

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION TO THE TWICKENHAM RIVERSIDE TRUST AND ITS INVOLVEMENT WITH THE RIVERSIDE

The Trust

The Twickenham Riverside Trust was founded in 2011 with the primary purpose of preserving the public open space on Twickenham Riverside for the enjoyment of both local residents and visitors to Twickenham.

The Trust had emerged following a extensive campaign by local residents to protect and preserve the public open space on Twickenham's riverside.

The Council had – over the preceding years, across successive administrations – been developing and implementing its policy for the unique Twickenham Riverside site incrementally.

The preparation and adoption of the 2013 Twickenham Area Action Plan (TAAP) was the consolidation of this direction of travel.

In 2014, two years after the Diamond Jubilee Gardens were opened, a lease with respect to a substantial demise within the gardens was granted and runs until 2139.

The Trustees

The Trust and Trustees are a-political and dedicated to fulfilling the charitable objectives.

We are flexible and responsive to local suggestions for both facilities and events. It was in that spirit that the Trust was open in 2019 to be part of the

process launched by the Council to work up new proposals for Twickenham's riverside.

Six new trustees (not counting the Council representative) were appointed in October 2020. Within two weeks of the new Trustees' appointment, the Trust was faced with the explicit threat of a Compulsory Purchase Order on the Diamond Jubilee Gardens.

Also, the situation was not made easier by the practical restrictions imposed as a result of the Covid pandemic.

Location

Nothing survives by accident and local activism spanning two centuries has served to protect this beautiful and historic stretch of the river. It features a number of very popular and well-used amenity spaces.

Twickenham's riverside also provides residents and visitors with many opportunities to interact with the river.

It is important therefore to see the Scheme site in the context of the wider Twickenham Riverside and the full length of this section of the Thames Path. The riverside walk from Marble Hill House to Twickenham's Embankment showcases so much that is characteristic of Twickenham's riverside.

Outside the 18th century Grade II listed White Swan public house, there is pebble 'beach', much used to gain direct access to the river. There is also an adjoining slipway used by the public to launch river craft.

Church Lane and its slipway is the first of many little 'village' lanes that lead off Twickenham's riverfront towards the newly pedestrianised Church St. There is vehicular access to this slipway so that larger, motorised craft can also be

launched, as well as paddleboards/canoes.

One continues along the Embankment promenade to arrive at the slipway at the bottom of Water Lane. This slipway is used for the launch of all manner of craft.

There also are several sets of ‘waterman’s steps’ giving direct access to the river from the Embankment promenade. These are also used as informal seating when the river is at the maintained level (16 hours/day).

Slipways allow sloped or staggered access into the water. This is by far the easiest way to enter the water, especially for inexperienced or differently abled users.

Whilst a pontoon is included in the Authority’s Scheme, no detail is provided as to who and how it will be used. For the vast majority of the time, it will sit on the bottom of the river alongside the Embankment, as it rests in the low-level water of the maintained level.

Past the Water Lane slipway, one continues along the Embankment and one is now in front of the Embankment-level Jubilee Gardens, with the raised Diamond Jubilee Gardens overlooking the river.

The scale and the variety and the history of all these different elements, finishing up in and below the existing Gardens underpin the compelling uniqueness of Twickenham Riverside.

Diamond Jubilee Gardens, and Jubilee Gardens

The 2012 Diamond Jubilee Gardens marked the extension/enhancement of a smaller Jubilee Gardens that had been opened in 2005.

The gradual increasing in size of Jubilee Gardens was all part of the incremental 'opening up' of the derelict pool site in order to re-instate the public use of Twickenham's Embankment.

The Jubilee Gardens exists to this day, and consists of the original Embankment-level gardens.

The Diamond Jubilee Gardens today are an all-year-round, multi-use area of public open space where individual sections are used for different purposes by different community groups, in a safe location above the flood zones.

There are many vantage points offering excellent views of the Thames, both up and down river, with many benches and low-walled 'seating' areas within the Gardens.

The Gardens enjoy a largely open aspect and support many mature trees, as well as bushes and hedgerows, all of which guarantees a sunny and green aspect to the Gardens.

All the sections of this multi-use open space come together to provide an excellent, safe, large and flexible area.

The wider context

It is difficult to define the 'centre' of Twickenham. Hence in part the Council decision in 2015 to purchase the three King St retail properties together with the car park behind them. This was intended to create an opportunity to open up a closer linkage between the centre and the river.

The sales brochure for the adjacent 3-33 King Street referred to the 2017 scheme then in preparation and also included concept visuals on how the rear of the row might be developed.

More recently, this row along King Street has seen considerable renovation 'activity.' Any development of the rear of King St (should the Council's Scheme be built) will create severe 'sense of enclosure' for the area of public open space in the Scheme, which would be surrounded by tall buildings on three sides.

Some myths

There are a number of misleading and over-simplified/anecdotal assertions in the Statement of Case, which seek to create a negative impression of the present state of the Riverside and the existing Diamond Jubilee Gardens.

The Gardens are **underused** and not well known to residents. Our experience is that they are well used by a wide range of residents. The Trust has concrete evidence on its general leisure usage in video footage covering the same weekend in February going back for the last 4 years.

"The Existing Designated Open Space has been **subject to anti-social behaviour, criminal damage, substance misuse**. These incidents are rare and no more frequent than in other similar local spaces.

The Trust stresses that the Gardens are not part of the adjacent **dereliction**.

The **artificial grass** in the central section of the existing Gardens is in some way inferior to natural grass (Para 8.41). The Trust's view is that the Gardens currently benefit from an all-year-round, all-weather surface which works well and retains its functionality.

The **events space** on the existing Gardens is smaller: The Trust notes that the Gardens are a multi-functional space above the flood zone and unencumbered by a highway and cycle routes, whose primary purpose is for daily leisure uses and enjoyment.

The Trust's important management role

The Trust is in many ways the guardian of this section of Twickenham Riverside and is exercising a regular 'estate management' role outside of its demise.

This requires liaising across various Council departments. Under a Management Agreement, the Council is currently responsible for the maintenance, but the Trust is scheduled and preparing to take increased responsibility for a number of maintenance aspects in 2024. However, the Trust already monitors and actively draws attention to various actions that are necessary. Trustees are also directly involved in their care through obtaining plants and planting, watering, general tidying, etc.

The Trust's overall position and approach to the CPO challenge

From the Trust's perspective, the lack of genuine engagement and dialogue between the Council and the Trust on certain core issues over the past three to five years has been a missed opportunity.

What has emerged and what the Council is now seeking to impose on the Trust through the CPO is a Scheme whose Public Open Space is more space between oversized buildings than the space envisaged in the current Local Plan (the TAAP) as a "riverside park".

The Trust welcomes public scrutiny of the situation in the forthcoming Inquiry, at which our views (and those of other members of the public) on the core issues relating to the Public Open Space on Twickenham Riverside can be considered in their own right – and not subject to a timetable which at times has appeared to be driven by political imperatives (including elections) or by an insistence by the Council on pressing through preconceived ideas just to 'get it done'.