since the abolition of the GLC, strategic planning for London has been the responsibility of the London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC). LPAC has adopted a policy of protecting and improving the environment and nowhere else than in East London can this objective be so important.

The value of the environment is a key factor in determining where people will want to live and where businesses wish to locate.

Two independent business sponsored studies (East London Partnership and the PIEDA) claim that investors have been put off East London because of its perceived unpleasant environment.

Modern planning also recognises the value of strong town centres in fostering a sense of belonging, community involvement and crime prevention. East London already has a reputation for a strong sense of community which should be a basis for future development. Indeed it can be argued that the Stratford one-way system, in destroying the town centre of Stratford, has actually caused the current negative perception of the area and would be worse still with the construction of an international rail-interchange and vast car parks.

The use of sites in or around the Lea Valley Park for retail or indoor leisure activities threatens to empty existing centres.

With huge areas of derelict and polluted land along the banks of the Thames this is the obvious focus for industrial, office, retail and leisure development. Such development would remove threats to the LVRP and be well served by bus, train and tube links. Residents would

use these to travel from homes in the leafy suburbs of North-East London to work in comfortable modern buildings overlooking the Thames.

Why co-ordinated planning is vital

Here we illustrate the lack of strategic planning on a regional basis by three examples:

Example 1: The development of derelict land

In Tower Hamlets a 1988/89 survey identified 1,718,900 sq.m. of opportunity sites such as derelict buildings and land that was vacant, underutilised or in temporary use. In comparison Hackney has far smaller amounts on its books with just 24,740 sq.m. of sites for commercial and industrial development in the south of the Borough around Bishopsgate and 63,600 sq.m. of sites adjacent to or within the LVRP.

Although Hackney residents would clearly benefit from more jobs this must not be at the expense of the Lea Valley environment. However the LVRP is being actively promoted as a development area.

The Hackney Deposit Unitary Development Plan states:

"the Council's policy is that there is a presumption in favour of employment related development ... The Council will, therefore, have to consider carefully the implications of any possible conflict between proposals from the LVRPA and the provision of new industrial premises."

Because Hackney's largest areas of derelict sites are in the Lea Valley it is adopting policies which destroy the environment of North-East London and reduce overall long-term employment opportunities for the area. The Lea Valley merits special attention in order to benefit all who live around it.

Example 2: Quality of Employment

Waltham Forest in its UDP refers to the natural wealth of the acres of now overgrown Temple Mills Yards, but says that on balance employment generation is more important. It is also recognised that significant amounts of traffic will be generated by the proposed developments. Presumably both the traffic and the loss of acres of wildlife habitat are considered a price worth paying for jobs. However this raises two issues:

- a) The number and the quality of those jobs. Local people need good quality jobs that offer the prospect of training and skill development. However, so far the Borough has only come up with a handful of poorly paid jobs in the form of a supermarket and an even smaller number to be associated with a highly mechanised freight terminal or freight village.
- b) The appropriateness of the developments in the Lower Lea Valley. If the site is to be developed sympathetically it would be better to go for high quality job creating schemes on a part of the site, thereby leaving a substantial acreage as a wildlife haven linking the whole of Marsh Lane with the LVRP. This area could then be incorporated into the LVRP.

Development would therefore allow the creation of more jobs than under LBWF's proposed scheme and be in harmony with nature conservation on a larger part of the site.

The siting of a major road based freight facility in the Lea Valley is a clear indication of a borough thinking narrowly within its own boundaries. Clearly such development needs to be considered in a strategic context.

In examining the importance of the siting of the proposed M11 Link Road and the Passenger Terminal and its linkages with similar Terminals around the country, it is clear that the Terminal would also serve East Anglia and a substantial part of the Home Counties. In the context of a strategic plan a more appropriate site for such a large facility would be near the M25.

Example 3: Access to the Lea Valley Park

For many years the LVRPA has planned for a bridge across the River Lea linking Hackney Marshes to Leyton Marsh which would allow pedestrian and cycle access along the valley without having to use the noisy and polluted Lea Bridge Road.

But so far lack of co-ordinated planning has failed to produce such a bridge.

Access to the Lea Valley Park land is limited mostly to the main roads across the valley. Waltham Forest in particular has only limited or unappealing access to the Park from adjoining residential areas. Access from Low Hall could be improved by provision of a proper foot-bridge. The LVRPA could liaise with councils on the development of pedestrian access or have its boundaries extended to incorporate adjoining Metropolitan Open Land (M.O.L.) which already has good access.

Access to the reservoirs is only available from Ferry Lane which is over a mile from the southern end of the reservoirs, a distance which results in more than a 2 mile journey from Leyton and south Walthamstow. If another access point could be provided from Coppermill lane this would increase the accessibility of a large area of the park to local people.

KARL WEISS



The heavily congested Lea Bridge road.

Planning and people

Our valley is threatened. We are up against powerful developers and sometimes misguided local planning authorities.

In some cases we are dealing with ignorance. Daft ideas are being put forward by people in power. People who should know better, who just do not seem to understand the value of the Lea Valley Park as a vital Urban Open space. They often fail to see the importance of defending our area against car commuter traffic from outside London. Indeed they appear to see it merely as an inconvenience to motorists who wish to get to work from other far nicer areas.

There are severe threats to our area. Our health, our neighbourhoods, our architectural and natural heritage are all under threat from planned road developments and supermarket proposals. What would be the future for Leytonstone House, Victoria Park, Bully Point Nature Reserve and Hackney Wick if the M11 Link road were to be built? What life would people in Hackney and Tower Hamlets have if such large volumes of traffic and pollution were delivered to their area? We must ask ourselves whether developments such as these would be proposed in a more middle-class area, where people are more likely to complain or have an M.P. in the government party.

However our area has its own important history with numerous victorious struggles:

- a) The Bryant & May "Phossie lip" dispute. The first battle over an industrial disease.
- b) In 1892 the mass defence of the Leyton Lammas Lands by local people.

c) The bravery, resilience and organisation of Eastenders during the Blitz in World War Two.

d) Early trade union struggles. e.g. for the "Dockers Tanner".

e) The Battle of Epping Forest over preservation of common land rights.

More recently we have been engaged in a battle to defend Walthamstow Marsh SSSI and the campaign against the East London Road Assessment Studies, which planned to drive a dual-carriageway straight through the Lea Valley Park and Victoria Park.

The Lea Valley Federation hopes to forge a campaigning organisation that will unite local people in defence of our environment. Our common-land is not "up for grabs" by those who wish to use it for commercial gain.

We believe that it is time to ask our local councils and planning departments to adopt a different approach. A new, positive approach that will not only control development effectively but also show vision and concern for the character of our area.

We need easier and safer access by foot and bicycle to the Lea Valley Park itself and imaginative schemes for bringing this "green enjoyment" right into our neighbourhoods.

This booklet aims to be the genesis of this changed approach. It is time for a fightback and regeneration, not just defensive action.

Join with us to fight for your area, your environment.

A SENSIBLE REGIONAL PLAN FOR NORTH EAST LONDON REQUIRES:

1. A co-ordinated PLAN for the development and expansion of the Lea Valley area as a centre for wildlife and open-air leisure activities.

This should include a strategy to extend the LVRP south to meet the Thames.

2. Opposition to any encroachment into the park, adjoining buffer land and public open space by roads, and inappropriate development.

3. Industrial, office and other developments, to take place only on derelict sites and only where compatible with Recommendation 1.

4. The creation of good integrated public transport, cycling and pedestrian links to existing and new centres of enterprise with convenient connections to the Lea Valley open spaces.

5. Recognition and enhancement of Hackney, Waltham Forest and the north of Newham as residential areas through the expansion of conservation areas and the development of coordinated plans for improving the quality of life for local residents.

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COVER PICTURE: KARL WEISS

Thanks to all members of the Lea Valley Federation who have contributed to the making of this book

LEA VALLEY FEDERATION

www.leavalleyfederation.org

The newly-formed (2009) Lea Valley Federation
extend our grateful thanks to all our predecessors
who produced this inspirational Charter for the Lea Valley
and gave us their permission to reproduce it
and thereby keep it in the public domain for perpetuity.

Lea Valley

FEDERATION

AFFILIATED GROUPS

WESTDOWN RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION
WALTHAM FOREST FRIENDS OF THE EARTH
WALTHAM FOREST CIVIC SOCIETY
WALTHAMSTOW MARSH SOCIETY
WALTHAM FOREST TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP
TOWER HAMLETS ENVIRONMENT TRUST
STOP THE M11 LINK ROAD
RESIDENTS AGAINST TRAFFIC
NORTH LONDON LINE COMMITTEE
NEWHAM FRIENDS OF THE EARTH
LONDON WILDLIFE TRUST
LINK ROAD ACTION GROUP
LEYTON LEA VALLEY FORUM
HACKNEY FRIENDS OF THE EARTH
HACKNEY MARSH USERS GROUP
HACKNEY NO THROUGH ROAD CAMPAIGN
GRAHAM ROAD NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION
FRIENDS OF EPPING FOREST
FEDERATION OF WALTHAM FOREST COMMUNITY AND TENANTS ASSOCIATIONS
CLAYS LANE HOUSING COOPERATIVE
CANN HALL RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION
BUSHWOOD AREA RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION
ARCHWAY IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION
ALLIANCE AGAINST ROAD BUILDING MENACE

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