

**Thames Central Open Space**

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David Joyce, Assistant Director – Planning  
London Borough of Lambeth  
1st Floor, Phoenix House  
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Dear Mr Joyce,

**Garden Bridge Proposal South Bank SE1**

We are a group of local stakeholders who have come together around a shared concern about the future sustainability of the river – London’s largest continuous open space –and the open spaces around it.

As you must be aware, the riverside has become one of the most popular places in the UK for visitors and Londoners to enjoy this open space. The South Bank in particular has become so popular that the number of additional attractions and visitors threatens to overwhelm the very space so many people have come to enjoy.

For that reason, we strongly object to the proposed location for what is predicted by its advocates to become one of the most popular visitor attractions in London – the so-called Garden Bridge.

Despite the clear requirement for pre-application consultation, there was no consultation whatever with residents in the area before the Mayor of London and the Chancellor of the Exchequer decided to support the proposal publicly, and to pledge the public’s money for it, nor before the application was submitted. Yet it is those who live in the South Bank area who would be most affected by the impact of the bridge. The proposal also has damaging implications for both Lambeth and London as a whole.

In response to a growing realisation among local people of the impact that the Garden Bridge would have, residents began canvassing local opinion. Of those approached so far, more than 80% are firmly against the proposal, giving many reasons. The remaining 20% includes those who are undecided and a few supporters. A signed petition will be submitted in due course opposing the Garden Bridge in this location. In the meantime, it is important that you should be aware of some of the many reasons given by residents for their opposition to this planning application.

1. There is no need for a further pedestrian bridge in this location. Connectivity across the river is already better here than in most of central London, including access to District and

Circle line underground services at both Embankment and Blackfriars. The likely need for a queuing system, given the limited capacity of the bridge (an issue identified by the applicants themselves as a justification for the proposed building on the South Bank to act as a queuing area) plus congestion and constriction of the riverwalk would severely restrict the usefulness of the bridge as a pedestrian route. There is not even provision for cycling. The failure of the proposed attraction to contribute to London's transport infrastructure needs is borne out by the applicants' prediction that the majority of those using it will not even cross the river but do a U-turn on the bridge and return to their point of origin.

2. The South Bank is completely the wrong location for an additional visitor attraction. The proposed Garden Bridge would be better located further upstream or downstream, where there are fewer bridges, fewer visitors and less pressure on local infrastructure. In a more sensible location, it could actually improve connectivity and serve a useful regenerative purpose, but cannot be justified on that basis in the South Bank.
3. The Garden Bridge Trust (GBT) application acknowledges that the proposed bridge is intended to be a popular tourist attraction. Yet the section of the riverwalk between Westminster Bridge and Tate Modern is already overcrowded, massively so at peak times. It is narrow in places, creating bottlenecks that make the present overcrowding even more acute. Whilst the GBT has repeatedly failed to give us an estimate of additional visitors at peak times, it has indicated that the proposed bridge would attract 7 million users per year, 50% of them additional to current numbers. We cannot see how 3.5 million additional visitors can be accommodated without bringing pedestrian flows to a standstill at critical times and creating serious problems. The GBT has been most unhelpful on this issue, consistently referring to overall numbers of additional visitors rather than the numbers predicted for critically busy times such as summer afternoons and weekends. Indeed, it has not even provided baseline figures from which such predictions could be made.
4. The GBT proposals include construction of a large building on dedicated open space adjacent to the London Weekend Television tower, but the purpose and justification for this building have not been explained. A serious omission is the apparent lack of toilet facilities for the large number of visitors who would have to queue to get on to the bridge. The proposed building and the mechanics of providing access to the bridge would result in the loss of a rare large grassy area and precious publicly accessible open space – and would dramatically reduce the sense of openness at this point of the riverwalk. Ironically, it would also involve the loss of many existing and mature trees. The structure itself would be built on London's greatest open space: the river. This is contrary to planning policy in the National Planning Policy Framework, London Plan and local plan to protect open space from development. GBT claims to be providing around 6,000m<sup>2</sup> additional open space on the structure itself, but it would actually be developing over a similar area of existing open space and compromising the very openness for which the river is celebrated and protected.

5. The views from Waterloo Bridge, along the South Bank and the river prospects are some of the very best in London. This fact is acknowledged, and the views protected, in numerous planning documents, including the London Plan, the London View Management Framework, Lambeth's Core Strategy, and planning statements for conservation areas impacted by the proposal. The bridge proposal would shorten and block many identified and protected strategic views and reduce the openness of this stretch of river. By damaging the current open views of and across the Thames, many iconic riverside views would be lost – including those of St Paul's Cathedral, especially from the South Bank. A large number of exceptional listed buildings would also be partially or wholly obscured from long stretches of the riverside and nearby bridges.
6. The costs of running and maintaining the bridge would be very significant, but GBT has failed to provide any credible detail or information quantifying these costs and how they will be fully met over the next 125 years. By way of comparison, the new Jubilee Gardens generates huge amounts of rubbish which cost a great deal of money to remove. The same will be true of the proposed Garden Bridge. The London Eye generates costs of over £300,000 per annum in relation to spaces external to its operation: rubbish, illegal traders, coach parking, crowd management, and so on. In addition to these costs, the Garden Bridge proposal would generate huge costs for security staff, gardening staff, bridge maintenance and utilities, and so on. Yet there has been no quantification of these costs by GBT.
7. GBT has also failed to provide details of how the revenue costs of the bridge would be funded in perpetuity. If GBT fails to maintain or raise the funds to cover these costs, responsibility will fall to Lambeth Council and local stakeholders such as Coin Street Community Builders to pay from that point forward.
8. Further costs would also fall on Lambeth Council in relation to the wider area from the intensification of use which would inevitably result: coach parking enforcement, refuse collection, highway maintenance and more.
9. GBT currently states that there will never be any charge for using the bridge. However, the recent decision by the Mayor of London to levy charges in relation to the New Year's Eve fireworks in order to regulate crowd control and cover increasing costs must inevitably cast doubt on GBT's claim that free access to the proposed bridge would be guaranteed in perpetuity.
10. We are concerned that the commitment of public funds from the Mayor of London for this project in Lambeth may mean a reduction in Greater London Authority funding elsewhere in the Borough.

11. Serious damage will be caused to the archaeological integrity of the foreshore, which is one of the UK's greatest concentrations of undocumented historical information and is protected by planning policy and law. There will also be damage to the delicate ecosystem of the river by driving huge piles 65m into the river bed. Whilst such damage might be justified where a piece of genuine transport infrastructure is desperately needed, it is entirely unjustified by the intrusion of yet another major visitor attraction.

Information and visuals presented by GBT are often contradictory or misleading, with many issues unresolved, questions not answered and new problems emerging.

As a number of the above issues fundamentally contravene existing planning policies, we believe it is incumbent upon officers to recommend refusal and upon the committee to refuse the proposal.

We will contact you further as we gather more information about the proposal and when canvassing the local community has been completed.

Yours sincerely,

Jeremy Cross

*On behalf of* **Thames Central Open Space**

Cc Cllr Lib Peck, Leader, LBL  
Cllr Diana Morris, Chair of Planning Committee, LBL  
David Smith, Case Officer  
Cllr Kevin Craig  
Cllr Ben Kind  
Cllr Jennie Mosley  
Valerie Shawcross, Assembly Member, GLA  
Caroline Pidgeon, Chair of Transport Committee, GLA  
Nicky Gavron, Chair of Planning Committee, GLA  
Kate Hoey, MP  
Simon Hughes, MP  
WCDG  
South Bank residents