



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Chris Weston, Chief Executive Officer
Thames Water Utilities Ltd
Clearwater Court
Vastern Road
Reading
RG1 8DB

19 February 2024

Dear Mr. Weston,

Re: Teddington Direct River Abstraction (DRA) proposals

Firstly, please allow me to congratulate you on your appointment as CEO of Thames Water. I hope you are settling into your new role, following your distinguished career in the Royal Artillery and in the private sector.

I am writing to follow up on conversations I had with your predecessor, former interim joint CEO Cathryn Ross, about Thames Water's Teddington Direct River Abstraction (DRA) proposals – which, as you know, have been the subject of a huge outpouring of public opposition in my constituency. With over 700 residents having signed my petition in Parliament and more than 30,000 people having signed a Change.org petition opposing the proposals, the strength of feeling against the proposals is overwhelming.

I have raised residents' concerns in a debate I held in Parliament, as well as with officials from the Environment Agency, DEFRA and Ofwat – and, of course, directly with Thames Water.

On 8 December of last year, I attended a meeting with Ms. Ross organised by Liberal Democrat London Assembly Member Hina Bokhari, with the participation of local councillors and river stakeholders, including Save Our Lands and River (SOLAR). In the meeting, Ms. Ross agreed to work with the assembled group on two main asks: one was around defining best value, and the other was on whether alternative proposals to the Teddington DRA are being properly considered.

Ms. Ross also committed to outlining what Thames Water's "dealbreakers" are; i.e., what thresholds/milestones would trigger the Teddington DRA option to be discarded or re-assessed. To date, we have not received an answer on these points. I am therefore writing to ask if you will meet with me and the local groups to discuss these crucial questions, and so we can present our case as to why we believe the Teddington DRA should be removed as an option from the Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP) entirely.

Environmental, construction and social impacts

I was interested to read, in an article in the *Evening Standard* announcing your appointment, that you are a keen fisherman. As the health and viability of aquatic life is one of the concerns that has been raised by my constituents in relation to Thames

The Hamptons • St Margarets • Strawberry Hill • Teddington • Twickenham • Whitton

Water's Teddington DRA, I'm sure you can appreciate why the environmental impact, including on fish – not to mention people – is such a concern.

Local residents are extremely worried about the impact of these proposals 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. Please refer to my specific questions on PFAS chemicals further below.

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.

This is not to mention the social impact of the proposals. On any given day, our stretch of the River Thames is alive with people swimming, rowing, kayaking, fishing and paddle boarding. Moormead Park is a vital hub for play, sport and recreation – including youth cricket and football – for local families and schools in Twickenham.

With this in mind, and 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”, we believe that the proposals should not go ahead.

Specific questions on PFAS chemicals

I recently met with the Royal Society of Chemistry to discuss their work on PFAS chemicals in drinking water. As you will be aware, there is growing concern about the environmental persistence and toxicity of PFAS, which has spurred international regulators to impose stricter regulatory limits on the acceptable levels of PFAS in drinking water.

Due to their widespread use and increasing evidence of toxicity, concerns are being raised about the impact of PFAS chemicals on human health and the environment. Some have been linked to a range of serious health conditions including fertility issues, thyroid disease, increased cholesterol levels and liver damage. One substance, PFOA, was recently declared to be a carcinogen by the WHO.

I would like to ask how Thames Water is testing for PFAS in our water. Specifically, I would like to enquire about how water would be tested for chemicals like PFAS in connection with the Teddington DRA. Moreover, I would appreciate it if you could explain the process of tertiary filtration and how this would protect our waters from harmful chemicals. I am aware that you have recently published your 2025-2030 business plan, and would be interested to hear what investments you are making in this area in the future.

Defining “best value”

The strength of feeling against the Teddington DRA reflects very real and serious questions that remain unanswered.

For example, Thames Water contend that the Teddington DRA represents the “best value” option. Yet the Teddington DRA would save only one tenth of the 630 million litres of water that Thames Water lost through leaks in the 2022/23 financial year. 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.

As campaign group SOLAR have asked, *how can any reasonable judgement be made when the public have not been given any further detail setting out the basis for this calculation?*

We would like Thames Water to be transparent in setting out the specifics and criteria of how it has determined “best value”, and therefore ask for details of the criteria on how this has been assessed.

Assessing alternative options

Local residents are also asking why the Teddington DRA has been identified as “best value” 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; the re-opening the de-salination plant at Beckton; and using spare capacity from the Queen Mary Reservoir.

We would like Thames Water to address how the Teddington DRA has been assessed vis-à-vis alternative options, given that evidence seems to point to other options being far superior in terms of achieving drought resilience objectives.

Ensuring transparency and accountability

We agree on 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 contend that the Teddington proposal is not the **right** proposal to achieve these objectives.

In the *Evening Standard* article, you said that you recognise that Thames Water's business is critical to both society and the UK, and how “important it is that we restore confidence in our operations and financial position”.

Answering these questions, and ensuring the utmost transparency in the decision-making process, would help with restoring some of this confidence. In particular, we would appreciate your responses on defining best value; whether alternative proposals to the Teddington DRA are being properly considered; what the “dealbreakers” are that would stop the proposals from going ahead; and what steps are being taken around PFAS chemicals.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss residents' concerns further. Thank you in advance, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



MUNIRA WILSON MP
MP for Twickenham