

9 September 2017

Dear RAG supporters

Following further meetings this week with the Council – both Councillors and planners – and also reports in the Richmond & Twickenham Times and social media, we think the time is now right to give you the most recent news about Twickenham Riverside. As well as RAG, the meetings have also involved three other community groups – Twickenham Riverside Village Group, Eel Pie Island Association and Twickenham Riverside Trust (responsible for the Diamond Jubilee Gardens) – all with a common position. Together our groups represent more than 3000 residents.

As those of you who have been actively engaged with RAG will know, we have been working with community groups and shop keepers for over two years to get the best possible financial, aesthetic and practical results for the whole community. It is thanks to your helpful comments and suggestions that we have been able to continue to engage with the other stakeholders and planners. So thank you for your help.

Following the last consultation we have succeeded in persuading the Council to totally review its plans put forward in this Summer's consultation – abandoning the concept of linking the service road behind King Street to Water Lane, reducing dramatically the footprint of the proposed building on the embankment, and providing space for a sizeable town square near to the river. There has been a substantial reversion to the plans approved in November 2016 by more than 70% of 630 respondents, but the current proposals are likely to offer a significant improvement on those designs too. Also agreed is the provision of wide single-level pedestrian access to the Riverside with, as publicly requested, a clear view from King Street down towards the river.

We have worked with the other groups to reduce the impact of cars but recognise that – unlike Richmond's riverside – Twickenham has for more than a century been a working waterfront allowing access to horses, wagons, carts, and eventually cars and delivery trucks to serve our market gardens, boat yard, shops and homes. At our meeting we agreed that there should be restricted, timed access for large service vehicles.

Thanks to our constructive engagement with all three groups including the Trustees of Diamond Jubilee Gardens, we can also report that the new design footprint provides the publicly expressed wish for open connectivity not just with the riverside but also with the gardens and Water Lane.

There are signs, in other words, that the Council is acknowledging the importance of 'community' viability in terms of the contribution of the project to Twickenham's heritage and wider economy beyond the site itself, as compared with a stance that pursues the economic viability of the development (one of the topics of the Council-led workshops in September 2016) above all else.

Critical to the entire concept are of course the styles of design and materials. Our groups have negotiated that the building on King Street should be in keeping with the style and materials of the current shops and that facing Eel Pie Island reflect the wood clad 'village' of the island. So there will be a mix of styles and uses rather than the monolithic design shown recently in the recent R&T Times. That design, you will recall, was abandoned over 18 months ago thanks to your insistence.

There have been many people who have contacted us and said 'just let the Council get on with it' and perhaps it would have been the easier, less time-consuming solution, but it would not have resulted in the best outcome for Twickenham. All the community groups that have persisted to engage with the Council are deeply conscious of the need for financial viability

(Council tax is already high in our Borough), the importance of the community retaining ownership and control of the site, and last but by no means least the inspiration that will inject life into our town centre – i.e. community viability and sustainability.

RAG continues to engage with both the strategic planners and larger Council planning group so please continue to feed us your thoughts.

The next public consultation date is from 3rd October until 22nd/23rd October. We will contact you at the start of the consultation to provide our viewpoint.

Our best wishes

The RAG Team (Marion, Mark, Peter and Susan).