



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Cathryn Ross, Chief Executive Officer  
Thames Water Utilities Ltd  
Clearwater Court  
Vastern Road  
Reading  
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11 December 2023

Dear Ms. Ross,

**Re: Response to Thames Water Site Options Consultation - Teddington Direct River Abstraction**

I was pleased to meet you recently at the meeting with local river stakeholders, councillors and Liberal Democrat London Assembly Member Hina Bokhari. At the meeting, local groups raised their concerns about the Teddington Direct River Abstraction (DRA) scheme, which would pump treated sewage into the river above Teddington Lock via an underground pipeline from Mogden Sewage Treatment Works, as part of Thames Water's stated drought resilience objectives.

As you know, I have been challenging these proposals on behalf of residents since they were first announced. As new information has come to light, the strength of feeling has only grown – with almost 30,000 people having signed a Change.org petition, hundreds more having signed a petition that I will present in Parliament, and thousands having responded to Thames Water's consultations.

In addition to raising residents' concerns directly with Thames Water, I have also raised them with the Environment Agency, as well as with DEFRA Ministers and Ofwat. In a debate I held in Parliament in September, I asked the former Water Minister Rebecca Pow to take the Teddington DRA proposal off the table – which the Government has the power to do.

This brings me to the crux of the matter: The current consultation, the Site Options Consultation, asks residents to choose which construction options they prefer, in terms of the potential sites for new structures, pipelines and shafts that would be needed for the Teddington DRA.

However, many residents have told me the current consultation is built on a flawed premise, because *residents do not want to be forced to choose between construction options: **they do not want this scheme to go ahead at all.***

I am therefore including below my official response to the Site Options Consultation, which sets out the reasons why I, and thousands of my constituents, believe these proposals should not go ahead, and the Teddington DRA should be removed from Thames Water's Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP).

It is important to state from the outset that local opposition to the proposals is not about residents saying "not in my backyard" for no good reason; we believe this is a deeply flawed proposal, with compelling rationale for why it should not go ahead.

No one is questioning the need to have robust drought resilience plans to face the climate crisis, and there is undoubtedly a need to future-proof our water supply. However, we

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contend that Thames Water have so far failed to make the case that the Teddington proposal is the **right** proposal to achieve the stated objective of ensuring drought resilience – particularly when more viable alternative proposals are available.

### **Negative environmental, construction and social impacts**

Our stretch of the River Thames is unique in London, in terms of the sheer number of people who swim, row, paddle, kayak and boat along our precious waterway. On any given day, the river and its banks are alive with people out and about enjoying nature with their sporting clubs, youth groups, schools and families. Whilst initial concerns about the proposals centred on the impact on water quality, the construction impacts have raised a whole new level of concern.

#### *Environmental Impacts*

My constituents are extremely worried about the environmental impact of these proposals, including on water quality, human health, biodiversity and wildlife. Thames Water have claimed that, with tertiary treatment, the effluent that it pumps into the river at Teddington would be of the same quality as the river water itself. Yet, we know that treated effluent contains a host of compounds and chemicals that we have not been assured would be filtered out, including pharmaceuticals and PFAS (forever chemicals), which do not break down in the environment and are known to cause health complications in humans and wildlife. In addition, bacterial, viral, and parasite contamination of the treated effluent has not been addressed.

The truth is that Thames Water have made claims about the environmental impact of the scheme that cannot be backed up, because a full environmental assessment – and human health assessment – has yet to be completed. With the Environment Agency itself having said that Thames Water have so far failed to show that the Teddington scheme is “feasible or environmentally acceptable”, this alone would be a compelling reason to stop the proposals in their tracks.

#### *Construction impacts*

Meanwhile, Moormead Park in my constituency, and Ham Lands conservation area just across the river, are among the precious local green spaces that would be turned from nature sites to construction sites if the scheme is approved. Residents are concerned about the traffic, noise and environmental impact of the proposals, as well as the potential impact on individual homes. This includes residents in one of Twickenham’s oldest roads, in a designated conservation area, who are concerned about the building of tunnels beneath homes that already suffer from subsidence.

#### *Social impacts*

Another message that came out loud and clear in the local council’s most recent public engagement event in Twickenham was residents’ concerns about the social implications of these proposals.

Moormead Park is a vital hub for play, sport and recreation – including youth cricket and football – for local families and schools in Twickenham. At the public meeting, we heard from a teenager who spoke on behalf of other children living near Moormead who wondered where they would play sport if the park became a construction site. And, for families without gardens of their own, these public green spaces are a vital connection to nature.

### **Best value for whom?**

Thames Water contend that the Teddington DRA represents the “best value option” to address drought resilience – but many residents are asking **“best value for whom”?**

The reality is that Thames Water’s own documents refer to a “short-term planning problem”, with the Teddington scheme only “necessary” because of decades of underinvestment in water resources. There is also a fundamental issue around trust, with water companies continuing to breach sewage regulations whilst losing millions of litres of water to leaks every

day. Most recently, Thames Water announced that its debts have risen, and that water bills will subsequently rise by 40%.

On top of this, the Teddington DRA would save only one tenth of the 630 million litres of water that Thames Water loses every day through leaks. This leaves residents rightly asking why they should pay the price for Thames Water's lack of investment – especially when the scheme would cost hundreds of millions of pounds of customers' money, but gain very little in terms of resilience.

This is particularly true when there are other, more viable options that could be pursued, including the River Severn transfer option combined with the Cotswolds canals upgrade, which received broad public support. Residents also want to know why other options are not being considered, including the re-use of water systems at Beckton and Mogden Lane plants; osmosis plants at Kempton and Beckton; and the re-opening the de-salination plant at Beckton.

### **A commitment to transparency**

I'm grateful that, over the last 11 months, Thames Water have taken on board feedback from me and MP Sarah Olney regarding the need for greater public engagement, including acting on our request to set up additional information events with residents and river groups.

However, I know there is a strong feeling from residents that their views are still not being taken into account. For example, we know that over 1,700 residents responded to the initial Thames Water consultation – with well over a third responding specifically to the Teddington DRA – but residents feel that their feedback has not been taken on board in subsequent iterations of the proposals.

It is absolutely crucial to ensure the greatest level of transparency and accountability in how the Teddington DRA is being assessed, and that feedback is genuinely listened to.

I was pleased that, in our recent meeting with river groups, you committed to outlining to residents what the “dealbreakers” on the proposals would be; i.e., what thresholds/milestones would trigger the Teddington DRA option to be discarded or re-assessed. I look forward to receiving more information on this, as well as on whether alternative proposals, such as the River Severn transfer option, will be considered.

The bottom line is that the Teddington DRA just doesn't add up. It's bad for residents, bad for the environment, bad for water bill payers, and barely scratches the surface of the problem it seeks to resolve. With this in mind, I ask Thames Water to remove the Teddington DRA as an option within the Water Resources Management Plan. Our river and our parks are a beloved and precious resource that must be protected.

Yours sincerely,



**MUNIRA WILSON MP**  
MP for Twickenham