

I have been a local resident since my 20s. I lived in King Street from 1987 when the steps outside my front door dropped down onto the site that is the subject of this inquiry. And then in 1992 I moved to Copthall Gardens only a few hundred yards away and have lived within shouting distance of the site for most of my life. I am a former chairman of the street resident's association.

In all that time this priceless riverside site has remained either unused or under used, certainly under cared for and under loved. It's slow death has been at a considerable cost to the community and every resident for miles around.

I feel the 'big picture' sometimes get lost in the battle over the planning detail and am trying to lift the discussion above the duelling shots from the interested parties and consider what is right for Twickenham as a whole.

As far as I know, this site is the biggest forgotten jewel of the entire Richmond borough and perhaps all west London. Certainly the best piece of river frontage of its size and location.

The kings and queens of England have either passed on the river or down it's high street on the final junction on the way to Hampton Court Palace. Two French princes born here, an exiled king of Spain worshiped at a local church.

Alexander Pope, one of Britain's most famous poets, is buried in the church bordering the site.

This planning Inquiry is at first glance about an area of riverside parkland but it really isn't about that, is it. It's about an entire community that is slowly wilting. There is a transitory population of rugby restaurant people who come and go with the seasons. There's a farmer's market held in the hinterland of a nearby modest car park. Again passing trade.

But where is the heart and soul of the people of Twickenham ?

Those fighting for the status quo have had since 1980, when the lido closed, to make the park a valuable, useful, community space.

Instead it has become a barely used backwater, a good percentage of which has – shamefully - been boarded up and left overgrown and unused.

At night many would think twice about walking through the park since it has caught the attention of local drug dealers.

The Trust deserve credit for the steps they have made. But the time is past for a few, albeit well-meaning part-timers. A site at the heart of the community should not be left to the whim of a few. The time has come for real and indelible change.

There is a feeling amongst the wider community that those fighting for the 'Save The Riverside Park' are as much, if not more, interested in 'Save our Riverside CAR PARK'.

Unfortunately the designs of those few dozen have come, over the years, at a price to many tens of thousands more, including thousands of children, in the wider borough and even the reputation of Twickenham itself.

Before walking around the site I urge the inspector to visit neighbouring Richmond riverside, Teddington's high street and even Kingston's riverside area. See how each development has lifted them.

Then I think it will become evident just how far the town has fallen behind its neighbours in the modern age.

Twickenham used to be the centre of the entire district. Most around it have Twickenham postcodes. That's why the town hall is here.

These days it is a tatty backwater.

Don't be fooled by the sudden polish that has cynically been applied for the period of the Inquiry with a string of events never usually seen.

It's an area at the heart of Twickenham that festers, largely unused and unattended and the sad truth is the sense of community has wilted with it. Until Church Street was pedestrianised recently the area had no focus.

Done correctly this development could help the area flower once again into the town's heart and soul; create a valuable focus of life for all in the area.

It's also worth considering that unlike the areas around it Twickenham is regularly the face of the nation as it becomes a global mecca as the home of the England rugby side.

Is Twickenham's tatty high street really the face the area, London and indeed Britain wants to show to the rest of the world ? Surely not.

On the back of this development, if permitted, the entire face of Twickenham with a community of hundreds of thousands could benefit from a long overdue regeneration and re-birth.

The benefits of a re-birth that has continually been denied me and my generation for the last 40 years could be built in time for my children and the generations that follow.

Byron Young