From: **Caroline Woodley (Mayor)** <caroline.woodley@hackney.gov.uk>
Date: Thu, 11 Jan 2024 at 5:49 pm
Subject: Your question to Full Council
To: Sarah Young (Cllr) <sarah.young@hackney.gov.uk>
Cc: Governance Services <governance@hackney.gov.uk>

Dear Cllr Young,

I am writing to thank you for your question directed to me in advance of Full Council. Unfortunately we ran out of time to take the question that evening, which is why I am responding in writing.

Your concern for the New River Path is appreciated - thank you for your advocacy of this issue. In line with your question, the Council has developed a number of initiatives to increase accessibility, explore more safe cycle routes and enhance biodiversity.

**Accessibility of New River Path**

The New River Path has been shared for many years by pedestrians, runners, dog walkers and cyclists. In recent years the path has regularly become very muddy with numerous puddles proving difficult for those with buggies or wheelchairs to use.

As part of the West Reservoir Improvement Project, we have recently resurfaced the path to make it more accessible, and have plans to replace the existing stepped bridge with a level accessible bridge. Roundels have been painted on the path, along with the words 'pedestrian priority'. Further signage emphasising 'pedestrian priority' will be erected, consistent with signage in some other public spaces in the borough.

The Council is open to exploring suggestions for the provision of an alternative cycle route. However, some of the roads in the immediate vicinity are part of the Woodberry Down development and have not yet been adopted by the Council. As per this adoption process, the Council will enter into discussions with the developer and we will consider what work would be required to provide an additional route. **We would warmly welcome your input as this progresses.**

As part of the wider programme, we know how important it is to provide safe conditions for cycling. Hackney is one of the most cycle friendly boroughs in London with one of the highest rates of cycling and the Council has an ambitious plan to improve conditions for cycling in the borough, which were detailed in the Local Implementation Plan published in January 2023. The plans included increasing coverage of low traffic measures in the borough, as well as several cycling schemes, including Cycleway 23 that runs across the borough from Lea Bridge to Dalston, which is due for completion this year.

Closer to the area in question, in recent years the Council introduced a separated cycle lane along Green Lanes and is currently working with Transport for London to investigate options for improving parts of Seven Sisters Road for walking and cycling.

I hope this sets a firm foundation for managing cycle infrastructure that allows us to direct cyclists to safe routes and prioritise pedestrians on dedicated pathways. We want the borough to become safer, friendlier and more inclusive for all.

**Enhancing biodiversity**

The Council is working on a number of initiatives to enhance biodiversity and this is a core component of our environmental strategy. With regards to this, we have recently adopted the Green Infrastructure Strategy and Local Nature Recovery Plan. We know that conserving wildlife in urban areas is both a challenge and a necessity, especially as there are multiple competing land-uses in urban areas.

This is only exacerbated by high population density and intense recreational demand on existing parks and green spaces. It’s a Council priority because of the moral responsibility to provide space for wildlife amongst us, but also because we know that making space for nature has associated benefits for our residents.

The Local Nature Recovery Plan specifically mentions that we need to improve the riverine corridor created by the New River. As such, we have now sown approximately 800m2 of wildflower seed along this route, which has very high floristic diversity including excellent pollinator species. The policy case for planting wildflowers is strong - it will vastly increase the diversity of native and water’s edge-appropriate flora along this route.

As part of the wider West Reservoir Improvement Project, biodiversity around the reservoir will be enhanced, with bug hotels, new trees, hedges and an extensive new area of reedbeds being planted. The proposed new cafe will have a green roof and Sustainable Drainage areas will be incorporated into the design. This will vastly improve the biodiversity of this important site, and ensure that it can continue to be enjoyed by all.

I thank you again for your question and look forward to working with you closely on New River Path.

Best wishes,

Caroline

Caroline Woodley

Mayor of Hackney

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