

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (Twickenham Riverside) Compulsory Purchase Order 2021.

Statement of Evidence in Support of the Compulsory Purchase Order of Land and New Rights in Twickenham Riverside: **Social Housing Provision**

3 May 2023

My name is Ellen Purton and I have lived in Twickenham for twenty years. I was already a Twickenham resident when the Diamond Jubilee Gardens and playground were constructed with the clearly stated intention that these would be temporary amenities until a permanent development was agreed. I frequented the playground with my now-grown children, but I'm sorry to say we were never tempted by the unappealing Gardens.

Over the course of my first 15 years here I watched a succession of councils try to foist unwelcome ideas for the riverside onto residents. By 2018, when the council started this current process, a consensus had slowly emerged among residents about what we want: public open space by the river instead of a car park, with both green space and hard standing for events, a connection between the high street and the river, and some housing and commercial properties around the perimeter to make it financially viable.

This is what people said in multiple consultations across thirty years. This is what residents and stakeholders agreed should be in the brief for the gold standard RIBA competition. These principles underpinned all five of the excellent entries to the competition, including the winning scheme, which was not only chosen by the council but also won the most votes from residents. Those principles remain in this final version of the scheme and continue to be supported by the people of Twickenham. We want our town centre river frontage to be a park, not a car park.

We want a gathering place where our wonderful Farmer's Market will be more visible. We want a place for outdoor community events, like a Christmas fair or summer Fete. We want a place to engage with the river, or just sit and look at it over lunch. We want a heart for the community, and the only way this works is with a whole-site solution such as the one that has already been approved by local planning and all other relevant statutory bodies.

Having said all of the above, in my view the most important part of this scheme from a planning perspective - indeed from an ethical perspective - is that it supplies the borough with 21 units of social housing. This represents 54% of the total housing on the site by habitable room.¹ This scheme will provide clean, secure and desperately needed homes for 21 individuals and families struggling in unsuitable homes, in temporary housing, sleeping rough or sofa surfing.

Richmond is known as a leafy borough with a high average standard of living. But thanks to historic national legislation we have an acute shortage of social housing. There are over 5000 people waiting for a property on Richmond's housing register² because of overcrowding, disrepair, homelessness, or disability.

We have families of five and six living in one-bedroom flats, with children getting up from the sitting room floor every day to go to school. We have babies and children spending months or years in temporary accommodation, sometimes living in hostels with strangers and addicts. We have people with disabilities struggling to survive in unsuitable housing. We have toddlers sleeping in rooms covered in black mould. These are the 5000 people waiting on our housing register.

This is not a problem we can outsource to other locations. The People in Housing Need Report from the National Housing Federation says there are 1.1 million people waiting on an official housing register in England.³

London is the worst hit region in England, with just under 19% of households having an unmet housing need, and with about half of these households specifically needing social rented housing.⁴ Every other London borough also has long waiting lists. Meanwhile, according to the Regulator of Social Housing, the number of social rent homes actually *fell* in the year to March 2022.⁵

In this wider context, expecting people to move to other parts of the city, or indeed the country, is not a viable solution, even if it were a compassionate and strategic tactic - which it patently is not. We need to build more homes. There is no other way to deal with the shortage. And we need as many of these homes as possible to be affordable and social rented homes.

This scheme puts 21 units immediately in the pipeline for households in desperate need of a real home. Were this CPO to be refused, the scheme would not be implemented and this vital housing would not be built for many more years, and possibly never at all.

The struggling individuals and families who should be moving into these homes in a couple of years deserve to have decent, affordable housing as soon as we can give it to them. This plan is the surest way to deliver it.

I beseech you not to let this development be derailed, and innocent people left in housing need, in order to protect two utterly unloved patches of astroturf.

With sincere gratitude for your kind consideration,

Ellen Purton

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1) Source – planning application for Twickenham Riverside

2) Source – Richmond Housing Committee

3) <https://www.housing.org.uk/resources/people-in-housing-need-2021/>

4) 2021 Summary report downloadable from <https://www.housing.org.uk/resources/people-in-housing-need-2021/>

5) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/registered-provider-social-housing-stock-and-rents-in-england-2021-to-2022/registered-provider-social-housing-stock-in-england-summary>