

Hello all,

Many thanks to those of you who shared views with us on the latest Council's consultation.

Please see below a note we have written to the Council.

We will continue to watch how this project evolves and continue to keep you informed of developments. .

Best wishes and stay safe!

Peter, Marion and Mark
The RAG team

TWICKENHAM RIVERSIDE

Now that the Council's consultation has closed and that the public's views are being collated, we wish to make clear the position of the Riverside Action Group (RAG) on the present proposals for the Riverside development. The general questions asked in your formal consultation have given an opportunity for a broad-based re-assessment of our position in the light of the explanations and picture boards you presented, and also of the information available to the wide range of stakeholder groups.

We welcome the Council's continuing commitment and energy towards developing this important site and particularly the part of the site which has remained derelict for the last 40 years. However, we still have major reservations about the present design, which we know are also shared by other stakeholder groups.

Finding the right solution for our Riverside is a historic decision and sadly – while we appreciate the difficulty of achieving a design which satisfies everyone – it is increasingly clear that this is becoming a lost opportunity.

Our judgement is that, despite the good elements in the design, it has lost the look and feel of the original winning design and that other factors have emerged over the last 18 months that have changed the environment in which this development now needs to be considered. The principal among these are the Environment Agency's strict flood defence requirements (only made public late in the day) and – in a much wider context – the evolution of retail and commercial activity, both generally and in the light of the Covid pandemic. On the latter, we wonder whether it would not be wise to review the scope of the proposed development, in view of the foreseeable financial pressures at the present time on all local administrations.

We acknowledge the quality and efforts of the chosen architect, Hopkins. However, we are deeply concerned that the Council has – on certain core aspects – not listened to many of the stakeholder groups, which have suggested in different ways that this project has lost its way and that it does not (in its present form) create the signature destination that Twickenham wants and needs. The main reason for this is that the open space that it promises is in many ways illusory and fails to improve on the popular and much used open space that is already there today.

1. **Not the destination it claims to be.** Reluctantly, our conclusion is that the design, particularly on the west side (towards Wharf Lane), is uninspiring and lacklustre and ends up reducing the net usable open space for Twickenham residents and visitors. As such, the proposal fails to meet the basic objective of creating an active and distinctive destination space, which will act as a draw for both residents and visitors and also help regenerate the town of Twickenham.

2. **Lost public open space.** Our view is that – despite all the good ideas in the proposal – the new open space offered simply does not enhance that which is there today, if one takes into account the full Diamond Jubilee Gardens combined with the space and promenade on the Embankment, once the car parking is removed. We do not see any real coherence in the new public space, which is too fragmented, and we are not convinced of the value of the re-provisioned Gardens. It does not have the feel of the open space of the existing Gardens. We have also still to be persuaded that the events space or the play area (too narrow) will work optimally.
3. **Wharf Lane building.** Related to the issue of open space, the biggest factor is the proposed Wharf Lane building which would be overbearing – in its mass (footprint and height), its position, the consequent need to widen Wharf Lane (to little or no practical benefit), and its encroachment on the public open space provided in the development. The Council's consistent refusal to open itself up to new thinking on this building means that the site is subject to stricter flood defence requirements than would otherwise be required and that less usable space is available on the upper level of the riverside. This destroys the sense of 'park' or 'gardens' that is there today and that so many residents have appreciated and called for over the years. One way of remedying this would be to remove the building (or at least reduce its footprint and height radically). We appreciate that this would have an impact on the cost and financial viability of the project – but equally, in the context of the financial pressures referred to above, less building on the site requires less outlay.
4. **Connectivity to the river.** The whole value of the redevelopment should be to improve public access to and engagement with the river itself. We welcome the Council's stated emphasis on this objective and much can be done to realise it through facilitating and organising activities on the riverside (upper and lower). However, the layout and nature of the public open spaces adjoining the river is critical here and the south west corner of the site in the proposal is very 'pinched' if facilities for river-based pursuits and boathouses are to be provided there. We believe that so much more could be achieved with a smaller or no Wharf Lane building and consequently less need for the loss of upper-level space occasioned by the widening of Wharf Lane.
5. **Water Lane.** We welcome the widening of the pavement and slimming down of the building proposed for Water Lane (leading from the Santander corner to the Eel Pie Island bridge) and consider that will encourage people to go down to the riverside. As to the look of the building, because of its size (height and length) in comparison with the other buildings on the Lane, the detail of its design and the materials used will be very important. In particular, it is hoped that the 'block' nature of the side of the building running down Water Lane can be broken up so as to make it more attractive and 'sympathetic'.
6. **Access and servicing aspects.** It is clearly essential that the servicing needs of all residents and businesses on and adjacent to the site must be taken into account, particularly those on Eel Pie Island, and RAG defers on specifics to those more directly affected. We acknowledge the complexities and sensitivities. We also recognise the endeavours and desire of the Council to find a way through these. The balance to be struck here is between carefully limited intrusions across the Embankment car-free space (i.e. the ability for the largest lorries to pass subject to genuinely strict limitations), ensuring greater safety for pedestrians and cyclists at the bottom of Water Lane, and – most importantly – the needs of the businesses and other residents on the Island which must be protected.

The Council has insisted on pushing ahead with this consultation at this time, despite the reservations expressed by stakeholder groups. Now that the consultation has taken place, we look forward to hearing how many local residents have submitted replies and what they have said – with those replies subject to independent analysis and review as in previous consultations (i.e. avoiding a short synthesis generated in-house).

We would be happy to enlarge on the points above, if you would find that helpful.
Peter

Peter Newborne - on behalf of RAG