The Super Sewer at Chambers Wharf

“Night and Day” by Larry Broomhead

Introduction

Good morning Chair and members of the Panel. Ladies & Gentlemen.

My name is Larry Broomhead and I’m representing over 2,000 residents who live on the Dickens Estate and over 200 people who live at Wrayburn House.

I have lived near to Chambers Wharf for almost 20 years and have always admired and respected the local community.

There is a general feeling of apathy on the Dickens Estate due to a common acceptance that the Super Sewer is a ‘done deal’ as it will go ahead regardless of local opinion. This is also due to a lack of awareness of how the Super Sewer will impact on residents’ lives and lack of involvement and proper consultation.

So this is why local people have not voiced their concerns and are not here in numbers today. However, after talking with local people, I can assure you that residents are apprehensive and worried about what may happen should sewer works commence and how it will adversely affect their ‘quality of lives’, night and day, for several years.

You will hear that we don’t object to progress and support our city’s expansion but our quality of lives has to be taken into account too not just by Thames Water but also our Council.

Dickens Estate

(The following was not included in the oral submission - There has been a community living near Chambers Wharf since, and before, the Bronze Age. Evidence from archaeological digs, before St Michaels School was re-built, has confirmed that the Dickens Estate was important to the Romans who needed a fertile area for farming. Many people have lived locally all their lives, some residents surviving the Blitz, with parents and grandparents having fought for their country and laboured hard in local factories and the dockyards further down the river.)
There are about 850 flats on the estate with a population of around 2,000. From a survey that was carried out (and confirmed by the 2011 census) you will see that there is higher number of flats with families with young children (compared to the London average) and the neighbourhood has a high proportion of elderly people. We also have a high percentage of people who do shift-work and need to have rest and sleep during the daytime. This data means that the people who live near to Chambers Wharf will be significantly impacted by proposed sewer works as – 1) children attending local schools 2) elderly people who don’t get out much and are ‘flat-bound’ and 3) ordinary working people, many of whom work supporting London’s service industry, often working unsociable hours. You will also have seen that we have a growing number of residents who are working from home who will have to also contend with noise and dust – both night and day.

A number of flats and roads on the Dickens estate have suffered from subsidence partly because the land has been reclaimed and due to the river Neckinger running under the estate. But in recent years this has been made worse due to the demolition of the warehouses at Chambers, the old St Micheal’s School and the piling of foundations for the new school and flats as well as movement of debris and materials, not all by river as planned, but a lot by road too.

Since the London Marathon started in 1981 residents on the Dickens Estate have always turn out and eagerly support this international sporting event. We don’t moan when Jamaica Road is closed for the day. But the thought of heavy lorries clogging up our local streets and bringing Jamaica Road to even more of a stand still will exacerbate residents’ feeling of being prisoners in our own neighbourhood. *(Not included - Even if we could find a place to park our cars, as we will lose the whole of Bevington Street, we will find it much harder to get out onto Jamaica Road due to the increased congestion – this will make us feel even more ‘trapped in’.)*
Here are some quotes from our survey that missed the deadline but would like to bring to your attention:

[Last name] lives at [Address] says “...it will affect me and my young family dearly as I have a young child attending Riverside School. It will cause a lot of distress, pollution, noise, traffic and endanger our children.”

[First name] who lives at [Address] says “I am extremely concerned; we already have construction works nearby which brings constant noise and dust into my home. A major project like the sewer will be a nightmare...”

And, [Last name] and her fiancé at Wrayburn House say “It will cause noise and will disrupt my sleep as I do shiftwork and my partner who works from home.”

**Wrayburn House**

Wrayburn House, like Fountain House, is very close to the proposed site and immediately adjacent to Bevington Street. We are some 50m from Chambers Wharf and only 30m from Bevington Street so the proposed tunnelling works and movement of spoil will have a massive impact on the 250 or so residents that live at Wrayburn & Fountain House, not forgetting our neighbours on the Dickens Estate too.

The past five years of major buildings works has resulted in cracks occurring in flats at Wrayburn and residents are rightly concerned that any tunnelling works (occurring just 5m from our homes) will cause more movement to the building and put our homes, and families, at risk. All these building works, right adjacent to our homes, have caused a bigger impact on our lives than had been predicted in pre-planning applications and environmental impact reports. Our patience and goodwill has been tested to the full and we don’t need to be put to the test again. There are already serious concerns about the health and well-being of residents at Wrayburn – several neighbours have medical records showing an increase in asthma and other respiratory problems.

To add to our woes, we believe that we will have to live with heavy lorries that will solely use Bevington Street for access to and from the site. This will
further impact on peoples’ already failing health. Further pollution, from diesel fumes, will not help nor will the continual noise — night and day.

If the sewer works have to go ahead, and we hope they won’t, then can you request that Thames Water and the Council ensure that homes close to the site and Bevington Street are more than just adequately insulated against all the noise, light and dust that will be generated over the years of construction — all day and night.

Wrayburn will, eventually, be modernised next Spring and the Council and Leaseholders will be funding new double glazed windows, doors and external wall insulation. Can you request that extra funding is found, as a necessary mitigation measure, so that residents can have triple glazed and dust ventilated windows that will fully mitigate and offer residents greater protection from noise and dust pollution that we will have to endure for several years? This is regardless of whether CW is a drive or a receptor site. There is time to ensure mitigation measures are properly put in place PRIOR to works commencing.

We extend an invitation to the Panel to visit some flats at Wrayburn House and join residents for tea and biscuits.

(The following was not included in the oral submission - On a personal note, I’m amazed that there has not been an investigation of alternative, greener, solutions that could be considered. There are international examples for London to investigate e.g. Copenhagen’s ‘integrated water management system’ and the one adapted in Philadelphia too. All conserving water as a finite resource rather than pumping it down a £4.2b drain as is now planned in this leading city of the world. In these times of so called austerity it must confuse the hard working community that makes up the Dickens Estate – some of whom are living close to the breadline – and find it hard to believe that so much money can be wasted and flushed down a new sewer.)
Closing

Residents on the Dickens Estate and those who live close to the site, and Bevington Street, are all for progress and have supported building projects that have benefitted the community at large and the whole of London. For example, we have lived through the construction of the Jubilee extension line, and more recently the demolition of warehouses, new flats housing 180 new residents and a new school. However, we have endured far more than our fair share of construction and the thought of several more years of upheaval and disruption will be intolerable for many, especially children, our elderly folk, people who work nights and those working from home in the day. How much further down does our quality of life have to fall before ‘the powers that be’ acknowledge that enough is enough and that TT have to go back to the drawing board and propose a solution that will not as adversely affect thousands and thousands of people’s lives from Hammersmith to Abbey Mills.

Conclusion

Surely there must be a way to stop Thames Water causing so much despair and disruption to ordinary people along the length to the River Thames. We know that we need to address overflow of sewage into the river but the idea of literally pouring billions of well earned pounds down a glorified drain does, as Charles Dickens would say, “beggars belief” – especially when the country and its people are up to our necks in debt and struggling to have decent standard of living.

(The following was not included in the oral submission - Chambers Wharf is a site of major archaeological importance and has not yet been thoroughly excavated. We know it’s the site of a prehistoric forest, and a Bronze Age settlement, and that people have lived and worked around the Dickens Estate since time began. So if we, the people, can’t’ stop Thames Water may be the past can?

We have lived the song “Night and Day” for years now and we need to know, and deserve, that we should have some peace and quiet back in our lives.)
Con’t.

Should we have to host sewer construction works at Chambers can the flats that are close to it and adjacent to Bevington Street be brought fully up to standard before works commence. Someone needs to take responsibility to ensure that our homes are fully insulated so that families can cope with all the disruption, and risks to health, that will arise.

On behalf of the all the residents of the Dickens Estate and at Wrayburn House, Thank You, for hearing this representation and we hope you will take our concerns seriously and include us in your final report.

Night and Day, 22nd November, 2013

Oral Submission to the Inquiry by

Larry Broomhead