



News release: Embargoed till Feb 22, 2011

**Thames Tunnel update: “Keeping our options open”**

In conjunction with St James Group Ltd (part of the Berkeley Group), Thames Water has bought land fronting the river at Chambers Wharf in Bermondsey, to ensure it can be considered as a key construction site for the Thames Tunnel.

The land can now be considered as a potential alternative to using King's Stairs Gardens in Rotherhithe – one of Thames Water's preferred shaft sites, which was included in the recent public consultation, which ran from 13 September 2010 to 14 January 2011.

Chambers Wharf's previous owners had secured planning permission to develop it for housing. As construction work had been expected to start in summer 2010, this meant Thames Water had discounted it as a possible site after it was agreed with the 14 potentially affected local authorities that the Thames Tunnel's construction should not involve demolishing housing.

The project is urgently needed to help tackle the 39 million tonnes of untreated sewage which overflows into the River Thames in an average year, when London's Victorian sewerage network becomes overloaded.

**Phil Stride, Thames Water's Head of London Tideway Tunnels, said:**

“Finding suitable potential locations for our major shaft sites has been really difficult. As a result, and due to the fact Chambers Wharf previously had to be discounted from our proposals, we could only present people in the Bermondsey area with one option for their comments during the first phase of our public consultation.

“When Chambers Wharf came up for sale, we had to act quickly to ensure we could consider the site in detail as a potential site. It is vital that we keep our options open.

"I must stress that this does not mean we will definitely use it, or that we have discounted King's Stairs Gardens.

"There is still a lot more work to be done, including further discussions with local communities, before we make any final decisions about the construction sites we need. Should Chambers Wharf prove not to be a suitable site for construction, we have the option to sell it.

"First and foremost, we must now listen to the views of local Chambers Wharf people on this unexpected change of circumstances."

Thames Water has arranged two drop-in sessions so local people can find out more and raise any concerns with the project team. These will be held at Beormund Community Centre, 177 Abbey St, London SE1 2AN on Friday 11 March (10am–7pm) and Saturday 12 March 2011 (10am–4pm).

**Phil Stride continued:**

"Before our next stage of consultation, due to start this September, we will be conducting detailed technical studies to assess the suitability of the Chambers Wharf site, similar to those already in hand for King's Stairs Gardens.

"Our challenge is to ensure we meet the environmental objectives of the scheme at a cost affordable for our customers, while also keeping disruption to a minimum."

Thames Water is due to publish its feedback report on the first phase of the public consultation by early April. During the consultation more than 4,750 people attended 25 public exhibitions and 3085 people submitted formal feedback. Thames Water also attended over 50 other public meetings to discuss the project with local communities who might be affected.

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**About the Thames Tunnel**

The proposed Thames Tunnel is a sewer up to 20 miles long, the width of three London buses, which will run from west to east London, up to 75 metres below ground, broadly following the route of the River Thames. It is needed to capture the 39 million tonnes of untreated sewage which discharged each year into the River Thames via 34 'Combined Sewer Overflows' (CSOs), and transfer it to Beckton Sewage Works for treatment.

The CSOs were designed by the Victorians as a safety feature to prevent the sewers – which capture both sewage and rainfall – from backing up into streets and gardens when full. Used only occasionally in the 19th century during heavy storms, these overflows can now discharge sewage into the river after as little as just 2mm of rainfall.

Although the Victorian sewers are still in excellent condition and are the backbone of today's sewerage system, they are not big enough to cope with a 21<sup>st</sup> century city which has trebled in size since 1850 and is continuing to grow. Many green spaces have been concreted over, preventing natural drainage and causing more rain water to enter the sewers.

The target date for the submission of the planning application is mid 2012. Initial construction of the Thames Tunnel is provisionally scheduled to start in 2013 with programmed completion in 2020.

#### **Notes to Editor**

- For more information call the Thames Water press office on 0118 373 8920
- If Chambers Wharf proves not to be the most viable site for any reason, Thames Water would exercise an option to sell the land to St James Group Ltd.