

Twickenham River Centre



PROGRESS UPDATE, SEPTEMBER 2008

The River Centre will be built as the public benefit from the regeneration of Twickenham riverside. The following pages describe the vision for the River Centre, as well as the organisations and people involved.

A WINDOW ON THE RIVER

A message from Sir David Attenborough, River Centre Patron

I am greatly looking forward to helping the Environment Trust bring together at the River Centre all of the people and organisations who share my love for this stretch of the Thames. The river is, of course, a flourishing wilderness, as exciting as many a jungle yet flowing right beside us. Great crested grebes display and nest on its surface, bats and dragonflies hawk above it, swans nest on its banks, and fish ranging from eels to dace, flounder, chub and an occasional salmon swim in its depths. Here, long-established inhabitants and recent colonists, both plant and animal, struggle to extend their territories and repel foreign invaders. And here too there are emergencies and ecological crises as floods or droughts threaten its equilibrium. The River Centre will provide a window on these dramas and enable us all to participate in the river's day-to-day life.

management of flooding will help to bring an understanding of the wider context, and the need to react to the consequences of climate change.

Commitment and imagination

The River Centre will be a new type of building, one that serves the whole community but that has a specific purpose – to help everyone to understand and enjoy the river. It requires commitment and imagination to bring it about, because nothing like it has been done before. But the Environment Trust has the expertise and the specialist support to carry through this innovative project and to manage it successfully. We are now making absolutely certain that the business plan has the maximum expert input needed at this stage to make certain that this wonderful project is watertight – in every sense.

For everyone

The Thames Landscape Strategy opened everyone's imagination to the history and architectural delights of this stretch of the Thames. The River Centre will provide a permanent base for the TLS, as well as a home for all of the voluntary organisations that are already bringing that vision into being. But the River Centre won't be just for specialists. It will be for everyone, and especially for young people. I know myself how encounters with wild animals and plants at a young age can be the basis for a lifelong fascination with the natural world and bring a sense of environmental responsibility. Everyone should have the opportunity to have their questions answered and become involved, whether it is by dipping a bucket to examine the river's microscopic creatures, watching the fish and the birds, or helping to manage the river banks.

The complex water management systems that enable us to travel on the Thames, to swim in it, sail on it and eat its fish, may not be immediately obvious, but they are all there behind the scenes, and the River Centre will help to explain how they work and what we can do to influence the people who operate them. Understanding local issues such as the causes and



David Attenborough

WHAT THE RIVER CENTRE WILL BE USED FOR

Few Londoners think of Twickenham as a river town, yet its position on the Thames was crucial to its history and development. Unlike many of its neighbours, it retains a tradition of boat-building on Eel Pie Island, and its waterfront is enjoyed by those lucky enough to live near it.

The River Centre will make the river an essential feature of Twickenham and provide a facility for the community, giving people of all ages and abilities the opportunity to explore and enjoy it.

Learning

The first aim of the River Centre is to provide opportunities for everyone to learn about the river and the environment through hands-on experience.

Led by the learning manager, and with key partners Richmond Adult Community College, Kingston University and local schools, the River Centre will provide:

- ▮ qualifications and apprenticeships in river- and land-based skills for 14–19-year-olds and adults
- ▮ practical teaching of curriculum-based science, geography and citizenship studies
- ▮ courses on sustainability, green construction and climate change for the community

The exhibition area will contain

- ▮ the Thames Aquarium, showing the diversity of life that lives beneath and beside the river
- ▮ a webcam to local environmental features, such as the new sand-martin bank on Eel Pie Island
- ▮ an interactive water model showing



Everyone will be able to try their hand at boat-building at the River Centre. Here Mark Edwards of Richmond Bridge Boathouses has been helping students of Grey Court School build a jolly boat



The River Centre's aquarium, like this one at the Horniman Museum, will let people see the life teeming within the Thames

© Horniman

how water levels in the river are influenced by tides, locks and sluices

- ▮ a camera obscura providing bird's eye views of the river up- and downstream
- ▮ help desks staffed by volunteers to provide information and engage with the community on the environment

Recreation and volunteering

The River Centre will provide links to the many clubs and organisations that row, paddle or sail on the river. Our key partners are Twickenham Yacht Club, Twickenham Rowing Club and Richmond Boating Centre (14th Richmond Sea Scouts).

The River Centre will be a place where teenagers are welcome and safe.

The organisations within the building will provide opportunities to volunteer and to learn new skills both at the River Centre and across the borough.

The River Centre will be a base for people to explore the river environment, encouraging walking and cycling, especially for people who need help and support.

The boathouse will be the base for active use of the river, with electric boats for hire from the pontoon and a new ferry stop linking Twickenham to Kew, Richmond and Teddington.

Relaxing by the river

The River Centre will have a café open throughout the daytime where people can sit and watch the world go by over a Fairtrade coffee and locally sourced, organic food. In the evening, this will convert into a full-service restaurant.

As part of the revitalised open space on the riverfront, there will be a new natural play area for children adjacent to the café.

Revitalising Twickenham's working heritage

The River Centre's exhibition area will tell the story of the transformation of the Thames from the 'Big Stink' to London's largest, richest, continuous wildlife corridor, visually and through recordings of the voices of the people who made their living on and beside the river. Twickenham's boat-building heritage will be celebrated through photography and oral history and, with the winter-time storage of the Queen's shallop Jubilant in the boathouse, everyone will be able to see and learn how traditional river craft were and still are constructed.

THE RIVERSIDE DEVELOPMENT

The Environment Trust for Richmond upon Thames is leading a consortium of environmental and community groups promoting the development of the River Centre as part of the plans to redevelop the old pool site on Twickenham riverside.

In 2002 the council put forward a proposal to develop this site as a mixed-use development with a public-benefit component. A competition was set up to select the best public-benefit proposal and the Trust's River Centre was the winning entry.

The basic scheme was put into the borough's Unitary Development Plan in 2004. It is reflected in the Riverside Development Brief, which ensures a

substantial central public open space within the site, removal of the car parking from the river frontage to the rear of the site, and an improved landscaped river frontage along the whole reach from the site to the sculpture garden.

The cost for these improvements will be provided from the building of a limited number of properties on the northern and western sides of the site. The council's development brief requires that the number of properties will be kept to the minimum sufficient to provide the revenue for the overall improvements and a pre-specified developer's profit.

The scheme proposals put forward by the selected developer will have to go through the planning process in the standard way.

The Environment Trust and its River Centre partners are emphatically in favour of public open space in Twickenham and elsewhere – in fact we have hundreds of volunteers devoted to managing and improving public open space throughout the borough. The current scheme to redevelop Twickenham riverside will create more public open space than has been on this site for some 350 years. It will also provide a major new community asset and fund a revitalised, pedestrian-friendly river frontage.

This site has lain derelict for 28 years – opposition to the scheme risks losing this opportunity to revitalise Twickenham, with the prospect of more years of argument and dereliction.

This scheme offers a remarkable opportunity to revitalise this site and provides a lasting benefit for the people of Twickenham



Twickenham comes alive during the Festival each June

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THE RIVER CENTRE: WHERE WE ARE NOW



The Trust's project team for the River Centre has been working in earnest on this project since winning the Twickenham Challenge in 2006. The team has produced a detailed business plan, the current version of which is under review by council officers and external experts, and a public summary will be produced in the next couple of months.

The council has produced a development brief for the overall site and is finalising a short list of prospective developers, who will each produce outline plans for the site. These will be subject to public review before a developer is selected early in 2009. The chosen developer will then submit a planning application for the overall site in the normal way.

The Trust's team has produced a specification for the River Centre building, which will be provided to all of the short-listed developers and we are working with the council to ensure that the best overall scheme for the people of Twickenham is selected.

Sir David Attenborough and the River Centre team consult with architect Clive Chapman about possible layouts for the River Centre building

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THE TEAM CREATING THE RIVER CENTRE

The core project team comprises the Environment Trust, BTCV, Richmond Environment Network and Thames Landscape Strategy, with the support and involvement of at least 35 other local and regional organisations. A panel of advisers provides expertise in the fields of law, business, charitable buildings management, fundraising, education, PR, architecture and planning.

Some of the members of the River Centre team



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Already active in the local community

BTCV RICHMOND: since 1992, this branch of the national charity has been maintaining open spaces across the borough through practical conservation volunteering projects. BTCV runs 2–3 volunteer work days in the borough each week throughout the year and makes a major difference to the appearance and environmental value of our green spaces as well as providing exercise and skills training to hundreds of local people. 'With our strong volunteer base we have achieved a great deal toward the long-term maintenance of the local green environment. Without the enthusiasm and commitment of our volunteers this work would not be possible.'

www.btcv.org/richmond

RICHMOND ENVIRONMENT NETWORK: 'Our work and projects support the development of environmental and sustainable thinking and practice in the borough, through working with residents, environmental groups, charities and schools.' There are some 60 groups with an environmental remit within the borough and REN provides support for these, crucially

raising awareness and interest in them. REN's Schools Environment Forum is already well established across the borough as a source of support and advice on environmental issues for schools. Current projects involve developing school allotments and wildlife gardens.

www.richenvironmentnet.org.uk

THAMES LANDSCAPE STRATEGY: 'Our vision is to conserve, promote and enhance for the future one of the world's great river landscapes between Hampton and Kew.' With 15 national and regional partner organisations, TLS is working across four riverside boroughs, including Richmond upon Thames, on river-based projects such as London's Arcadia. The TLS education service and one-stop shop for every sort of river information will be based at the River Centre.

www.thames-landscape-strategy.org.uk

ENVIRONMENT TRUST FOR RICHMOND UPON THAMES: The Trust has 25 years' experience of protecting and conserving buildings and landscapes in the borough, through campaigning, restoration of buildings and maintenance of environmental sites. 'With architectural and planning expertise on tap, we help local groups rescue buildings and landscapes at risk, and we enthuse and inform the community through six volunteering events each month and many arts projects. Our interest in the Thames and its heritage led us to enter our vision for a River Centre in the Twickenham Challenge, which won the competition in 2006.'

www.environmenttrust.co.uk

Also at the River Centre will be **HANDS (HELP A NEIGHBOUR IN DISTRESS)**, a charity that provides help for people in need. In times of difficulty volunteers give people of any age practical help and support in many ways. HANDS is currently based in the old bath house on Twickenham riverside.

Please contact the Environment Trust with any comments, concerns or offers of help for the River Centre.



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