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**Re: STOP THE DESTRUCTION OF NEW RIVER PATH BY LBH - URGENT ACTION NEEDED**

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**Dawn Carter-Mcdonald** <dawn.cartermcdonald@hackney.gov.uk>  
To: newriverrenewal@aol.com

16 October 2023 at 10:50

Dear Mr Alexander

Thank you for sharing your concerns and those of some other residents regarding the resurfacing of the New River path currently being undertaken by the Council.

I raised this matter with the Head of Parks and Green Spaces who has provided me with a detailed explanation of the resurfacing project and the considerations around it. Therefore, before responding to the points you have made, I think it would be helpful to first set out some important context:

**a) Biodiversity:** The area directly on either side of the New River path has limited habitat and biodiversity value. This is because it is already well-used by pedestrians and cyclists and is therefore subject to regular disturbance (which has increased further over recent years);

**b) Budget:** Like all public sector organisations the Council is facing significant financial challenges. Therefore financial decisions in relation to the New River path resurfacing can't be viewed in isolation, as the Council has many other assets (including thousands of metres of paths in other parks and green spaces) that it has to maintain to a satisfactory standard;

**c) Condition of the Path:** The path is in poor condition, with increasing complaints about its condition, especially in the wet winter months. These problems are exacerbated by the environment and constraints of the path;

**d) The Project:** The project is resurfacing and trying to improve a path that already exists and has a number of constraints that impact heavily in terms of design / space, and can't be changed. It is not creating a new path on an unconstrained site, where there would be much more scope to deliver the ideal solution; and

**e) Use of the Path:** The New River path has been shared use for many years by pedestrians, runners, dog walkers and cyclists. Use of the path has increased significantly over recent years due to a number of factors:

- The increasing popularity of the West Reservoir Centre;
- The introduction of the new entrance at the Fairview Homes' development onto Green Lanes;
- The pandemic period;
- The promotion and popularity of active travel; and most importantly
- The regeneration of the Woodberry Down estate.

Reaching any decision has to take into account various factors and often results in compromise. The resurfacing of the New River path has been no exception, having to consider:

**a) Biodiversity:** I understand your concerns about the impact on biodiversity, and the Council shares the commitment to preserving and enhancing the natural environment. However, the biodiversity value of the areas adjacent to the New River path are limited for the reasons already outlined. In addition, there will be minimal impact in terms of vegetation removal. The Parks and Green Spaces team is working closely with the Council's Arboricultural Team to ensure the tree roots are protected as part of the work - which has influenced the choice of wood as the edging material. Wildflowers are also being planted along the entire route to promote biodiversity.

Given the above, the type of surface chosen would have had limited impact on biodiversity. In fact contractors having to come onto site more regularly to maintain a breedon gravel or similar material path would have potentially had a higher negative impact over time.

It is also worth noting that the resurfacing of the New River path is part of the wider West Reservoir Improvement Project that includes a number of ecological enhancements to improve the biodiversity around the site, including improved wildlife corridors with wildflower and tree planting and extended reedbeds along the perimeter of the Reservoir for wildlife.

We believe that these measures, combined with careful planning, will help maintain and enhance biodiversity across the entire site.

**b) Cost:** The cost (both for installation and over the life of the path) of the various options for surfaces had to be considered;

**c) Developing Alternative and Improved Routes:** The resurfacing of the New River path is not the only improvement work we are undertaking to routes and paths around West Reservoir. The Council is planning two new fully accessible bridges and a path with a similar surface to those used in Woodberry Wetlands, that will be pedestrian only, and will allow people an alternative route along the east bank of the Reservoir to reach West Reservoir, Castle Climbing Centre and Green Lanes;

**d) Maintenance:** The ongoing maintenance costs of the path had to be a significant consideration in reaching a decision on the surface type in a high traffic area. Asphalt is a durable and long-lasting material, it is also a relatively more affordable option to install and maintain, which is particularly important if we are to avoid being in a similar position as we are currently in with the New River path. The team's experience of breedon gravel or similar surfaces in high trafficked areas has not been positive, with significant levels of maintenance required, and poorer conditions in wet weather.

**e) Shared Use:** Without making access for people using pushchairs or in wheelchairs more challenging, there are few practical ways to prevent cyclists using the New River path, even if this was desired. The entire length of the path will be improved to provide passing opportunities throughout its length, due to tree roots and tree incursion, the path narrows in some places. Signage will be incorporated to emphasise pedestrian priority. As noted above, an alternative pedestrian-only route will also be developed along the east bank of West Reservoir.

**f) Surface Type:** Whilst the team has considered the aesthetic appeal of the surfaces used in Woodberry Wetlands and by Thames Water, it cannot be the only consideration. It is important to consider the practicality and functionality of the path in a high footfall environment like New River, along with the constraints / challenges of the site.

Asphalt has been chosen for the new pathway because it is a durable and long-lasting material, it is also relatively a more affordable option to install and maintain, which is important for the reasons already outlined. Asphalt is also a safe and accessible material for all users. It is smooth and even, making it easy for people of all ages and abilities to travel on.

To ensure the safety and comfort of all users, the Council has opted for a smooth and even surface, which will make the path more accessible for people with mobility challenges, older individuals, and children. Additionally, the path's width has been designed to facilitate safe passing opportunities for everyone, and we will incorporate signage to emphasise pedestrian priority. Asphalt is also less likely to be slippery than other materials, which can be especially important in wet or icy conditions.

Whilst I can understand your concern, I believe that the resurfaced path will offer a significantly more accessible and improved option for residents, and when viewed in the context of the wider outcomes of the West Reservoir Improvement Project, will result in more choice of routes and improvements to biodiversity across the entire site. The works to resurface New River path that are currently taking place will therefore continue.

Yours sincerely

**Dawn Cater-McDonald**  
Interim Chief Executive

London Borough of Hackney  
Hackney Town Hall  
Mare Street, E8 1EA

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **malcolm alexander** <[newriverrenewal@aol.com](mailto:newriverrenewal@aol.com)>

Date: Sat, 30 Sept 2023 at 10:11

Subject: STOP THE DESTRUCTION OF NEW RIVER PATH BY LBH - URGENT ACTION NEEDED

To: [Dawn.Carter-McDonald@hackney.gov.uk](mailto:Dawn.Carter-McDonald@hackney.gov.uk) <[Dawn.Carter-McDonald@hackney.gov.uk](mailto:Dawn.Carter-McDonald@hackney.gov.uk)>

Cc: [catherine.hay@hackney.gov.uk](mailto:catherine.hay@hackney.gov.uk) <[catherine.hay@hackney.gov.uk](mailto:catherine.hay@hackney.gov.uk)>

## **STOP THE DESTRUCTION OF NEW RIVER PATH BY LBH - URGENT ACTION NEEDED**

Asphalt is being used to relay the New River path from the Castle to the children's play area. It will make the path look ugly and destroy the biodiversity of the path and environment. What was a beautiful path for walking on, is being turned into a hazardous cycle path. LBH is breaching the Equality Act by making it too dangerous for older people, disabled people and children too walk on. Speeding bikes are a terrible hazard for people with these protected characteristics. The path is not wide enough for walkers and for bikes. Making it wider and covering with asphalt just kills of the wildlife and destroys biodiversity.

Non-asphalt paths need slightly more maintenance than asphalt paths, but are transformative in relation to the quality of the environment and biodiversity. The new path from Seven Sisters Road to Finsbury Park, laid by Thames Water is a great example of best practice.

**LBH please reconsider your design approach and follows Thames Water's best practice. TW and the LWT have relaid their paths so beautifully. Why not follow their outstanding example of best practice.**

See email below from expert Dr Judit Kimpian to Catherine Hay, Project Manager, Public Realm, Climate, Homes & Economy Directorate, Borough of Hackney

Malcolm Alexander  
New River Renewal Campaign  
07817505193

**Dear Catherine,**

**This is an extremely worrying development and entirely contrary to the London Plan's requirement for LAs to ensure works on public land are biodiversity positive.**

**As the chair of our local residents association, and as a governor of a nearby Hackney school, I very much support Malcom's points.**

**The New River Path is part of our local heritage and a key source of health and well-being for young families, families with neurodiverse children and adults, as well as disabled people.**

**As a keen cyclist and cycling campaigner I can testify that asphaltting this path would legitimise fast cycle traffic, putting other users at a disadvantage and risk. This measure would also be in direct contravention of the government's advice that pedestrians should enjoy priority on all public paths.**

**As an architect, and sustainable policy expert I can confirm that the path is not wide enough to be shared between fast moving cycle traffic and pedestrians - unless significant loss of biodiversity is planned along the way.**

**We will make further representations at all possible forums to ensure that any plans going forward are in compliance with the London Plan, as well as Hackney Council's walking and cycling action plan.**

**Regards,**

**Dr Judit Kimpian**

@JuditKimpian

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Catherine Hay, Project Manager, Public Realm, Climate, Homes & Economy Directorate,  
Borough of Hackney

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