

Hello again!

Thank you to those who have sent in comments and to everyone who was able to join us at the Twickenham Club last Tuesday. It was a well-attended meeting with a good discussion for over 1 ½ hours of the design proposals for the Riverside project, following the last public exhibition. While this report inevitably only represents the views of those who were there, hopefully it will offer you some thoughts on the designs and will help you form your responses to the consultation, which have to be sent in or completed on-line by this coming **Wednesday 2 October**.

Whatever your decision, please make sure that you have a final look at the designs on the Council website (if you need to) and put in your comments by that deadline. Specifically, we would urge you to make your overall preference or preferences clear in your submission. We say this because, while the form asks for your comments on the positive elements of each of the five designs and on elements which should be improved, it does not specifically seek a view on your preferred architect overall, which is a failing. Equally, if you think one or other of the designs misses the target largely or completely, we suggest you make that clear.

RAG will also send in to the Council a commentary based on the discussion at the meeting (as set out here) and any further replies you wish to send us. We will also seek a common position with the other residents' groups with whom we have worked in the past.

General principles

We opened the discussion by recalling the general principles for the Riverside which have been agreed by RAG and guided our contributions to date, including the importance of maintaining:

- the character of the Twickenham Riverside
- open community space including the Gardens and linking Twickenham to the Riverside
- good pedestrian and cycling connectivity between the adjoining streets/areas and the riverfront
- the right mix of uses for the buildings on the site
- easy and balanced access and traffic flow, including sufficient parking to meet all needs
- continuing close consultation by the Council with residents.

The designs

All the designs were projected onto a screen and were considered in turn. While some minor individual features were supported, there was little or no support for three of the five proposals (except in one reply which had been received before our meeting, which was relayed to those present) namely those of

Architects 2, 4 and 5. The reasoning was:

- Neither 2 nor 5 were thought to reflect – or bring anything striking to – the character of Twickenham riverside, either in their substance or their architecture.
- While 4 offered some interesting architectural elements including the concept of the villa, the layout offered little coherent green space with inefficient use of the long paved stepping down to the riverfront. The result was similar to the waterfront in Richmond, but without the green and in the wrong context.
- There was a helpful emphasis in all three on the opening up of the perspective from the King St and Water Lane junction down towards the river, but this did not overturn the disadvantages.

We moved on to detailed discussion of the proposals by Architects 1 and 3.

On Architect 3:

- There was considerable debate about the concept of the natural pool, which appealed to a number of people. With this having such prominence and taking up a large space on the site, it was decided that the viability of the overall design depended on the decision whether or not such a pool complex was wanted. Ultimately it was not thought that it would succeed, as it fell between different stools. With only two lanes, it would not attract swimmers looking for proper swimming lanes. Secondly, while many were drawn to the idea of wild swimming, that was not really the case here. Thirdly,

while a pool which was an attraction for families with children was welcomed, it was thought unlikely that this would be actively used by many outside the Summer months. There was also a view that Twickenham had only one opportunity to develop this site and this would mean that such a large area would only be accessible to the public on a paying basis.

That would leave insufficient public open community space (and green space) and no sense of a 'promenade' on the riverside as exists currently (the possibility to sit close to, and observe, the river and activities on it).

- There was some support for the concept of a covered market off the King St/Water Lane junction, though not for the McDonald's or Wembley style arches. In contrast, there was no enthusiasm for the long and heavy row of buildings across most of the width of the site.
- The children's play area was commended as interesting, innovative and well thought through.

Architect 1 was regarded from the start by the large majority present as the front-runner and this was confirmed overwhelmingly after the discussion:

- Pros included its compatibility with the rest of the riverside and Eel Pie Island, the large amount of well-designed public open space (both green and paved), the sense of an 'open feel', less overwhelmed by buildings and balconies, the continued existence of a 'promenade' completing this section of the Thames path.
- Above all, there was a feeling that this was the one design that allowed for **flexibility** both in the present and for the future – e.g. with buildings suited to a wide range and mix of uses; the possibility of extending the undercroft area in the building at the bottom of Wharf Lane to accommodate more parking as required e.g. for market traders; the ability to incorporate aspects of the existing infrastructure; and just generally.
- There was active support for the 'Winter garden' and the linkages around that end of the embankment.
- The suggested location of the Eel Pie Museum was noted and approved.
- On the negative side, the access to the service road (behind the proposed location for the Eel Pie Island Museum) seems totally inadequate and incapable of taking the long lorries required occasionally to make deliveries to the Island (e.g. steel for the big boatyard). The preferred solution, which would also break up the mass of the long building down Water Lane, would be to replace the small archway entrance with a proper gap for the service road, making the building housing the museum a separate building. That is important for traffic flow.
- Secondly, although it is acknowledged that the pedestrian access down Water Lane to the Embankment has been widened, it was felt that more should be done to make the draw down Water Lane from King Street more appealing, perhaps by drawing on the ideas of Architect 2.
- Other suggestions for improvement included reducing the height of the end building on Wharf Lane and/or moving it a bit back from the riverfront to give riverside space; and incorporating some or all of the playground concepts from Architect 3.

The combination of the above points resulted in the clear view of those present at the meeting that the design of Architect 1 was the best and should be used as the starting point for the next phase of the development. The consensus was striking.

Last thoughts

Other points emphasised, which will be included in the RAG comments to the Council, are:

- A key factor in the assessment of the designs should be to ensure that the chosen design should preserve the existing and future economy and nature of Eel Pie Island.
- Considerable importance should be attached to getting the final mix of uses in the Riverside village project and in Twickenham's town centre right.
- The lack of an assessment to date of the impact of removing and adjusting the existing parking – particularly the almost total removal of Pay & Display from the embankment – needs to be corrected, so that there are no unforeseen consequences for the town's economy and life. So far,

the focus has been only on how lost parking spaces may be provided elsewhere, not on the practical and economic impact.

- Finally, the riverside and embankment do currently work for residents and visitors (even if there is a pressing need to develop the site). The end product must continue to encourage the current diversity of business and leisure activities, the daily and informal recreational activities on the water and on the 'promenade', and cultural aspects relating to the river and this area – all of which underpin that success.

Many thanks and congratulations for staying to the end of this long missive! As ever, all views welcomed. And, please, make sure you get your comments in on time!

All the best

Mark, Marion & Peter