

THE RIVERSIDE CONTROVERSY – CHALLENGE FOR TWICKENHAM'S FUTURE

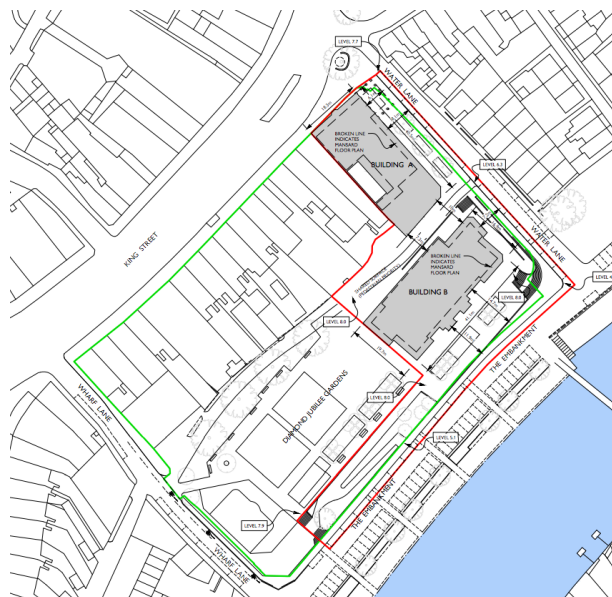
We are writing again because there is a need to clarify the true picture regarding RAG's support of the present proposal for the Riverside development, in the face of some highly personal and misleading criticism of the RAG position.

In response to universal condemnation of the Council's original concept proposal in its consultation in November 2015, RAG developed a 'community brief' in Spring 2016. This was widely supported and has formed the mandate for the pursuit by RAG of closer – critical but constructive – engagement with the Council since then, with the aim of influencing the proposals as they evolved. RAG supporters have in the intervening period been invited to public meetings and received regular updating newsletters describing the progress of our talks with the Council and always inviting comment. Our strategy and action have been guided by your responses.

It is being suggested that RAG has kowtowed to the Council's proposal and departed from its original position. This is untrue. Over the last 18 months, but particularly since Spring this year, RAG has also worked with the three other local groups – the Twickenham Riverside Village Group, Eel Pie Association and the Twickenham Riverside Trust (responsible for the Diamond Jubilee Gardens) –to maximise the influence of residents over the Council's plans. This has been particularly effective following the joint response by three of these to the April consultation.

The Council's proposal

The Council's final proposal was that in the April consultation below and was strongly contested by RAG and the other local groups because of the building mass on the Embankment (Building B in a single very large unit, blocking rather than opening the river end of the site) and the lack of pedestrian-only access to the Diamond Jubilee Gardens, in favour of a through road between Buildings A and B.



The present proposal differs massively from that. Contrary to the assertion of the Park-Not-Car-Park (PNCP) group and its supporters, this is not the 'Council's scheme' but one driven by those groups of residents who have been active on this issue in a practical way for close to two years.



The latest (October) scheme:

- Creates a large square/open space on the corner of the Embankment and Water Lane, the size of two tennis courts that can be used for many different public activities
- Has provided an 8 meter wide pedestrian only street (Church St. is 7.5 meters wide) that connects the community space with the Diamond Jubilee Gardens
- Maintains a substantial terrace along the Embankment, identified in the Thames Landscape Strategy as the best viewing point for the river here
- Creates good pedestrian flows and vistas from King Street down towards the river and through to the Diamond Jubilee Gardens
- Has reduced by about half the mass and scale of the building planned for the Embankment
- Accepts that the only solution which is viable in terms of servicing the local river based industries and community is one which allows the continuation of an access road along the Embankment
- Is subject to a continuing commitment by the Council to involve the groups in decisions on the style and materials of the architecture of the buildings.

Three other developments are also highly significant – that (1) the Council has accepted a much wider approach to ‘economic return’ to the development taking into account the wider picture of the boost to the whole town’s economy rather than just the return on the site itself and (2) something we all pressed for - a second firm of architects has been brought in to assist with the project design (3) it has accepted that the development must be controlled by the Council and that the freehold of the land, unlike a previous scheme in 2009, is preserved for the community.

Any objective assessment of the present proposal would see that these follow the wishes in the community brief, which essentially called for:

- The withdrawal of the proposal and a return to the design stage
- A new focus on the provision of a town centre for Twickenham that defines our town and its working riverside and the development of a whole-site solution as a harmonious area with good open space for public enjoyment – a hub for the local community and a draw for visitors
- An enhancement of the working waterfront taking its cue from Eel Pie Island and from the immediate locality including the Embankment church and plugging into the ribbon of landscape and heritage linking Twickenham and Richmond

- Are the proposed pedestrian flows and connectivity adequate for drawing people to the proposed open space and the riverside embankment?
- How much would such a scheme cost (for example, construction of an underground (as compared with basement) car park beside the Thames)?
- What are the financial implications of this concept to the economy of the entire Borough and what other services might have to be cut in order to pay for it?
- What will happen to the top of the projected town square? How practical is it and what evidence is there that the new owners of the shops and flats along that stretch of King Street will develop their back gardens and rear elevations as the concept suggests? How long would that take?
- What evidence is there that those owners will be prepared to sell one of two properties in order to allow a cut-through to the square, without which pedestrian flows and views to the river would again be severely restricted? And again at what cost? The three buildings on the corner of Water lane, purchased as public request cost the local taxpayer £6.5 million
- Does the PNCP concept actually fit the particular characteristics of Twickenham with its working waterfront - or does it instead imitate the approach to the riverside in Richmond?
- How is it suggested that the fact of the 125-year lease of the Diamond Jubilee Gardens should be addressed - and again at what cost?

Without clear well researched answers to these questions, the PNCP concept remains fanciful.

Final remarks

The present (October) scheme – which is the product of genuine consultation – whatever its detractors may suggest – is not a political statement by the Council or the local groups. It is a genuine endeavour to achieve a long-term solution for the future of Twickenham which meets the initial hopes of RAG members and other residents' groups and which matches the character of Twickenham with its working waterfront rather than create a mini-Richmond.

As ever, your views are invited to guide our future approach and actions.

Mark, Marion, Peter & Susan

23rd October 2017