

Twickenham Riverside Swimming Pool Site

An Update

The Twickenham Riverside Terrace Group (TRTG) is a community action group dedicated to restoring public open space on the Twickenham Pool site. TRTG considers that the development football of this site has been kicked around for too long. To allow a site by the River in the centre of Twickenham to lie derelict for 27 years a perfectly usable piece of land originally purchased by a community spirited Council in 1924 for public walks and pleasure purposes to remain closed to the public for this length of time is an unprecedented wasteful neglect of a community asset.

The positive building of a popular and successful children's play area and café in 2004 should remain. TRTG considers the Councils plans to dismantle and move this amenity which assists in bringing parents and business to the town centre shops is acting contrary to the wishes of parents and the community, as well as a public waste of money.

TRTG will campaign for the Council to implement its proposals for public open space on this riverside site and to put into action the UDP Inspectors recommendations. Its ongoing petition has already over 3000 signatures and is growing daily.

TRTG is concerned that the built development to justify the Councils expenditure on the shell of the proposed River Centre will not be limited to that purpose alone. Offices for HANDS and community toilet use of the River Centre are preplanned doubt as to the method of funding. The site area is not defined, whether it includes the present car park in Water Lane, or co operation with the owners of that car park and King Street Parade. The River Embankment is understood to be included, in the site area. The Councils failure to maintain the River Embankment and recent post playground contractual neglect of the pool site will be added into the cost. These costs will be further increased by the heady mixture of exemplar sustainability building, and ill defined grandiose district energy plans. In achieving these ends the Council plans to circumvent current affordable housing requirements solely in order to increase the return on the development. This could result in higher denser luxury housing developments, creating a wealthy housing ghetto. The value of this site in this prime location far exceeds the basic cost of the River Centre.

TRTG draw attention to the dangers to the community of neglecting the principal requirement of public open space, an amenity to all ages. Examples of building on former privately owned amenity sites such as Richmond Ice Rink have been detrimental to the leisure opportunities of the community. Massive Riverside flat developments along the River Thames, locally evident at Kingston, Putney and Kew, have resulted in accommodation out of the reach of first time buyers.

By again handing over the pool site to developers the Council are sacrificing a community leisure amenity in a unique position in the centre of Twickenham. A public leisure amenity that the Council have chosen to neglect for over 27 years. The only charitable reason for this must be lack of will and vision. There has been no research into revenue raising activities for an open space in this unique situation. The amenity is already there, all it needs is a determined responsible Council who can see into the future and realise that our children and future generations will not thank us for building on every conceivable open space by the River Thames whether it has the excuse of exemplar sustainability or not.

It remains to be seen whether the latest appointed Consultant 5 practice team come up with any acceptable proposals. If the ½ million allocated had been spent by the Council in 1984 we would now be improving on a useful amenity. It is certain that if the combined money that has been spent on reports schemes and surveys over 25 years had been spent on the site itself we would have an amenity the envy of all. It is not much to ask of a Council that they spend on amenity and the future. s costed its original site landscaping cost, assuming that the present site is partly used by (a) The Children's playground and (b) The River Centre, leaving

approximately 2000 sq metres. This cost is of the order of £600,000. It is this small sum of money,(equivalent to a normal years Council spend on paper reports and proposals for this site) that stand between public and commercial use of this site.
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To put the present state of affairs in context a brief history of a neglected community asset is appended.

Land purchase

The land in the centre of Twickenham between the River Thames, King Street ,Water and Wharf Lanes was purchased in 1924 by the then Twickenham Urban District Council with official sanction of the Ministry of Health for public walks and pleasure purposes, surplus land, and street improvements, the period of repayment for the Ministry of Health loan was 60 years. This area is designated Twickenham Riverside Site T1 in the Unitary Development Plan.

Land Use

On this land stood Richmond House which was used by a community meeting place until it was demolished in 1928. The land on the King Street frontage was conveyanced to others in 1928. In 1937 King Street Parade shops with flats over was built with its rear service road. The remaining land was public open space until the present swimming pool was opened in 1935 as a consequence of a public petition for a local baths in 1928. The pool was open from 1935 to 1981 when it was closed for repairs. A sum of £500,000 was allocated for repairs and refurbishment in 1984 from the proceeds of the Civic Centre development, this was not spent on the pool. Existing buildings on the pool site are occupied by HANDS (Help a Neighbour in distress) and until September 2001 by the Riverside Play Group, when the latter moved to York House. Both groups pay rent for their accommodation. The Council has carried out other land sales/ leases since 1933, such as the present business car park in Water Lane. There is a history of gradual diminution of the original public open space. The present site, comprising the derelict pool, plus new play area is approximately 4272 sq metres in area.

The Years 1981 to 2007

The site remained unused and derelict with several attempts at commercial development by the Council. These proposals have been for:

1990 a Marks & Spencer Store resulting in a public Inquiry, which refused permission.

1999 A new scheme with Developer. Alsop Zogolovitch. in partnership with the Council. This was terminated by the Council due to public opposition.

2001/2002 The Council in partnership with the developer who owns King Street Parade and its car park in Water Lane, put forward a scheme for 47 luxury riverside flats above a ground floor for commercial use, comprising bars, restaurants, a basement with a fitness centre, Cinemas with basement car parking. This scheme opposed by all the local amenity societies was due to be the subject of a planning Inquiry. The Government Office of London requested an Environmental Impact Assessment in June 2002 this was not provided by the developers and the Council terminated their association with this developer in 2003.

All development proposals to date for land originally purchased for public walks and pleasure purposes, have been resisted by the public and local amenity societies, because of their size and the absence of community benefit.

2001 For 25 years The only successful planning application was granted to The Twickenham Riverside Terrace Group in **19/7/01** for the removal of the first floor of the existing pool changing rooms to form a terrace above a Cafe, boat and other facilities on the ground floor. The remaining site was to be landscaped and the existing restaurant Caretakers House and public toilets brought back to use. **This is attracting an ever growing petition of support now over 3000 signatures.**

2004 After a Public Inquiry. Planning permission was granted for 5 years from 18/6/04 for a short term scheme providing a children's playground and Cafe at the Western Wharf Lane end of site utilising approximately 25 % of the site area.

2004 The Council announced The Twickenham Challenge. Inviting participation from local organisations to provide at no cost to the Council a public amenity on the pool site allowing a specified area of the site for a peppercorn rent.

2004 Unitary Development Plan (UDP) The Inspectors Report for the Twickenham Riverside Site (Proposal T1) states public open space should be the predominant feature of the Pool site, that this should be immutable irrespective of the time scale of any proposal.

2005 Playground and Cafe opened, reported expenditure of £1.2 million.

2006 Challenge proposals result in 3 finalists. Council selects Richmond Environment Trust scheme for The Twickenham River Centre, an educational facility promoting river use and safety, located at the river end of Water Lane. The other 2 finalists, Busen Martial Arts Centre and Duke of Edinburgh Hostel are promised that the Council would actively seek alternative accommodation for them.

Alliance

The Amenity Societies comprising the Twickenham Society, Friends of Twickenham Green, the York House Society and TRTG have formed an alliance to help prevent another major development on this riverside site, to help promote the River Centre plan. TRTG want to keep the Popular Children's Playground in its present position and for the Council to honour the UDP Inspectors public open space recommendation.

2007 New Report by Council.

The Council originally invited proposals for the site at no cost to the council. A proportion of the site was to be provided at a peppercorn. The Council chose a proposal which although it is community based, and river related was originally intended to have no cost to the Council. Now that the Environment Trust River Centre has been chosen, it needs support from the Council which did not appear to be part of the Council's original plan. The shell of the River centre building costing £1.6 million will now have to be funded by Richmond Council, by other commercial development on site. The Environment Trust need to raise lottery money for the fit out of £700,000, and will be competing with the 2012 Olympic Games for this. Therefore even further support may be needed from the council putting more pressure on them to force the sale and redevelopment of this public land - unless instead of the council giving them the money they structure it as a loan instead.

Space in the River Centre is now allocated to HANDS the community toilets and caretakers accommodation. The Council speaks of flexibility of use.

The Council have said they propose to move the playground to somewhere else in the vicinity - but actually there is nowhere else for it to go. None of the spaces talked about are practical and at what cost to move it?

The Council have appointed a 5 practice external expert team to consult with the community and report after 6 months work on the marketing of this site to a developer. With reports to Council in October 2007 at a cost originally given as £147,000. The final cost of this external expert team is not known. As a rudimentary consultation exercise the team should have someone located at the River site to collate the views of all the people who currently use that amenity. They would then find out that the public do not want this land built on - maybe this is why this elementary basic research has not been carried out.

At the same time based on the expert teams claimed environmental credentials, we would expect some helpful alternatives to the dead hand of demolish and build. Such as ways of

raising income from a prime piece of Riverside land by the use of the land and its existing buildings for community purposes. Revenue can be raised by other methods than building. There is for instance an unresolved need for a ice rink site, and as Kew, Hampton Court and Somerset House have shown this is a feasible temporary option. Farmers Markets, Craft Markets, open air theatre, cinema. All of these options are subject to site enabling work but the cost is minimal in comparison to the proposals to date.

The toilets are already in position and connected to the drainage system.

The Buildings for community projects are already there.

The Cafe exists as a permanent structure with room for expansion

The open space is already there.

The playground exists and is in its best location.

The River Centre is being used as the excuse to build luxury homes on this site, TRTG says the alternatives should be properly explored before the community lose this asset.

The Twickenham Riverside Terrace Group September 2007