

Hi everyone,

This is to update you on the latest developments regarding the Twickenham Riverside project, particularly in the light of a meeting last week of the Stakeholders' Reference Group, in which RAG and the other residents groups were involved. It happens too that the Council has just put up a report on progress and a number of images on its website – see [here](#). While this is reasonably comprehensive, as you will see from this newsletter, we regard the picture presented there as over-generous and rather 'rosy'!

At the stakeholder meeting, for the first time, we received a comprehensive and clear presentation by the winning architect (Hopkins) of the significant constraints they have faced as a result of the Environment Agency (EA) requirements relating to flood defences and storage on the Twickenham Embankment. You may remember that the firms of architects who took part in the design competition last year were asked to do so by the Council on the basis that each firm would inform itself of the flood issues affecting the Riverside site and would take account of those as best as possible in its proposed design. With the benefit of hindsight, it would have been better for the Council to consult with the EA and instruct all the architects more precisely prior to the competition. As it is, the EA requirements have in effect rewritten the project brief and now nearly a year later this has led to a substantially changed Hopkins design for the Riverside development as compared with that which won the competition last November.

Additionally, it is clear that Hopkins is under time pressure from the Council to close off the initial design phase – including final decisions on the footprint of buildings – to allow the Council to pursue its plan for a formal consultation on the revised design shortly, in November, before the start of planning processes.

Important new points have just come to light. The main changes in the revised design would:-

- widen Water Lane to allow better views from the King Street junction and traffic flows, particularly at the lower end. This is welcomed and would mean greatly reducing the depth of the long Water Lane building;
- reconfigure the Embankment/Wharf Lane corner of the site to accommodate the EA flood storage demands. This would involve substantial widening of Wharf Lane (which is essentially 'wasted' space) and moving the Wharf Lane building back from the river, whilst also placing it on a podium protected by a high wall (+2.4m) with maintenance clearance on both sides – thereby removing the area in the original design which included a boathouse and a thoroughfare under the buildings held up by 'stilts'. The effect of this would be to reduce the area open down to the river itself to about half of what is currently there (two of the 8-parking-space sections). It would also accentuate the different levels of the river embankment and the park/gardens above that and require a new set of steps (at 90 degrees to the river) to gain access to the building;
- change the mass of the Wharf Lane buildings substantially, merging the two buildings together and losing the Winter Garden concept in-between (which we had liked). The plan would also combine the 'Pavilion' building and the Water Lane building;
- reduce the overall mass of the buildings on the site by one-third, with little adverse effect on economic viability.

Meanwhile, the questions (to which we referred in our previous newsletter) remain as to how the proposed design would satisfactorily provide for the servicing and access needed by the businesses and residents of Eel Pie Island. More details are needed on how to resolve these issues, to be sure that big lorries would have adequate space to reverse and turn at the foot of Water Lane near the river while pedestrians and cyclists could move along the riverside safely.

Our reaction is:

1. The EA's flood defence requirements are far more stringent than what was known and made clear at the time of the competition last year. The site is therefore not as was presented then – the

space available is significantly more constrained – and all five shortlisted architect entries displayed at the public exhibition at Clarendon House would have been non-compliant.

2. The look and feel of the *revised* Hopkins design is very different from the *original* Hopkins winning design – and has lost elements of ‘Twickenham village’ including the spaces between buildings such as the Winter Garden. This aspect of the connection to the wharves and spaces on Eel Pie Island has also been lost.
3. Depending how much green space and ‘park’ is retained (not clear from the current images), the impression currently is of a much greater degree of bunched-up, ‘block-like’ buildings, steps, paved areas and pavements than expected. Contrary to all of our aspirations (including the architect’s), that comes across as rather dull. The revised design is certainly not eye-catching in the way that Hopkins originally intended – and as residents of Twickenham and visitors to the Riverside would no doubt wish.
4. The consultative processes with stakeholders have been welcome, but they have been marked this year by long silences and often only activated after stakeholder pressure. While the Council has convened meetings of the Stakeholder Reference Group with opportunities to ask questions and express views, too often information has been presented to stakeholders abruptly without time for consideration of revised proposals before meetings. The effect – exacerbated by virtual rather than face-to-face conferencing during this Covid period — has been to limit the meetings largely to factual reporting with little opportunity for meaningful exchanges between the Council and stakeholders. There have also been meetings with individual groups, but with little follow through.
5. We do not yet know how the formal consultation will be framed, but such has been the recent steep learning curve of the EA flood requirements that we do not consider the design as now proposed, including final layout and building-footprints, is ready yet. There is a consensus among the stakeholder groups that more time is needed for proper reflection and engagement with stakeholders (who include architects and experts) on the best way of meeting the EA requirements and of resolving the other issues. This need not be lengthy: postponement by 2-3 months would allow space for Hopkins to engage in meaningful consultation, prepare and present a new design to respond to the EA requirements and win the support of residents. Given the deficiencies and gaps in what is currently being proposed, the allowing of that extra time is going to be very important.

We will report again when the way ahead is clearer. In this newsletter, our aim has been to put you in the picture ahead of the wider consultation scheduled for November. It will of course be important for each and every one of you to take her/his own view of that and to comment in due course.

As ever, all comments welcomed. And stay safe and well!

Marion, Peter & Mark