

Hello everyone,

Twickenham Riverside Development: the next crucial stage

This is an update regarding the proposed re-development of Twickenham Riverside.

The public inquiry

As noted in our previous newsletter, the next key event - coming soon - is the public inquiry ordered by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

The planning inspector appointed by the Secretary of State will hold the sessions of the inquiry on the following days in June: Tuesday 6th to Thursday 8th, June; Tuesday 13th to Thursday 15th, June; Tuesday 20th to Thursday 22nd, June; and Tuesday 27th to Thursday 29th, June - exact times during those days to be informed by the planning inspector.

Members of the public can be present to listen to the sessions which will be held at Clarendon Hall, York House, Twickenham. We understand there will also be on-line access also (viewing only).

In preparation, the inspector held a pre-inquiry meeting in March to discuss and agree the procedure for the inquiry including organisation of the programme and presentation of evidence – as well as the timetable of actions and contributions by the parties *prior* to the event (on that, see below).

Why the public inquiry?

Here is a rapid recall of the reasons why the public inquiry is necessary - and important - as described in our previous newsletter (by all means skip this section if your memory of the details does not need jogging...).

The Council's planning application for the Riverside was considered and approved by the committee of local Councillors and Council officers at the Council's Planning Committee meeting on Thursday 24th November, 2022. Normally, the Council would be authorised to go ahead with the building BUT, in this case, the Council is seeking to take land – the Diamond Jubilee Gardens, in the middle of the proposed construction site - away from its current owners, the Twickenham Riverside Trust (TRT). The Council could not - and cannot - therefore, proceed without its intended next step of imposing a compulsory purchase order (CPO) of 'land and new rights' on the riverside site, including of the Gardens.

As described in our previous newsletters, we at RAG are of the view that the design of the proposed new building for 25 private apartments on Wharf Lane (on the south west corner of the site) with its height and mass (higher than King Street) and location close to the river would be over-bearing and inappropriate for Twickenham Riverside with its particular characteristics in what is a 'Conservation Area' (see below). The Wharf Lane building would be constructed on half of the existing Diamond Jubilee Gardens.

The trustees of the TRT - which is responsible for the Gardens under the 125-year lease granted to it by the Council in 2014 - explained to the Council's Planning Committee what would be the impact of the proposed development on the Gardens in terms of a loss of coherent public open space which can accommodate a variety of usages. Despite that, the Committee approved the planning application.

While the planning permission is a necessary prerequisite to application of the CPO, it is not sufficient. The key issue still remains to be decided of the size of the 're-provisioned area' (split above and below the flood plain) and whether the proposed area would be 'of equal or better amenity value' as compared with the existing Gardens.

The TRT had previously submitted (as noted in our newsletters) in November 2021 its objections to the CPO in letters addressed to the Secretary of State. At that, the Secretary of State ordered the public inquiry.

Pre-inquiry statements of the case for, and against

The timetable set by the planning inspector provides for the Council, as the local authority, to set out the reasons for why it is seeking a CPO. This the Council has done in its [Statement of case](#) (135 pages).

The TRT will, soon, submit its response, highlighting its assessment of the flaws and factual inaccuracies in the Council's case. When this becomes public, we will let you know.

The TRT's case is based on its view that most of the declared objectives of the Council's proposed scheme – removal of parking and the current derelict area (on the north west part of the site), as well as opening up of access to the Diamond Jubilee Gardens and Twickenham Riverside as a distinctive destination – can be achieved without reducing the size and quality of the open space in the site.

The Council will then have the right to reply.

This crucial next step - and the opportunity it could offer

The public inquiry will be critical, as the opportunity to voice in public the questions and concerns raised by the Council's proposal for the Riverside.

Were the Council's application to be found by the Inspector to be an inappropriate use of the CPO powers, the development as currently proposed by the Council would not be able to go ahead. That would open up the opportunity to find an alternative better suited to this unique area - confirming the objectives of the Council's proposed scheme, but reducing or eliminating the amount of building on the west end of the site.

Twickenham Riverside Conservation Area

The space on which the Council wants to build this proposed development comes within the Twickenham Riverside Conservation Area.

In parallel to the CPO process, the Council is currently engaged in updating its appraisal of the Twickenham Riverside Conservation Area (last carried out, as far as we are aware, in the early 2000s).

The definition of 'conservation area' is 'an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'.

In line with that, the purpose of the TRT's objection to the CPO is to achieve (as set out in the TRT's petition) 'genuine improvements on the Riverside for future generations to enjoy', namely: "Improvements to Twickenham Riverside that will see the existing footprint of Diamond Jubilee Gardens remain free from development, the withdrawal of the Wharf Lane Building proposal, and the trees retained - so as to preserve and protect the Public Open Space on the Riverside for the benefit of the Public".

A design gone wrong

We at RAG had an opportunity to speak at the 24th November meeting and we took the opportunity to express our wish – together with presumably most everybody in the borough – to see the current derelict area removed and transformed in a positive way, for the benefit of local residents and visitors.

As we have set out in previous RAG newsletters, our view is that the proposed design would *not* do that. We question the need for so much density of build (45 flats in total) on this site, in such a special location by the river, within the Conservation Area. Is that the 'exciting destination... championing the river' - the Council's words in its planning application – that this very special place needs?!

As ever, we hope the above is useful - and we welcome your comments.

If you do not wish to receive further communications from us, please go to the bottom of this newsletter and click on 'unsubscribe'.

All the best

The RAG team