

Where next for the hydro plan? Questions ignored

Sir – At the end of the very confused and not very informative planning meeting last Wednesday, it appeared that the Teddington and Ham Hydro (THH) planning application had been turned down by a majority of five to four, that decision should have been final, but was not.

It was not clear why this decision was not acceptable to planning officers and some of the councillors, but further discussions took place ending in some sort of agreement to defer the decision, apparently with the intention of eventually approving the planning application if acceptable sound levels could be achieved.

I had provided council officers with a DVD of Teddington Weir and Romney Hydro taken on December 18, 2013 – had that been played, everyone would have known what weirs and hydros look and sound like – and much time would have been saved.

The problem with this fudge is that the very real problems of increased flood risks, appearance, design, installation and maintenance of this extremely large and outdated fixed screw design were not explored.

Why does it need an upstream extension annexing at least 500sq m of public water used by the boating and canoeing clubs to train new sailors, for example?

Why does it need a 2.6m head of water when two metres is more than enough for more modern designs?

And its biggest technical weakness is the fact it has to be closed down in flood conditions to prevent screw damage, with floodwaters being diverted via a small adjacent sluice, which is

claimed not to increase the flood risks.

The most modern designs, such as that planned for at Bell Weir at Runnymede, employ compact screws that pivot completely out of the way to allow very high volumes of floodwaters to pass through with no delays and little or no increased flood risk – that is exactly what is needed at Teddington. What else can be done? Well, start with adoption of more compact screw units designed to operate with a two metre head of water, with a reduction in overall height to the one in 100-year flood level which is well below control hut roof level – about half way up the door.

This would allow the screw units to be safely shortened to Romney Hydro size, removing the need for any part of the unit to be upstream of the weir, or above the current lower footway level, thus solving many other problems as well, including appearance, size and noise.

Teddington would also end up with a much more efficient and compact unit, one that would blend nicely with the rest of the weir.

I believe that building the present hydro design would be bad enough, but to build it before the Oxford and River Thames (Datchet to Teddington) flood relief schemes are in place would be an absolute disaster.

All the capacity increase measures will have to be put on the remaining sections of the weir, and from what little we have heard, the new sluices and gates could well damage the gravel spawning beds under the suspension bridge, and require the removal of many of the moorings.

So not only are we losing hundreds of jobs at Haymarket, plus possibly a large number at Lensbury, and threatening local boating businesses, but we could be suffering major environmental damage as well.

Brendon Barrow, the hydro's designer, is on record of saying that he cannot be 110 per cent certain that the THH scheme will not cause environmental damage, and the only way to find out whether it will is by building it, and then apply lessons learned to future hydro projects.

There are no comparable semi-tidal schemes anywhere in the UK, Europe or possibly in the world. Teddington Weir will therefore, be the guinea pig for this very much experimental scheme.

Hence Teddington MP Vince Cable's suggestion that the THH design should be scrutinised and compared with other more modern designs to ensure the best possible design is eventually installed.

This thoroughly sensible suggestion was completely ignored by planning committee members at last Wednesday's rather confusing planning meeting.

The directors of the limited company, which has taken over the original Ham United Group's community interest company with its green credentials, need to think their plans through again, and start consulting Teddington's residents about building a more compact, modern and efficient hydro scheme, one that can gain widespread support, save local jobs, and remove the risk of environmental and visual damage to the most important weir on the

River Thames.

The ball is in their court.

BRIAN A HOLDER
Teddington

Sir – I am appalled by the refusal of the planning committee to recommend approval of the Ham Hydro project.

There appears to have been a political decision to oppose their own planning officer's recommendation but despite this they were clearly unable to agree on a valid reason for rejection.

This scheme is exactly the sort of small scale, community owned, eco-friendly energy we will need considerably more of if we are to avoid the devastating impacts of climate change.

It is sad that instead of showing leadership our council has resorted to politically motivated delaying tactics. Let us hope they see sense once the noise reports have been provided.

Mrs J LANGRISH
Address supplied

Sir – I love Teddington. Its community spirited village feel is second to none; its residents passionate and intelligent in their opinions; traditional, yet modern and forward thinking.

It is a wonderful place to live and bring up a family. It, therefore, surprises me there is such a strong negative opinion towards the proposed hydro scheme.

"It's ugly. It'll be noisy. What about flooding?" I've read the latest details and all of these issues appear carefully considered, investigated and reported on by our regulatory bodies; not a "dodgy dossier of evidence" as stated in your article, April 17, 2015. In my opinion,

the weir at present is not the quietest and most attractive structure. It has been on the Teddington landscape for many years but maybe it is time for change.

It is a shame that there are a few who, in their best interest, choose to voice false information. This is a pioneering venture that we can use to educate our children; we owe it to them to make a difference in securing our future energy. Teddington – do not listen to hearsay. This scheme is for your community so make your own intelligent and informed choice. Be a part of it.

MANDY TENNANT
Teddington

Sir – The Lensbury is voicing its concerns that their proximity to the proposed power generating project at Teddington Lock will have a negative impact on their site as a wedding venue.

So, as they feel the view and the noise is not conducive, I cannot help being surprised that they have not already planted some natural screening in the form of trees or flowering shrubs to block the, in my opinion, rather formidable existing view they already have of their part of the weir at Teddington Lock, and also going some way to mask the noise which at low tide twice a day can be at quite a volume.

Indeed the Archimedean screw turbines might well prove an attraction.

It would seem to me that this is perhaps not quite as much of an issue as they would like us to believe.

The green energy power for our area, however, most certainly is.

CHRISTINE ARNOLD
Via email

Cable's clear on runway

Sir – I was rather astonished by Boris Johnson's personal and quite frankly silly attack on Vince Cable over the issue of Heathrow expansion (April 17).

Of course Boris Johnson is only resorting to personal abuse to merely deflect attention away from his own failure to persuade the Conservative Party nationally to take a clear stance opposing a third Heathrow runway. The current Conservative Party manifesto does not even mention the word Heathrow, let alone provide any assurance against a third runway.

For the record Mr Cable has consistently opposed a third Heathrow runway and has repeatedly set out his firm

opposition. I was proud to march with Mr Cable back in 2008 against the expansion of Heathrow, and over the last few years he has repeatedly reiterated his clear position.

Unlike so many Conservatives he has not wavered on this issue. And for the record the Liberal Democrat 2015 general election specifically states: "We remain opposed to any expansion of Heathrow."

Twickenham residents should be aware that no such statement can be found in either the Labour or Conservative Party manifestos.

CAROLINE PIDGEON AM
Leader of the London Assembly, Liberal Democrats
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Borough View



Verna Evans was delighted to meet this feathered family in Kew Gardens last week – spring has most certainly sprung. If you have a picture you would like published in our weekly Borough View slot, email it to lettersrtt@london.newsquest.co.uk.

Bike danger

Sir – I cycle or drive through Twickenham nearly every day. The new layout of the High Street is putting cyclists in danger. The roads are now so narrow bikes are pushed into the same space as cars.

Bikes cannot undertake queuing traffic, and cars cannot overtake a slow cyclist without either skimming past them or entering an adjacent traffic lane. I thought the council wanted to encourage cyclists, not kill them.

NAME AND ADDRESS SUPPLIED