

**NEW RIVER  
RENEWAL  
CAMPAIGN**



**Report on Meeting Between  
Residents and Richard Aylard  
(Sustainability Director – Thames Water)**

FRIDAY, 28 JULY 2023

**PRIORITIES FOR THE ‘DROP-IN’ MEETING  
WITH THAMES WATER**

**14<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER – 5.00pm – 7.00pm  
Redmond Centre**

***The New River is not just a piece of infrastructure to  
provide fresh water to London, but a key part of  
North London's heritage and fundamental to its  
green regeneration.***

# CAMPAIGN TO RENEW THE NEW RIVER & MAKE THE ENVIRONMENT SAFE FOR WILDLIFE AND RESIDENTS

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## WHAT IS THE CAMPAIGN ABOUT?

“We are local activists who want the New River brought up to the same high standards as the Woodberry Wetlands for the wildlife, and for people who want to enjoy the pleasure of walking by a river.

We want the New River to be an environment that is safe for wildlife and not contaminated by plastics, rubbish, and junk.

We want regular clearing and maintenance of the whole length of the New River from Finsbury Park through to the Castle in Green Lanes.

It should not be the job of residents to continuously complain about and raise these issues - Thames Water and the London Boroughs of Hackney and Haringey must take responsibility for keeping the river and the riverbank a clean and safe environment for wildlife and for people who want to enjoy walking by the river”. Our successes include getting piles of rubbish removed from the river, getting the path from Seven Sister Road to Finsbury Park re-laid and removing rubbish from the river path.

Our objectives include persuading the London Borough of Hackney to take responsibility placing rubbish bins at the entrances to all sections of the river path and emptying them regularly to keep rubbish away from the river where in heavily contaminates bird nests.

The New River Renewal Campaign was started by residents who live around Woodberry Down.



## **REASON FOR THE MEETING**

We submitted a formal complaint to Thames Water in June 2023 about the failure of Thames Water, to engage appropriately and adequately with the **New River Renewal Campaign**, regarding the relining of the New River.

We initially had a positive relationship with Thames Water. They agreed to restore the extremely unsafe path from Seven Sister Road to Green Lanes, removed rubbish from the river, and a mattress which has been laying in the river for many years.

However, all effective communication between and the New River Renewal Campaign ceased because Thames Water stopped responding to our requests relating to the development of the river and path, making it very difficult to achieve our campaign objectives. This failure of communication is of particular concern now as Thames Water prepares for major works on the New River from Seven Sister Road to Green Lanes.

We have been told by local residents that the initial plan is to take samples from the side and bottom of the river to determine its composition, and then to drain the river and concrete/reline the riverbed.

This plan would destroy that section of the New River as an important local environmental centre for wildlife. This is a very important area for the breeding of birds and the growth of many plants, and it appears that Thames Water would be acting against the aspirations of the EIP – Environmental Improvement Plan, that the Government recently published. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ambitious-roadmap-for-a-cleaner-greener-country>

Thames Water had a minibus ‘drop-in session’ on July 5<sup>th</sup> outside 66 Eade Road, N4. However, this invitation was never sent to the NRRC, despite our repeated requests for information about your plans for relining the New River. Thames Water staff at that meeting were unable to answer questions put to them by local residents and the New River Renewal Campaign. In response to our complaint, Richard Aylard, (External Affairs and Sustainability Director – Thames Water) met with member of the New River Renewal Campaign on July 28<sup>th</sup> and gave us the opportunity to explain our concerns in detail. We then met with local residents at the New River Studios Café, Eade Road, N4.

A meeting is now being planned for the second week of September 2023 where local residents will be able to meet Thames Water engineers and other experts to discuss Thames Water’s plans to reline the New River.

**This report provides details of the questions put to Richard Aylard and his answers.**

## Action Plan For Drop-In Meeting with Thames Water - 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2023

There is broad support by residents for the goals of the New River Renewal Campaign regarding biodiversity, positive management of the New River, as well as increasing its accessibility. These priorities are shared by Eade Road Residents and the New River Renewal Campaign.

### 1) **Unused Land on the North Side of the River – by Eade Road**

Many residents on Eade Road side of the New River would like to see greater use and better landscaping of the northern riverside too. It is currently an abandoned patch of grass, with a great deal of fly tipping over the fence.

### 2) **Relining the River – Seven Sisters Road to Green Lanes**

In relation to re-lining of the river, surveying local houses prior to the commencement of any re-lining works, and indemnifying households against any potential subsidence is a high priority.

### 3) **Evidence from Thames Water Engineers Regarding Mitigation**

We require details of measures taken to mitigate damaging changes to water content on the land on which properties adjacent to the New River stand. This must include details of the measures that will be undertaken to maintain the moisture levels at the pre-works baseline after the works are completed.

### 4) **Evidence that The Seven Sisters Road to Green Lanes Section is Particularly Susceptible to Leaks**

Data underpinning Thames Water's decision that this section of the New River is contributing significantly to water loss, compared to other sections of the New River, such as the section on the Finsbury Park side of Green Lanes, where there has been regular river flowing down towards Green Lanes every winter in the past years.

### 5) **Cost Benefit Analysis of Different Approach to Leak Management**

The cost benefit evaluation undertaken to ensure proper annual maintenance of the canal, as was done over the past 400 years versus concrete re-lining and maintenance, over the estimated life span of both solutions, including the cost of surveying and indemnifying of neighbouring households.

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- 6) **Impact of Leak Management Approaches on Wildlife, Biodiversity and Homes**  
Assessment of the impact of different approach of leak management on wildlife and biodiversity, embodied carbon, and disruption to neighbouring properties and the general public.
- 7) **Active Involvement of Local Residents in All Decision on Leak Management**  
Involvement of the local residents who have many decades of experience with the historical issues of the New River, including Thames Water's maintenance.
- 8) **New River Is An Essential Component of Biodiversity**  
Recognition of the New River as part of the urban and biodiversity heritage of the Finsbury Park and Hermitage New River area, as well as a potential focal point for urban regeneration, requiring proposals to augment the New River's cultural, social, economic and biodiversity value in the area.
- 9) **What is the Timescale?**  
The feasibility of the timescale for undertaking all the above prior to the commencement of relining the New River, or other more appropriate techniques.
- 10) **Credible Technical Proposals Closely Linked to Re-lining Works Including:**
- The Thames Water Programme of works
  - Detailed drawings and visualisations of actual and potential outcomes
  - Sustainability evaluation, including the feasibility of using low-embodied carbon concrete, landscaping proposals to retain localised reed beds, incorporating nesting locations, sustainable urban drainage, and meadow planting of the riverbank.
  - Contractors' preliminaries, including the 'Considerate Constructor Scheme' compliance, diverting waste from landfill quantitative targets, re-use of soil removed from the riverbed for local landscaping.
  - Feasibility of incorporating horizontal ground source heat pump pipelines to work in the riverbed to supply low carbon heating to neighbouring properties, etc.
- 11) **Communications Plan**  
We aim to get support from residents and Councillors for the action plan above.

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS  
28 July 2023 – Eade Road Café Meeting with  
Thames Water**

**QUESTION 1** - Why is Thames Water spending so much money on relining the New River from Seven Sisters Road to Green Lanes (Finsbury Park)?

**ANSWER – RA** - We don't spend money on improving infrastructure unless we need to. It is a 400-year-old aqueduct that brings valuable spring water into London every day. We have a statutory duty to keep doing that.

The New River leaks and Thames Water Engineers believe it leaks here and that they must do something about it.

Engineers are not always wrong, but they are not always right, and we have to have the conversation with them. I shall act as your Advocate with Thames Water. It doesn't mean that I shall necessarily be able to achieve all that you want me to achieve.

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**QUESTION 2** - Is the plan to reinforce the sides of the New River with concrete?

**ANSWER 2 – RA** - It is to reinforce the bottom. Normally we reinforce the sides with sheet piling, but initially it would have to be clay.

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**QUESTION 3**

- Is concrete sustainable in holding the water?
- Is concreting the bottom of the river a long-term solution to water leakage?
- What impact will the relining have on the wildlife ... the birds and other wildlife migrating wildlife?

**ANSWER 3 – RA** - I am not an Engineer. I am a Freshwater Biologist. I am here to listen.

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**QUESTION 4** - How long will it be closed for? How will it impact on local people who enjoy walking along the river on a sunny day?

**ANSWER 4 – RA** - No answer.

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**QUESTION 5** – I live about one house away from the New River and I am concerned about two things:

- The New River has been leaking over the last 400 years, and all our houses literally sit on a lot of clay.
- Once the water supply is turned off and the clay beneath our houses dries up, are we at risk of subsidence?

**ANSWER – RA** – That is a question for the Engineers. We are quite used to working on clay, and I am sure that they will be able to explain what they will be doing about that.

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**QUESTION 6 – JK** - As an Architect, I understand what kind of surveys would be need beforehand, and I think that all the residents on Eade Road would like to see all of their properties surveyed ... and that Thames Water would indemnity us in case of loss from damage.

If subsidence occurs, we shall not be able to insure our houses anymore. So, we need some kind of security from Thames Water that, should that happen, it would indemnify us against the impact of damage to our homes?

**ANSWER 6 – RA** – We have done that in the past. We have done pre-surveys and post-surveys. We are quite used to building tunnels under London and looking for subsidence. So, yes, we shall look at that.

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**QUESTION 7** – Participation at the last meeting held by Thames Water in Eade Road was low, and the Thames Water staff could not answer our questions. How will you ensure much better participation and response next time?

**ANSWER 7 – RA** – We probably did not invite the right Thames Water people – or enough people – to give the answers you wanted. For the next drop-in, Malcolm and Mark have offered to help us to identify the affected communities, so that we get the maximum number of people - and perhaps the Councillors as well – to understand what is going on.

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**QUESTION 8 – JK** – This is a very large undertaking for a leak that has been happening for many years.

We should like to understand what other ways of leak prevention have been considered before deciding to pour millions of tons of concrete into the river for the new lining.

Other issues with the New River are that the trees have not been properly maintained, and the roots are doing damage to the riverbed ... and the bed is not being cleaned and maintained. When that is done regularly, leaks can be sealed. Would not that approach take away the need to reline the river with concrete?

We all know there is a very big development coming on the other side of the river and, as an Architect who has worked on very tall buildings all over the world, I feel that if there is a massive 'load-change' on the other side of the river, then Thames Water would already be in preliminary discussions with the builders about the things required for such a huge investment. Is that the case? This development will take 10 years to complete.

**ANSWER 8 – RA** – I do not know if Thames Water is aware of that development. As fast as we fix leaks to provide the water resource, the water use by the population goes up, and climate change is a significant problem.

We have to look at every way we possibly can in order to conserve and supply. So leaking water out of a 400-year-old aqueduct is a problem.

I do not know, as I am not an Engineer, why they have picked on this bit. Somebody will have done a proper analysis to show that this actually is a cost-beneficial solution and needs to be done here, but we need to explain this to you.

Making concrete does create a lot of CO<sub>2</sub>, but it lasts a long time. On a lifecycle analysis, concrete does not come out too badly, compared to other options. Concrete does look horrible when it first goes in, but it is not bad for things to grow on, if kept rough. You can grow reeds on concrete.

Mark reported that a proposal has been made to compensate for the loss of reeds, by establishing a reed bed in the West Reservoir.

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**QUESTION 9** – Why isn't the visible water leakage being dealt with? It has come out from Endymion Road near Green Lanes every winter for the past Thames Water for three years. The river flows into that corner and a small lake is created on a monthly basis, with tons of water. It is very dangerous.



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**ANSWER 9** – RA – I shall try and find out what is going on. Maybe we can fix that problem too.

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**QUESTION 10** – What sections of the river will actually be relined, and what methodology will be used?

- Why is this particular methodology chosen?
- What other options have been looked at?
- Why have they been discounted?
- Might there be methodologies that have not been looked at that might be more beneficial, in terms of wildlife conservation?
- Will the concrete kill wildlife?
- What are the potential risks of this method, and of the works and, specifically, how are they related to the potential risks of subsidence to nearby homes?

**ANSWER 10 – RA** – As a Fresh Water Biologist, I shall be asking Thames Water those questions on your behalf – and we shall get some answers.

So far, I have not spoken to the Project Team. I am not an Engineer and I have not seen the plans for relining the river. I shall find out about the building that is planned and make sure that it has been factored in.

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**QUESTION 11** – I live on the nearby Estate. All the old homes are going to be knocked down and replaced by lots of very tall buildings, ranging from 6-11 storeys. Basically, the density is going to be doubled. At the moment, the plan is meeting opposition, as it will be far too dense.

It is due to be completed by 2040. Obviously, the work will be phased, and there is also the fact that, in a nearby street, they also want to knock down all the houses there.

We think that this is not a good idea. I live in a new block of flats opposite where this is going to happen. I have got a ‘not in my backyard’ type of feeling, and I think that Thames Water should be talking to Berkeley Homes.

**ANSWER 11 – RA** – I think that we may need to do another ‘drop-in’ meeting, but we can do a Public Meeting as well. The thing about a Public Meeting is that it tends to be that some people are included to dominate the conversation, whereas a ‘drop-in’ allows a one-to-one chat on the topic that they are interested in.

We shall probably do another ‘drop-in’ with a much wider Thames Water Team, and after that, I shall be happy to do a Public Meeting.

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We did have a 'drop-in' but it was too small and it failed to provide answers to people's questions. It was publicised by leaflets through doors, but it did not go through the 'right doors', I suspect.

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**QUESTION 12** – What would be the timescale for those meetings? We were told, at the first 'drop-in' that the first stage of the work will commence this September/November by removing the reed-beds and clearing the river ... and then the birds would move elsewhere. The major works would then begin in the Spring of 2024.

I should like to ask for that timescale to be moved back, in order that things can be properly assess, and we can be properly consulted.

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**QUESTION 13 – MA** – Is there not a case for a public consultation on this issue? A formal consultation would require that a number of options are published, and the public can then respond. If this were done, then Thames Water must not have made a final decision to reline the river before the consultation exercise.

Different options may have different outcomes.

**ANSWERS 12 and 13 – RA** – Consultation is a legal concept in the planning process. We should only formally consult where there is a need to go through the Local Authority planning system.

The New River relining project, I think you will find, will go through the 'Permitted Development Rights' process, which is not a 'formal consultation', but it is certainly a 'listening process'.

We want to engage – we want to discuss – we want to listen ... and we went to explain, but that is not a 'formal consultation'. It does not mean we will not talk – it does not mean that we will not listen – but we have significant discussions and engagement.  
<https://tinyurl.com/55ydpche>.

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**QUESTION 14** – How will the next 'drop-in' be advertised? Will you use lamp-post wraps and place leaflets in Community Centres and Schools? Door knocking would

also be a good idea. When residents next meet, we shall have a good think about how we publicise it and agree, between Thames Water we shall have a good think all of us, how we do that well.

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**ANSWER 14 – RA** – Holding the meeting in early September would be a mistake, as many people will be away. I would have thought that the second week in September, when schools and people are back, is when we could engage effectively.

Malcolm will let you know when.

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**QUESTION 15** – Now that the path has been restored between Seven Sisters Road and Green Lanes, will you allow plant life improvements to take place?

**ANSWER 15 – RA** – the problem is the Reservoirs' Act (1975). Thames Water Engineers have to certify that there are no problems regarding overgrown plants on the riverbank. The Act states that the vegetation must be kept short enough to be able to see any leaks as soon as they occur.

Some Engineers allow short-growing plants, providing they are strimmed twice a year. It is possible to use wild meadow flowers if they are at the right height.

I shall get the Engineers down here with my Biodiversity Team, and then negotiate to see what we can do to improve the riverbank environment.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1975/23>

<https://tinyurl.com/8skyw6ch>

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**QUESTION 16 – New River, Eade Road side:** The whole section of land on the Eade Road side could have an amazing hedgerow and attract so much wildlife, if the fence were moved much closer to the river.

Moving the fence would probably stop the dumping of rubbish over the fence.

We have a huge issue on rubbish 'dumping' due to people throwing rubbish over the fence. Having a fence there almost becomes an 'attractor' for rubbish dumpers.

**ANSWER 16 – RA** – But we could have a leak there! It is possible to have short wild meadow plants in that location, which are cut back twice a year, but not a hedgerow.

We shall discuss this in more detail and make a plan. We shall also discuss this with local Councils.

They have people who can unlock the gates to the fence and clean up the riverbank – and that might be a perfect solution for local people. They would be better Stewards of the Eade Road riverbank than Thames Water.

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**QUESTION 17** – When the path was relayed between Seven Sisters Road and Green Lanes, it seems that no consideration was given to the impact on the path of the river relining work.

Will this be taken into consideration as a potential cost, when the work is carried out on the river?

**ANSWER 17 – RA** – I approved the relaying of the path and my Budget paid for it, because it was in a terrible state. At that time, I did not know about the relining work.

If the Contractors mess it up, they have to reinstate it.

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**QUESTION 18 – GEOFF BELL** – Regarding large housing developments on both sides of the river, a bridge is planned for the linkway across the canal. It is in the Berkeley Home's 'master plan'.

Residents in this area would probably welcome the re-landscaping of the Eade Road New Riverbank with low foliage.

There are also security considerations - for example in relation to the new bridge and the path being made accessible for bikers.

**ANSWER 18 – RA** – Let me know where the proposed bridge would be placed, and when it will happen. This will be discussed with the Councils.

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**QUESTION 19 – JK** - If concrete is used, would Thames Water consider doing it with the high amounts of GGBS\* (Ground Granulated Blast-furnace Slag)? It is incredibly good for underwater construction but takes a little bit longer to set.

*GGBS = A strength-enhancing compound improving the durability of concrete – a component of metallurgic cement.*

**ANSWER 19 – RA** – We need to ask the Engineers. One of the things that has to be considered is that drinking water has to pass through there, so any possibility of leaching would be a problem. It is probably also more expensive to use. We shall look into this, and you can discuss this with the Thames Water Engineers.

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**QUESTION 20** – Can Thames Water provide a detailed response as to why some recommendations are being discounted or included, and if cost is the reason?

**ANSWER 20 – RA** - Public questioning of the Engineers and for them to explain their plans properly, will happen at the next 'drop-in'. You will be able to see their plans, listen to what they have to say and discuss their plan.

These plans take a long time to be produced and implemented - and are expensive. You are welcome to challenge the Thames Water Engineers at the 'drop-in' session.

Thames Water has a process for challenging the Engineers, through the Thames Water Team which is designing our plans, and the Contractors who refine the design and are responsible for implementation.

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**QUESTION 21** – How will you choose Contractors to carry out the river work?

**ANSWER 21 – RA** – Contractors have to get through a tendering process and be on our approved list of suppliers, and they have to have full accreditation.

We do not go with the cheapest bid; they have all got to be Achilles Certified.

[www.jvrconsultancy.com/which-is-achilles-certification-all-about](http://www.jvrconsultancy.com/which-is-achilles-certification-all-about)

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**QUESTION 22** – Will we be able to see the actual decision-making evidence that provides the basis for the Thames Water decision to reline the river, in terms of how much leakage there is?

**ANSWER 22 – RA** – We can certainly show you why we have picked this area to carry out the relining work, and how much leakage we think there is, and how much we think we are able to deal with it – and also what we have been able to do elsewhere in similar situations.

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**QUESTION 23** – Could the current plan be postponed? If we are meeting in September, that is when the first steps are proposed.

**ANSWER 23 – RA** – I promise we shall make sure that we have not started any work by September 2023, unless it is something that we need to do as a routine operation. We shall not start work on the project until we have had a proper conversation with everybody.

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**QUESTION 24** – If we are having a ‘drop-in’ as the next stage, can that be shared with everybody who drops in, because there is a likelihood that we all come at different times?

**ANSWER 24 – AR** – We have a very long list of questions – it runs to about 4 pages – which came from the previous ‘drop-in’, and we are answering those in a simple Q&A type form. We shall be circulating that in advance of the September meeting, so you will be able to see our approach to the main questions we received last time.

When you come to the ‘drop-in’, you will be able to meet somebody who will be able to go into more detail with you.

We shall be building on what was done last time, even though it was not all that efficient.

We certainly got a good feel for the questions, and I have some more questions here now. I have to promise not to delay the project, because we need to get on with this. If we have got a problem and it is leaking, then it has got to be fixed.

We have to have a sensible timescale.

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### PROPOSAL – FOR ACTION BY THAMES WATER

- Much bigger and better ‘drop-in’ sessions.
- Much better advertising.
- ‘Drop-in’ to be held in the second week of September 2023.
- More realistic-looking cost actions.
- Have Engineers and Biodiversity Teams present.
- Surveys to be done on local properties which might be affected by the relining.
- Biodiversity Survey for comparisons.
- The development to be biodiversity positive.
- The use of concrete and its environmental impact to be carefully considered.