



**A River Centre for London, at Gallions Reach, Beckton
Submission to the Thames Growth Commission, by Thames21**

October 5th, 2016

Thames21 believes that Beckton in Newham, which is framed by the River Thames, would be the perfect venue for a River Centre for London. With the Mayor's announcement that the DLR is to be extended across the river from Gallions Reach to Thamesmead, the position, next to the PLA Radar mast and by the new crossing, is the right location for an active, practical centre serving both local communities and visitors which reinforces and celebrates the relationship between Londoners and the Thames.

Our vision at Thames21 is to maximise this important new opportunity to engage the rapidly developing mix of old and new residents in connecting with and caring for the natural environments in the place where they live. Twenty years of working on London's waterways tells us that the best – and most sustainable – urban environments are developed hand-in-hand with residents.



Artist's impression of a new River Centre for London at Gallions Reach

For the last 20 years, Thames21 has connected Londoners with their natural water environments to help create vibrant, healthy, engaged communities. Thames21 would use the River Centre for London as:

- A multi-purpose site and community hub to involve local residents with the rivers that characterise and enhance east London
- A unique link to the river for all Londoners, to help them learn about and engage with the rivers of London and the Thames Estuary



- An east London space for Thames21 staff to work and develop programmes
- A centre for the charity's educational and community outreach activities including:
 - an education space with classrooms to develop and deliver sessions to school pupils
 - a space to provide training opportunities for volunteers, individuals or groups
- A location for cultivating aquatic plants and constructing 'living flood defences' to demonstrate, teach and involve communities in creating sustainable urban landscapes
- A place from which river sporting activities, accessible to all, could take place, for example paddleboarding, canoeing and rowing
- A place to learn about the Port of London Authority and how the river is run, located at the PLA radar mast on the edge of the river
- A place that will help provide the vital social infrastructure that will help the region to thrive



A River Centre for London would allow residents and visitors from other parts of the capital to learn about rivers and engage in caring for them

As London expands eastwards, new areas, such as Gallions Reach at Beckton, are being developed to meet the needs of a growing population.



An influx of residents requires new facilities quickly, to help them put down roots and build a community feel, amid a background of increased business as well as residential development.

A River Centre for London at Beckton would not only encourage new residents to value and care for the environment around them but, as the capital's first river centre, the facility would also act as an attraction for all Londoners, to help them learn about the key role that London's rivers play in our daily lives.

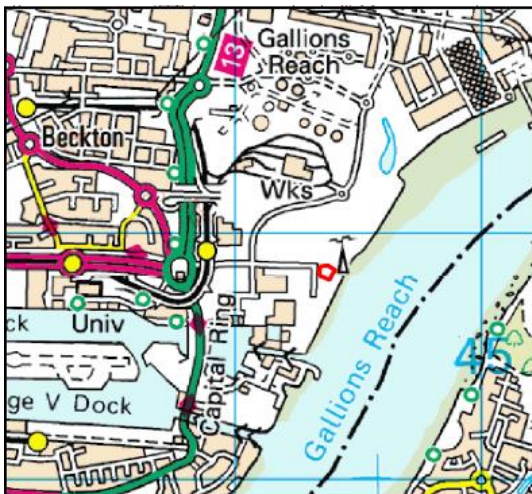
Thames21 has maintained a presence in the London Borough of Newham since 2009, building up networks of individual volunteers, residents' associations, schools and voluntary groups. Thames21's use of this site will pull together the fragmented nature of the relationships created in the past seven years and introduce the charity's activities to new audiences.

The charity already provides practical help in east London, via its short-term office at Bow Lock. Staff and volunteers have carried out various projects, from clearing litter and invasive plants to planting trees and reedbeds. The charity is also working to develop natural sustainable drainage systems to prevent pollution flowing into the water. Volunteers at Bow have formed new relationships and developed new skills. Activities have also involved school children carrying out water dipping and water quality testing.

However, this is just the tip of the potential for east London.

We plan to energise and unify east Londoners with the common purpose of revitalising the rivers and streams that run throughout their neighbourhoods, underpinned by a new local presence and long term commitment from Thames21.

Doing so would regenerate green spaces where a multitude of wildlife can flourish, encourage people across all ages and from the full spectrum of cultural backgrounds to lead more active, outdoor lifestyles and play their part in maintaining and learning about a green, clean and safe environment.



The Gallions Point Marina is an area popular with rowers and water sports enthusiasts – especially at the London Regatta Centre – so Thames21 will also be engaging with groups and individuals with an interest in protecting the health of the area's waterways. Thames21 has much experience running volunteer and engagement events, such as "paddle and pick" litter clearances, with sporting groups, encouraging them to take an active interest in the health of their stretch of river or its tributaries.

The site location (left)



Establishing a base at Beckton will also offer Thames21 greater accessibility for Thames21's expanding programme of activities in the neighbouring borough of Barking and Dagenham.

Since May 2014, Thames21 has been working with representatives from a number of businesses and groups to progress and develop the concept of a London River Centre in the east of the capital. The plans are fully supported by the Port of London Authority, which is a key partner.

The project has the support of the Greater London Authority, which recognises the charity as a builder of communities, and the idea has been included in tender documentation in local planning schemes. The concept has also been included in the tender documentation to developers.

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Bringing London's waterways to life

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About Thames21

Thames21 is an environmental charity putting healthy rivers at the heart of community life. Through environmental improvements, education, research and advocacy efforts, we inspire and influence effective and lasting change by working hand-in-hand with communities to deliver tangible and measurable improvements for urban rivers.

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