

NEW RIVER RENEWAL CAMPAIGN

James Townsend,
Field Performance Manager,
Thames Water

June 16th, 2023

Dear James,

We were very pleased with the progress made following a successful period of interaction and collaboration between our organisations, when TW agreed to restore the extremely unsafe path from SSR to FP, removed rubbish from the river, and the mattress which has been laying in the river for many years.

However, you seem to have stopped effective communication with the NRRC and have ceased to respond appropriately to our requests relating to the development of the river and path and understandably we are very disappointed at the recent poor communication. We understand how wide your brief is and how busy you are, but it feels as if the successful engagement that we have developed with you and your colleagues has now collapsed.

We have asked for a face-to-face meeting between yourself and representatives of NRR campaign not a general meeting as you have suggested. The two types of meeting are quite different, at this stage we think it is more important to have a short business meeting at which we can go through the priorities listed in the appendix below and mentioned previously.

We rely on your cooperation and effective communication to achieve our campaign objectives and look forward to a positive response at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

Sara Leviten, Mark Wilks and Malcolm Alexander

New River Renewal Campaign

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Appendix A – General Meeting

We will invite you to speak to a General Meeting about the New River developments, and shall also invite two Campaign supporters to speak - Nick Higham, ex BBC journalist, and author of a recent book on the New River called the Mercenary River, and a speaker from the Save the Reservoirs Campaign, which led to the saving and opening up of the two reservoirs.

Some of the issues we have raised with you are shown in the list of priorities below.

Appendix B – Wild Meadow Seeds

We can find no legislation that could prevent TW from arranging for the planting of wild meadow seeds. This relates to the side of the path where excess mud/soil is being placed. Can you identify the relevant Regulations that prevent the planting of wild meadow seed? You promised a supporting statement from your Reservoir Safety Team regarding the Reservoirs Act. We cannot see how the Reservoir Act relates to a side raised bank as nobody will walk on the raised bank.

On 21/01/2023, we wrote to you confirming our view that the reservoir legislation has no mention of any restriction on growing plants which are not on the river path. Can we meet with the Reservoir Safety Engineer to discuss this issue? It is now 4 months since you promised to get a statement to clarify the legislation. Your background in environment science would suggest that you would be committed to resolving this issue. We believed that Thames Water was committed to complying with its values and promises. We distributed our newsletter to 2000 homes around the east reservoir and people were very pleased with the progress made but stated that much more is required.

Appendix C – Our Priorities

We asked you to respond to a number of priorities including the following:

PRIORITY ONE:

Relaying other sections of the path which are hazardous to walkers – especially following rain. Our emphasis is on compliance with the Equality Act and Duty of Care by both the London Borough of Hackney and Thames Water. We are particularly concerned about enabling access to the river paths for people who are disabled. The Duty of Care requires action to be taken to protect walkers, plus installation of signage regarding potential hazards. Responsibility for path maintenance lies with Thames Water and LBH.

Some of the paths were improved through gravelling in 2021, but since then no further action has been taken, despite the development of deep puddles and thick mud after rain. The path of both sides of the Newton Close Bridge and the path near the large children's playground are prime sites for upgrading to reduce deterioration of the path.

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PRIORITY TWO:

Establish which parts of the new river are contaminated and require regular removal of rubbish, in order to maintain and restore the natural wildlife environment.

PRIORITY THREE:

Disposal of waste along the river path through the installation and emptying of dustbins

PRIORITY FOUR

Developing an agreement between Thames Water, the London Borough of Hackney and the London Wildlife Trust to determine which body should be accountable for rapid action when the path or river are contaminated or unsafe to walk on, i.e. protecting wildlife and people.

Appendix D – Relining of the New River from SSR to FP

We have raised with you our concerns about TWs plans to re-line the NR from SSR to FR. We have asked for detailed information regarding your plans and the impact on wildlife in the river. We understand the plan is to drain that section of the NR and reline with concrete. This will destroy the wildlife environment that has been created in that section of the NR over hundreds of years. We have seen no environmental assessment and no assessment by the Environment Agency which would seem essential for work which will have such a major environmental impact.

On 01/04/2023, we asked if you have a date for a meeting regarding relining this section of the New River

On 04/04/2023, you informed us that you have discussed our enquiry in detail with Rachel the project manager for the New River relining project, and that you are committed to effective engagement on this issue, but the project is still in the design phase and the full team has yet to be appointed. You said that the river reline is a comprehensive engineering project and includes a complete redesign. You added that for large projects TW is obliged to maintain an equal level of biodiversity in the affected area of the New River.

On 21/04/2023 we asked to meet you soon for 'a catch-up' to discuss this issue.

On 02/05/2023, you confirmed that the path and river reline are being led by different sides of the business and added: "The path refurb is being run by external affairs and is less complex relative to the reline. The reline is comprehensive engineering project, complete with redesign".

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On that date we wrote to you and again asked you to arrange a meeting for us with the people designing the relining of the New River, to which you replied that it is not your area of the business, so I won't be arranging this meeting, but that you are prepared to ask questions regarding current status. We asked you for a TW contact, e.g. Rachel, for the river relining, so that we can contact the team directly. You replied that you can't disclose direct details for colleagues. I therefore asked you to give my contact details to Rachel, so that we can speak to her directly. You did not reply.

On 22/05/2023, we asked you why you have stopped communicating with the NRRC, despite that fact that good communications have achieved so much. I asked if you would advise me to contact the TW Chief Executive or our local MP? I confirmed that we expect best practice from TW.

You replied on 22/5/2023 stating that apart from having direct contact with TW regarding relining of the river that you are not aware of any other issues.

On 22/05/2023, we replied that we have written to you several times about the relining of the river, but we have received no information at all. We also asked to meet you, but you did not reply.

On that 22/05/2023, you apologised for not being more forthcoming with information regarding the reline. You added that: "this project is being run by a dedicated project team. This team is in the process of being stood up and will a specific person for customer liaison. This is better for yourself and others who are keen to understand the project because they will be closer to the detail".

We have still received no contact details for the relining team.

End

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