

Cllr Lib Peck

Leader of the Council
London Borough of Lambeth
Leader's office
Town Hall
Brixton Hill
London SW2 1RW

Date: 14th October 2015

Dear Lib Peck,

The Garden Bridge paradoxically seems to divide opinion. Some people are for, others against. It has also had a huge amount written about it; some of this is false but has fed a media frenzy which lurches from being highly supportive to jumping on whatever allegation has been raised most recently.

So why is an organisation like the Connection at St Martins, a large centre for homeless people in Westminster which delivers services to and tries to find solutions for over 4000 homeless people a year, involved and supportive? The answers are quite simple. To begin with we have stood back from the frenzy and taken a leap forward and thought about the opportunities such a venture might create. There are three of these. Firstly, directly involving our users as volunteers, as staff, as builders. They have the skills, so let's use the creation and management of the Bridge as a type of social enterprise giving jobs and work/volunteering experience to the many marginalised people who live near it. Secondly, let's use the Bridge as a way of showcasing the work of local community groups. Lambeth and other neighbouring Borough's house some of the best community gardening and urban farm projects in the country. Let's work in partnership with the Garden Bridge to put them on the map and celebrate their work in the same way the Eden project is in Cornwall.

Lastly, there is a developing agenda about greening Central London, whether this is parks on either side of the river, public or private space, roof gardens and/or vegetable patches on spare land. It may be organised or based on more guerrilla tactics. The end result however is to make London a more attractive and healthier space and place. By involving socially excluded people in the creation and maintenance of such spaces there is a double benefit with potential buy-in from a group of people who may not have historically seen the quality of their environment as a priority.

Yes there are downsides to adding yet another world class attraction to the area, yes there may be issues about how flows of people are handled at either end and there may be challenges about how the Bridge is integrated. These are however problems created by success. Let us all therefore show a willingness to look positively at opportunity and not turn a major and exciting addition to the London landscape into a threat.

We really hope it gets built and hope those with current doubts are prepared to re-examine their position and to keep their minds open.

Yours sincerely



Colin Glover
CEO of Connection at St Martins