

TWICKENHAM REDISCOVERED CONSULTATION (July 2017)

JOINT VIEWS OF THE EEL PIE ISLAND ASSOCIATION, RIVERSIDE ACTION GROUP AND TWICKENHAM RIVERSIDE VILLAGE GROUP

General

These residents' groups welcome the November/December 2016 consultation process and the informal discussions with the Council which have preceded this formal consultation. However, the current proposal differs significantly from the site plans in Proposals 1 and 2 in the last consultation – with three major adverse consequences. Specifically:

- The decision to extend the existing service road behind King Street to join Water Lane cuts the development in half, to the detriment of pedestrian access.
- The footprint (depth and width) of Building B has been increased, to compensate for the loss of footprint to Building A (when compared to the previous Proposals 1 and 2) that is a direct result of the need to accommodate the extended service road. In addition, the level of the terrace is now c. 3m high to accommodate the undercroft car park. The combined effect of these – particularly when viewed from the Riverside – reinforces the sense of 'monolith', harking back to the original proposal which was roundly rejected by residents in 2015.
- The current proposal is not viable from either an historic heritage or community perspective. There is no evident community benefit.

The residents' groups are united in considering that the current design is driven too much by the desire to meet the logistic needs of the service road rather than to maximise connectivity for pedestrians, and too little by what will work as community open space.

Most importantly, the consultation document itself acknowledges that Twickenham is unique and that this project demands a similarly unique and imaginative approach which reflects Twickenham's historical and cultural significance, centred around the river. But where is the uniqueness in the proposed design? Building B, as proposed, bears no resemblance to the existing Twickenham Riverside clustered around the Church, Church Street and the eastern end of the Embankment – the historic village. Much more thought and imagination still needs to be brought to this critical project than is evident from the focus on the detailed aspects of a flawed proposal, as is evident in both the exhibition and its accompanying survey.

Specific proposals

Connectivity. The relationships between the high street, river, Diamond Jubilee Gardens and the Riverside terrace would be considerably enhanced by uniting the historic village into a single composition. Blocking off the Diamond Jubilee Gardens with a monolithic building and steering pedestrians up a rear service road to the Gardens generates a poor and sub-standard urban experience.

Drawing pedestrians down to the riverside. The level, wide pedestrian access to the new Riverside terrace shown on Richmond Council Proposals 1 and 2 has been compromised by the proposed extension to the service road. The lack of wide and level access to the Riverside terrace on the new proposal undermines the pedestrian movement that it sets out to enhance.

Service Road. The existing service road has been extended through to Water Lane. This is not necessary and we are not persuaded that this shared-access to Diamond Jubilee Gardens will work in practice. This change compromises unrestricted pedestrian access to the Riverside. A turning head incorporated into the existing service road would meet the difficulties identified for larger delivery vehicles. The service road should be subservient to pedestrian access.

Footprint/Layout of Buildings. The mass and design of Building B on the riverside remain inappropriate for the location. Building B should be broken up into three buildings, to reflect the scale and patterns of the historic village and complete it. The proposed width of the terrace should be retained. The breaking up of Building B and the creation of a wide internal 'lane' behind it would draw pedestrians towards Diamond Jubilee Gardens, which then become a Town Square for Twickenham. In addition, the storey heights of all the buildings should be reduced by a minimum of 30 cm per floor, effectively lowering the height of the development by over one metre throughout.

Style and landscaping. The appearance of all the buildings will be crucial to the success of the development. This should not be limited to variations of a single theme but reflect the tremendous variety of styles within the existing historic village. While the consultation seeks to draw on a range of architectural styles local to Twickenham, the devil is always in the detail. Residents wish to be consulted closely on the detailed plans as they emerge. The design must be distinctive and not merely echo that of similar buildings in other parts of the Borough.

Uses. Leaving aside the intention for commercial/café/restaurant/community activity to be located on the ground floor of both Buildings A and B, the focus in the current proposal is for the upper floors to be entirely taken up with residential property. We regard this as excessive and again this reverts to the proportions of residential-to-other uses in the discredited original proposal. The current proposal does not reflect the range of uses said on p3 of the consultation document to be part of the new design brief – that refers only to 'some residential'.

Economic viability. We assert that the changes we suggest to the layout of the buildings and to the uses can be achieved while maintaining the economic viability of the overall project. We regard as key principles in this development that the Council must retain full ownership of the entire site, so that it can maintain effective control over it into the long-term future, and that the economic contribution from commercial and residential opportunities in Building A should be maximised, so as to allow the volume of the buildings on the Riverside terrace to be reduced.

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