

My name is Sheila Hale. I have lived in Twickenham for fifty years. I've fought many battles against attempts at unsuitable commercial developments of the riverside and was a founding Trustee of the Twickenham Riverside Trust. I would like to talk about the greatly improved accessibility and visibility of the Twickenham riverside provided by the Hopkins plan.

Although the original Trustees of the Twickenham Riverside Trust were grateful to the Council for the long lease on The Diamond Jubilee Gardens, we saw it as only the beginning of what we hoped would eventually be a whole-site solution, one that would better connect the town with its riverside and embrace the whole of the embankment for the enjoyment of the public. It was because we were not entirely satisfied with a rectangle of infertile land built on rubble high above the river that we framed our charitable objectives as we did. They were - and I believe they still are? - to preserve, protect and enhance the whole of the Twickenham riverside, that is to say not just the Diamond Jubilee Gardens, which occupies only one section of the embankment.

In those early days we Trustees were especially aware of two problems with the siting of the DJG and we devoted many meetings to discussing how they might, given the will and financing by the Council, eventually be addressed. One was its inaccessibility, which was – and remains – a challenge, especially for the disabled and mothers with prams. The only step-free entrance from the town is on a corner of Wharf Lane where it is frequently obscured by large servicing vehicles. From the riverside itself, which is largely occupied by parked cars, access is by way of a single uninviting flight of steps. To reach these steps, which are dangerously slippery in wet weather, pedestrians must cross the path of moving cars searching for parking places or using the embankment as a rat run.

These are the only points of access to the Diamond Jubilee Gardens.

The gardens furthermore do nothing whatsoever to connect the town to its riverside. Indeed, you could pass through Twickenham town without ever guessing that they exist or indeed that the town backs on to what could be one of the most beautiful south-facing embankments along the entire stretch of the Thames.

So we original Trustees were of course delighted when in 2019 the Council decided to mount an international competition for the riverside, and when a shortlist of architects was announced we voted unanimously for the Hopkins scheme.

A glance at the Hopkins plan is enough to demonstrate what a difference it would make to the visibility and accessibility of the Twickenham riverside. The widening of Wharf and Water Lanes open enticing views from King Street of the river as it flows past the town. Wide, step-free entrances at the top of Wharf Lane, Water Lane, and from the embankment invite all members of the public including those who are disabled, elderly, or mothers with prams to wander through expanded gardens, safe from cars and their polluting fumes, and enjoy the amenities of what once was and could be again Twickenham's chief asset.

Thank you.