

TWICKENHAM SOCIETY GROUP (TSG)'s

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT BRIEF

VISION

Background

The Twickenham Swimming Pool occupies a niche site on the River Thames. It was built on the gardens of Richmond House, which was one of the grand Houses built upon the Thames, alongside a working river with an important inland port and a local community of workers in the river-related businesses.

The house was bought by the local Council in 1924 for leisure use of the community. In due course it was divided into a commercial development, which resulted in the King St Parade and a Public Baths.

The current process will, inevitably, reduce further the proportion of public use of a site that was purchased for the purpose of public leisure use.

For the local community and amenity groups there are three possible responses to this process:

1. Insist that the pool site shall remain exclusively for public use
2. Accept the economic realities underlying the process, but insist that the commercial element is minimal and that public utility of the site is maximal.
3. Help to bring about a public asset that is self-supporting on a site with minimal, low scale development. (Elements of this idea underlay the Twickenham Challenge.)

The Twickenham Society Group (TSG) supported the concept of the Twickenham Challenge, but recognised the inherent practical limitations of the approach adopted to bring it about. We understand why the Council has reverted to a mixed development, and believe that they have made important changes to the ground

rules that give it a much better chance of working than before. Accordingly, we are adopting the stance implicit in the second of the above options. Furthermore, we have a vision as to how it could be done with style, so as to satisfy the public, the developer, the local community and, hence, the Council.

Concept

The most famous of the grand riverside houses was Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill. Its stunning design attracted many visitors, who expected to be, and were, shown around the house and grounds. The build of the house made innovative use on construction materials, well ahead of their time. At the foot of the gardens, the strand alongside the river was freely used by the public and the river workmen. Walpole noted how the rural setting was offset and given vibrancy by the activities and community of the port at Twickenham.

We think it would be good for the Twickenham Poolsite redevelopment to adopt that style in a manner appropriate to the 21st Century. Thus, the rear and Wharf Lane parts of the site could be assigned to residences of high architectural quality, built as exemplars of sustainability. Public facilities and assets would be on Water Lane and the Embankment, with the River Centre and playground at the corner of the two. In this context, "public facilities" could include a café and restaurant/bar, as well as open space, seating etc. The development needs to ensure that the private and public parts work in harmony.

It is necessary that traffic access and parking on the Embankment is retained to support the needs of the local businesses, residents and visitors. However, this could be done with less visual intrusion, and the Embankment could be used more flexibly to support events and river-related activities. To do this will require that the landscaping of the Embankment is changed for the better, to a new layout that will make tree-lovers rejoice, hide the cars and make the Embankment a good place to go to enjoy, whether it is approached from land or river. It will also need to be able to cope with flooding, already a problem, and one that is set to increase.

Pros & Cons

The advantages of this approach are:

- It offers the best chance of getting a low-scale development with maximal public usage.

- It will cause the least disruption to the local community because it will put minimal strain on traffic and parking, it will not generate rowdy activities, it will blend with existing residential buildings and the new owners will patronise local shops.
- It offers a realistic chance for the creation of a showpiece of sustainability.
- It will bring added wealth to Twickenham Centre, without adding competing businesses away from the true commercial centre of the town.
- Housing will provide informal policing of the public spaces.
- However, it must not be a gated community or in any way cut off from the central open spaces.

The principle disadvantages are avoidable:

- Financial underpinning of the scheme is dependent upon the Council.
- It is dependent upon the Developer and the Council resisting the itch to cram extra commercial development on the site, at the expense of public usage.
- The landscaping should be carried out separately from the development to ensure that the whole of the Waterfront is properly and consistently treated. Neither TLS nor the Council should be sucked into a landscaping scheme for which the developer is responsible. Better for the Council to use a 106 arrangement and retain control.

DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS

Following the local election of 2002, and the collapse of the Dawney Day scheme, the new Council requested the views of the Twickenham Society Group about the possible redevelopment of the pool site. This resulted in a discussion paper, "Rethink on the Riverside", that summarised lessons learnt from previous attempts at development of the site. This was followed by conceptual drawings by local architects that illustrated a radically different approach. Both of these attracted a good deal of support within the community and were welcomed by Councillors and Council Officers.

We have re-examined that paper in the light of changes that have taken place over the last five years and after hearing and discussing a presentation by Paul Chadwick about the Council's current approach and aspirations.

The following is a brief summary of the factors that we think important if the Council is to achieve its objectives, and if the vision outlined above is to be brought to fruition.

CORE PRINCIPLES

- i. It is a riverside site and any development must respect the river.
- ii. It requires a low scale, permeable development in keeping with the spirit, as well the letter, of the Inspector's report of 1991 Public Inquiry.
- iii. The site is primarily for the leisure use of the public. Hence the identifiable public assets, such as the River Centre, playground and public open space, easily accessible by all of the public, are priorities and should occupy prime parts of the site.
- iv. Any enabling development should be appropriate for a riverside site whose leisure facilities are aimed at family use.
- v. Design to be of high architectural merit and in sympathy with the townscape and the working riverside. Buildings to be exemplars of sustainability.
- vi. Existing traffic flows and parking levels within the riverside area need to be maintained. It is desirable that parking be made less intrusive by re-siting it within the riverside area or by careful landscaping.
- vii. The development should be concordant with the ambience and economic workings of the local riverside community.
- viii. The Embankment is not part of the site, but it is long overdue for upgrading. This needs to be considered in the context of the poolsite redevelopment.
- ix. The Council's profit from the redevelopment should be used to support the public aspects of the site and Embankment, not spent elsewhere within the Borough.

SPECIFICS

1. Context

- i. The site is a transitional link between the river and the town.
- ii. Let the river drive what is done to the site so that its heritage will be preserved, the existing river-related uses will be respected, and it will have a distinctive character that will attract visitors and refresh residents.
- iii. Scale of building should match local "old Twickenham": 2-3 stories, old lanes. Regal House & the Church are not the ideal guides.
- iv. Need for pedestrian permeability.
- v. Need to take into account views of the River Centre team and the Waterfront Group, etc.

2. What is required on the site

(a) Buildings

(i) Scale

- i. A large scale, mixed use development will not work.
- ii. The Inspector's report from the 1991 Public Inquiry is a key document, which has been endorsed by two later Inspectors. The spirit as well as the letter of it should be respected.
- iii. The enabling development must be the minimum needed to allow for "public

space”.

(ii) Siting of major components

- i. The public asset (River Centre) should be at the corner of Water Lane and the Embankment, with the playground nearby.
- ii. Housing should be towards the rear of the site and along Wharf Lane, where greater height may be acceptable.
- iii. Need to take into account flood levels, present and predicted.

(iii) Mixture of buildings (usage)

- i. Mixed but appropriate usage.
- ii. Emphasis on public access, leisure activity suitable for all ages.
- iii. The River Centre, the playground and public open space are primary. A viewing tower or camera obscura, and a water feature, are examples of desirable public assets that could also be on the site.
- iv. Compatible with the river. What works elsewhere should be placed elsewhere.
- v. Coffee bar, restaurant, but no bars.
- vi. No High Street chain stores.
- vii. High quality residential, which relates to the public open space.
- viii. No gated development.
- ix. No opportunity for future encroachment of public open space by the residences.

(b) Open space

- i. A piazza and other features and small open spaces will enable a “Mediterranean” life-style to be successfully adapted to English conditions and it is very appropriate “by the river”.
- ii. The playground is popular and appropriate.
- iii. Specialist markets are fun and attract a lot of people to the area, who then go on and support established traders. (Market traders’ vehicles will need space.)
- iv. An open space can be a very challenging and interesting space for performing arts.
- v. The riverside at Richmond is cited as an example of how popular an open space is, but there are also things that Richmond got wrong. Twickenham needs to avoid the errors of Richmond as well as creating a separate identity.
- vi. There are at least two different “open spaces”: There is the space at the bottom of Water Lane that links with the Embankment and which will support the current informal use of the riverside as well as provide new opportunities for community events. There is also the possibility of an interesting open space on the old pool site.

- vii. There is enthusiasm for a water feature and this also is associated in the mind's eye with an open space.
- viii. Better landscaping on the Embankment, e.g. curved hedges could screen cars more effectively by clumping them

3. Linked to the site

(a) Embankment

The Embankment is not part of the Pool site, but there is an urgent need to re-landscape the whole of Twickenham Waterfront so as to take into account the ambience of the whole area. A start has been made with the TLS Arcadia project, but this is limited to the Embankment other than that in front of the pool. The reason for this anomaly was that the Dawnay Day proposal was to take care of frontage of the pool site redevelopment. Hence, the successful Lottery bid for Arcadia covers only part of the Waterfront. Better to have a clean separation of responsibilities, but desirable to develop both the pool site and the landscaping schemes in parallel.

- i. The road, access, parking, are all essential, but can their impact be reduced?
- ii. Flexible use of the Embankment.
- iii. Improved landscaping to screen parked cars, encourage "enjoy the river" activities.
- iv. Upgrade quality of landscaping. Levelling off the present mess, removing all the trees and starting again from the water's edge would make all the difference.
- v. Consider re-thinking the whole area, with the road and parking put to the King St side of the site, freeing up the entire River side as open space for Markets and other activities.

(b) River

- Encourage river activities linked to the development.
- Pontoon and increased access by river.
- Support the proposals and initiatives of the River Centre and the Twickenham Waterfront Group.

(c) Riverside community

- The community bounded by Wharf Lane, Church St, Church Lane and the South Bank of Eel Pie Island is culturally and socially diverse. It is a major visitor attraction for Twickenham: the boats on Eel Pie Island, Church St shops and eateries, the Church, with its many activities, the Barmy Arms and Church St pubs, all of which are heaving on the days and nights of RFU events.

- It is economically fragile.
- It is effectively isolated by the river, the major roads and the large commercial buildings in King St, York St, London Rd and Arragon Rd, with restricted road-side parking, which make it difficult to relocate cars from the Riverside area.
- The redevelopment of the Pool site will have a big impact on the community. It must enhance the ambience, not destroy it.

4. Traffic flow, Access & Parking

Cars must be catered for; they bring people in. No parking = no visitors; we must be realistic. The community should have the same rights as everyone else to have a car.

The following vehicular constraints are identified:

- i. Must satisfy requirements of access for emergency vehicles, local businesses and clubs, and existing local residents. Long vehicles are in frequent use.
- ii. Must satisfy parking needs for customers of local businesses, members of boat clubs and existing local residents.
- iii. Wharf Lane and Water Lane are narrow and the service road does not connect the two.
- iv. One-way Water Lane & Wharf Lane.
- v. No exit via the Barmy Arms end of the Embankment.
- vi. Al fresco dining and Twickenham events close Church St to traffic.
- vii. Previous attempts which have assumed closure of the Embankment have failed to provide convincing alternatives, often showing turning circles too small for large service and emergency vehicles.
- viii. Turning/loading areas by the river are often flooded.
- ix. Cycle route to be maintained.
- x. Parking on the Embankment provides a measure of policing in the area.

Options worth exploring

- i. Reduce the number of visitors entering the Riverside area by car.
- ii. Reduce visitor parking on the Embankment in front of the development, whilst maintaining friendly, convenient and safe parking facilities for those who work and reside in the area.
- iii. Examine closely the TSG conceptual proposals for re-siting parking and altering the road routes.
- iv. Application of existing parking policy consistently throughout the area, i.e., parking via meters and permits for residents and businesses.
- v. Flexible use of the Embankment for access and parking.
- vi. Use the natural levels of the site creatively in dealing with the parking problem.