

**Question Number: 2017/3583      Bridges to Fish Island in Hackney Wick**

**What is your view on the extent of opposition to the demolition at Vittoria Wharf and proposed road and pedestrian bridges linking the Olympic Park and Fish Island in Hackney Wick?**

**Caroline Russell AM**

*I am aware that LLDC's plans have attracted some concern, particularly in connection with the planned ending of a temporary use of a warehouse by a small number of creative and business users who had been given short, meanwhile use leases by the Corporation.*

*The LLDC's plans to install two new bridges are not a standalone development but part of a wider strategy for Hackney Wick and Fish Island in the Local Plan that includes up to 4,500 new homes, employment space (including the protection and re-provision of 8,400 sqm of low cost workspace and artists' studios), and a major refurbishment of Hackney Wick Station. The bridges will connect communities to each other - including future neighbourhoods to be built - to wider forms of public transport, open space, new schools, healthcare facilities, universities and cultural facilities, and the economic*

*opportunities that surround them, including high quality jobs.*

*The bridge plans have been reviewed and tested several times, most recently prior to the detailed planning application being submitted in early 2017. There was also extensive public consultation on the proposed designs for the bridges during the summer and autumn of 2016.*

*LLDC's Planning Decisions Committee considered all of the representations made from the public and other interested parties both for and against the bridges, including those who attended the Committee's public meeting, before approving the detailed application on 28 March 2017.*

*The Committee voted 7-2 in favour of H-16 (Stour Road) and 8-1 in favour of H-14 (Monier Road). The reserved matters planning application was approved in April 2017.*

*Given that planning permission has been granted and that LLDC's planning committee made its last decisions on these matters only very recently and by a very large majority, the threshold for reopening these decisions must be high.*

*The Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills has met with remaining objectors and listened to their concerns, but concluded that LLDC has operated within the policy and planning framework and relevant legislation, and undertaken all the relevant and required processes, so*

*it is difficult to conclude that any such threshold has been met.*

**Later inserted at request of Will Normal, Walking and Cycling Commissioner:**

Discussions with Tower Hamlets about the long term future of the road are ongoing. Should the road be adopted by Tower Hamlets in the future, the local authority will take over responsibility for the management and operation of the bridge in accordance with the LCS planning consent.

### **Potential Supplementary Questions**

**Q: Why is LLDC persisting with old plans against the overwhelming wishes of local people?**

#### **Answer**

*The Legacy Corporation believes that its proposals for the bridges will futureproof Fish Island and the new neighbourhood of Sweetwater by significantly improving connections between Fish Island and Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The bridges will serve not just the current community but the new communities that will emerge in the area in the coming years.*

*The plans were first made some time ago, but they have been reviewed a number of times since and they remain sound. They are an essential part of creating a successful new neighbourhood.*

*It is not correct to say that this is being done “against the overwhelming wishes of local people”. There are some people who oppose the plans and others who support them including a social landlord providing housing on the west side of the canal and the future provider of the school on the east side of the canal. Crucially, there are many future residents who cannot express a view because they don’t yet live there. They won’t thank us for creating an isolated neighbourhood that doesn’t work properly.*

*However, I have been clear that developers and planners must do all they can to protect affordable workspace including artists’ workspace*

*and I have been assured that LLDC is working to ensure the amount of creative workspace will remain the same in the area.*

**Q: Don't the proposed bridges go against your Good Growth objectives?**

**Answer**

*No, I do not believe they do. They are what Good Growth is specifically about. I believe that Good Growth is about avoiding physical, social and economic cliff edges and connecting people to jobs, social infrastructure, community facilities, green space etc. The bridges will help to build a more inclusive city - connecting new and existing neighbourhoods, supporting regeneration and investment in jobs, homes and new community facilities.*

*The bridge designs are fully inclusive to allow use by all members of the community.*

*The bridges will help to enrich the city's public and civic spaces, supporting new routes and streets between the existing and emerging facilities and communities in Hackney Wick and Fish Island and strengthen the character of these neighbourhoods.*

*The bridges will also support greater environmental sustainability, enhancing pedestrian and cycle routes and, via the all modes bridge (H14), enabling new bus access. If and when, Tower Hamlets adopts the all modes bridge, it would have the ability to manage the future use of the bridge, restricting vehicle access. The new H14 bridge will also enable the extension of the district heat network from the Park to surrounding communities with associated localised and sustainable energy benefits.*

**Q: Why is LLDC ignoring the recommendations made by Assembly Members in its report Creative Tensions which called on the corporation to review its plans and engage properly with the local community?**

**Answer**

*Unfortunately, the report, “Creative tensions - Optimising the benefits of culture through regeneration”, doesn’t take into account the Hackney Wick Central masterplan, which is being co-promoted by the London Borough of Hackney and LLDC and which was granted outline planning permission in April 2017.*

*The Hackney Wick Central masterplan will protect and re-provide 8,439 sqm of low-cost workspace, including artists’ studios. By contrast, the report chooses to highlight the closure of Vittoria Wharf which provides less than 950 sqm of low-cost workspace, a significant amount of which was not used for arts and culture purposes, but included businesses involved in food supply and delivery, for example.*

*Preserving the whole of Vittoria Wharf would be at the significant cost of losing the H16 pedestrian and cycle bridge, which will connect old and new communities with each other and with the new social infrastructure being built across the canal, including a school.*

*It would be wrong of LLDC to ignore the lessons from previous failed housing, development and regeneration projects. Hackney Wick and Fish Island were themselves historically deprived areas in part because of a combination of rivers and the construction of the A12 flyover that left them significantly cut off from the surrounding areas. As Hackney Wick and Fish Island are developed, along with adjoining land in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, construction of new bridges is*

*critical to the ambition of both addressing these historic problems and ensuring the creation of new and sustainable communities.*

*I understand that LLDC is a long-term supporter of the London Assembly's Regeneration Committee's proposal for Hackney Wick to be a Creative Enterprise Zone (CEZ) pilot to further its credentials as one of Europe's leading creative hubs. As part of their continuing commitment to Hackney Wick, they have recently jointly appointed (with LB Hackney and LB Tower Hamlets) a Business Retention Manager who is actively engaging with local artists and creative businesses in Hackney Wick to support them during the redevelopment period. This includes actively supporting them in developing ideas for a CEZ in Hackney Wick/Fish Island. I know LLDC's Executive Director for Regeneration and Community Partnerships met with the Deputy Mayor for Culture in Hackney Wick/Fish Island last week, along with local artists and operators of local cultural and creative venues and had positive discussions about this, including the idea of considering a CEZ as part of the LLDC's Local Plan review.*

**Q: Will you overturn LLDC's decision?**

**Answer**

*The bridges have been considered numerous times by the LLDC's planning committee as a consequence of the decision by the board to proceed with those elements of the long-standing masterplan.*

*The decision to approve the detailed application was taken in public by the Corporation's Planning Decisions Committee at its meeting in March 2017, and the reserved matters planning application was approved in April 2017.*

*Given that planning permission has been granted and that LLDC's board and planning committee made its last decisions on these*

*matters only very recently and by a very large majority, the threshold for reopening these decisions must be high.*

*The Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills reviewed both the issue and the decision-making process and he has concluded that LLDC has operated within the policy and planning framework and relevant legislation, and undertaken all the relevant and required processes, so it is difficult to conclude that any such threshold has been met.*

*As Mayor of London I have no powers to call in the (planning) decision and the period allowed for a judicial review has now lapsed.*

**Q: Why is LLDC demolishing an asset of community value?**

**Answer**

*Half of Vittoria Wharf was purchased by the London Development Agency in 2009 to enable a new pedestrian and cycle crossing to be built across the Lee Navigation canal. Ownership passed to LLDC in 2012.*

*Rather than leave the building empty the business units within it were let on short-term leases. The rents were heavily discounted in view of the fact that the building was only going to be available for a short period. Tenants were fully aware when they signed the leases that the intention was to demolish the building in due course to construct the bridge. Some of the units were occupied by artists. Others were occupied by businesses with no relation to the creative and cultural sector. Tenants left when their leases expired and the building has been empty for just under a year. Where required, tenants were given practical support to find alternative premises and a small relocation grant.*

*The building itself is old but not historic in the sense that it does not have any architectural or heritage merit.*

*The other part of the building will remain in use.*

**Q: Isn't the proposed road bridge contrary to the policies in your draft Transport Plan?**

**Answer**

*The proposals for new developments on the Park, including the bridges, support my draft Transport Strategy. The new development at Sweetwater will comply with the Healthy Streets approach to plan new homes and jobs around walking, cycling and public transport. The new road through the new development at Sweetwater that will serve the H14 bridge will be 6.5m wide and so will have a street character and will have speed limits set at 20 mph.*

*The report to the Planning Decisions Committee clearly assessed the air quality, noise and other amenity impacts arising from the bridges applications. The conclusion as reported was that there would be no detrimental impact to residential amenity given the design of the bridge and related connections as a typical 20 mph London street.*

*Furthermore, it is my understanding that if and when, Tower Hamlets adopts the all modes bridge at H14, it would have the ability to manage the future use of the bridge, restricting vehicle access.*

*TfL has supported this development in part because it will bring residents of new developments and existing Fish Island residents within 350 metres of a bus route, something that is not currently achieved. The bridge and road will also provide important access for new businesses and services, including new schools, community library and health centre.*



**Q: There has been opposition to the plans from residents; why are LLDC ignoring local concerns?**

**Answer**

*There has also been support for the bridges, including from a social landlord providing housing on the west side of the canal and the future provider of the school on the east side of the canal. The most vocal opposition has been from those who want the temporary use of Vittoria Wharf to become permanent, who are not necessarily residents. I am confident that LLDC's consultation practices are robust and go beyond its statutory requirements. Their community engagement activity is informed by their Code of Consultation which takes its principles from government, mayoral, and national best practice guidance, as well as learnings from previous consultations – this code also governs activity undertaken by development partners and consultants.*

*Local concerns are also addressed in the governance structure of the LLDC. Residents of the relevant local boroughs that make up Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park are directly represented on both the Board and the independent Planning Decisions Committee; the Mayor or Leader of each of the four local boroughs is a member of the LLDC Board and LLDC's independent Planning Decisions Committee has elected councillors from each of those boroughs on it and this ensures that community interests are represented. This allows communities to have direct input into all major strategic and planning decisions taken by their elected representatives, alongside experts in their fields who make up the remainder of the Board and its sub-committees.*

*I have been clear that developers and planners must do all they can to protect affordable workspace including artists' workspace and I have been assured that LLDC is working to ensure the amount of creative workspace will remain the same in the area.*

*I am committed to improving access to dedicated, affordable workspace so that the next generation of small businesses and creatives are given the support they require to flourish. As well as setting up Creative Enterprise Zones, which will provide dedicated workspace for creatives, I have commissioned a feasibility study into a Creative Land Trust to help London's artists access affordable workspace across the capital.*

## **Background**

### Timeline

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|------------|--|
| 2004       | Olympic Park Planning Applications submitted – Olympic Masterplan includes plans for the two bridges   |
| July 2007  | Olympic Park Masterplan Approved   |
| Sept 2011  | Legacy Communities Scheme submitted for planning approval  |
| Sept 2012  | Legacy Communities Scheme Approved. This included planning conditions relating to bridges, and approved the LLDC entering into the s106 that would allow the LCS permission to be granted    |
| Sept 2012  | Tower Hamlets Council adopted its Hackney Wick Local Area Action Plan. This details how the new bridges will “provide important links across to the legacy development in Fish Island East.” |
| 2013-14    | Local Plan Consultation. Widespread consultation on drafts of the Plan which includes H-14 and H-16 bridges and then a public examination held by an independent inspector in 2015           |
| Jan 2015   | LLDC adopts its Local Plan. A statutory requirement as a planning authority, which includes H-14 and H-16 bridges  |
| March 2015 | East Wick and Sweetwater contractor appointed (Balfour Beatty with Places for People).   |

- July 2016 Consultation starts on bridge designs.  
Vittoria Wharf tenants given 2 months' notice.
- Aug 2016 The Chairman of LLDC reassessed the decision and found the decision to be sound and tenants were informed of his findings
- Oct 2016 Reserved matters planning application submitted.  
Formal consultation undertaken.
- March 2017 LLDC Planning Approval. LLDC Planning Decisions Committee - the decision to approve the reserved matters applications for H14 and H16 bridges was taken in public at its meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2017, and the Committee voted 7-2 in favour of H-16 and 8-1 in favour of H-14
- April 2017 LLDC's Hackney Wick Masterplan approved. This will provide support to the cultural and creative sector (29,000 sq. m of employment space of which 9,000 low cost workspace etc)
- Sept 2017 Vittoria Wharf Demolition and beginning of North South Highway and H-16 bridge construction
- Spring 2018 Conclusion of H-16 construction. Once complete construction will begin on H-14.
- Dec 2018 Completion of H-14 construction