

REPORT OF TWICKENHAM WATERFRONT MEETING, MARCH 20TH 2006

Organised by:

The Twickenham Society, in conjunction with the Eel Pie Island Association, Environment Trust for Richmond-on-Thames, Keep Twickenham Tidy, Richmond Environmental Information Centre, River Thames Society, Thames Landscape Strategy and York House Society

Chaired by Cllr Doug Orchard (Chairman of the Twickenham Society)

SUMMARY

Over a hundred people filled St Mary's Church Hall to join in a discussion about practical ways of tackling the myriad of problems that beset Twickenham Waterfront. It is now more a suitable case for treatment than an Arcadian gem.

Elizabeth Wood, local resident, recounted that in the 1870's, residents and working boatmen were complaining about the disposal of sewage into the river, inadequate mooring piles and obstruction of access to the river. The Council of the day responded by building the Embankment, more or less as it is today, the final design being modified as the project progressed in the light of on-going public reactions to successive proposals.

A WWII bomb that fell at the end of Water Lane killed people, demolished houses and destroyed the popular boats-for-hire business. The area's recovery was slow, and was only completed in 1975 with the landscaping of the Embankment that introduced the present chestnut trees and planters.

Since then, the Embankment has gone into slow and not very graceful decline. The planters and seating have been damaged, litter and public nuisance are an issue, the stability of the Embankment is in question, access to the river is frequently blocked, landing steps are in disrepair, a diverted drain is a source of pollution, mooring piles are a liability and unsuitable for either working or recreational boats, and the vista of the river from Flood Lane has been lost. (Flood Lane runs from Church St to the river, past the end of the churchyard.)

A lot needs to be done to restore Twickenham Embankment to being one of those rare places where the public can enjoy the ambiance of the riverside whilst watching a working river front.

Andrew Darvill, the Council's Assistant Director of Environment, Traffic & Transport, made proposals for positive action. He promised that the Council will undertake a detailed structural survey of the Embankment at the next draw-off to determine what needs to be done. He proposed a Tow Path Forum for the Middlesex bank along the lines of the one for the Surrey bank in which the Council, PLA, Environment Agency and local community groups work together. On the Surrey side, complex legal issues have been resolved and programme of work has been agreed that is leading to significant improvements along the riverside. He felt a similar approach would be of great benefit for the Twickenham Waterfront.

Philip Wealthy, the Council's Head of Policy & Design, explained how the Embankment fitted into the planning policy of the Council. It is part of the Twickenham Riverside Conservation Area, and there are specific proposals for the Embankment. There is a new Local Authority best value performance indicator relating to conservation areas, so the Conservation Area Study including the policy for the Embankment will be reviewed. However, since the Borough has 72 conservation areas, it is not clear when that for the Embankment will happen. A programme for the studies is currently being developed.

Jim Trimmer of the PLA (Port of London Authority) said that their responsibility is for the river and the riverbed. They work with local groups to solve particular problems, which in this area often relates to access to the river; flooding of parked cars below the high water mark being a frequent occurrence. He confirmed that the Tow Path Forum had helped to identify and resolve problems on the Surrey side and supported the proposal for a Middlesex group. He announced that the next draw-off would be in Nov 2006, enabling the Council to survey the state of the Embankment this year.

Jason Debney of the Thames Landscape Strategy briefly reported on three projects that are relevant to Twickenham Waterfront, of which Arcadia is the best known. The start of that has been deferred because of the uncertainties of the stability of the Embankment so an early resolution of that issue would be helpful.

Members of the audience politely but firmly made it very clear that they are not happy about the neglect of the Waterfront. They want early action.

Photographs and documents were produced to demonstrate that the Embankment is failing as a working wharf and the riverbed is being damaged.

Complaints were made about toilets, lighting, litter and the decrepit state of the landscaping.

A new litter problem is mass dumping of bread for the birds. This is much appreciated by the rats and crows and has given rise to a new form of slime.

Jim Deasley, local architect, presented a vision of a pedestrianised Embankment with the duck-feeding area moved upstream where it would be safer for children. It can be seen at

<http://www.rivercentre.org.uk/mayors100.htm>

Cllr Orchard, Chairman of the Twickenham Society, noted that numerous speakers had made it clear that something needs to be done. The speakers for the Council and the PLA had made excellent positive suggestions for action. He pledged the support of the Society, and of the other local groups that had organised the meeting, to work with the Statutory bodies as proposed by the speakers. He felt we now have an opportunity to halt the decline and restore the Waterfront to a state of which we can be proud.

A. DETAILS OF STATEMENTS MADE BY SPEAKERS

Elizabeth Wood (local resident, local historian and member of numerous river-related societies)

Historical background

In the 1870's, residents and working boatmen were complaining about the disposal of sewage into the river, inadequate mooring piles and obstruction of access to the river. Problems had arisen since the replacement of London Bridge in 1832. The old bridge had acted as a weir that held the water back. With its demolition the water level at Twickenham dropped and became tidal. The local Council of the day, after talks with the newly formed Thames Conservancy, decided to build the Embankment more or less as it is today. The final design was modified as the project progressed in the light of on-going public reactions to successive proposals.

In 1898, the owner of York House independently built an Embankment to York House gardens, with no queries from the Thames Conservancy although it involved the loss of riverside meadows.

During the Second World War, a bomb fell at the end of Water Lane killing numerous people, demolishing several houses and damaging others. It completely destroyed Hammerton's popular boats-for-hire business, previously owned by Charlie Shore and a feature in many old photographs of the riverside.

The grassy knoll at the foot of Water and Bell Lanes is a reminder of where the bomb fell. After the war, recovery was slow and only completed in 1975 with the landscaping of the Embankment that introduced the present bollards, seats, chestnut trees and planters.

Since then the Waterfront has, by and large, been ignored while the attention of Council and public was firmly focused on the debate about what to do with the pool site.

One of the chestnut trees by the Barmy Arms was brought down in the great gale of 1987, and this has been replaced. Another fell in 2003 and was not replaced. Recently some remedial work has been carried out on the planters and railings, but this is seen as an interim measure.

Current problems

(a) Stability of the Embankment

Many are seriously concerned about the stability of both the Embankments; the original Council one and the York House one. Some old photographs do show cracks that are apparent today, but there is now extensive cracking and manifest signs of serious wear and tear.

(b) Steps & Stairs (Watermen's plying places)

These are much used by today's watermen and by other river users who moor alongside the Embankment. They are in very bad state of repair.

(c) Landing Stage at end of Water Lane

Old photographs show this as being a gravel slope. What we now see, are the boards that restrained the gravel and maintained the gradient. These have deteriorated.

The area is much used for recreational purposes by children, feeders of the ducks and fishermen. It is used by the boatyards on Eel Pie Island for loading heavy and awkwardly shaped materials and goods

at all states of the tide, and by river users as a landing stage. It also acts as a haven for river birds because it is out of the mainstream, and this is most important during the winter when the river is high and fast flowing due to high tides and flood waters.

(d) Access to the slipway adjacent to Champions Wharf is frequently blocked by vehicles parked on it.

(e) A land drain has been diverted so that it discharges onto the slipway. The effluent is often unsavoury and the flow appears to be affecting the river bed.

(f) The opportunity for a vista of the river from Flood Lane has been lost because of the redevelopment of Church Square. The views on the approach to the river are marred by cars and recycling bins. The area around the Mary Wallace Theatre looks very run down, although it is a much used pedestrian access to the river.

(g) The Embankment looks very dilapidated. Some of the chestnut trees need replacing, preferably with other chestnuts, the planters have crumbled, the railings and seating are in need of attention. The recent remedial work is much appreciated, but the execution left a lot to be desired, with concrete rings left in place around the bases of the trees and brickwork that has already broken in several places. The completion of the Thames Landscape Strategy's Arcadia project will be most welcome.

(h) The flood warning lights are not working and there seems to be a general lack of awareness of the frequency and levels to which the river water rises when the tide, winds and prolonged rain produce flooding.

Andrew Darvill (LBRuT, Assistant Director of Environment, Traffic & Transport)

The Twickenham Waterfront is one of the Borough's 72 conservation areas, all of which will have to be reviewed to comply with new performance measures introduced by the Government. The points that had been made by local groups and Elizabeth Wood will prove very helpful in shaping a planned approach to the Waterfront.

As immediate practical measures he proposed that:

(a) The Council Engineer will undertake a detailed structural survey of the Embankment at the next draw-off, in order to establish its structural integrity and to establish exactly what needs to be done to make good or refurbish.

(b) A Tow Path Forum for the Middlesex side should be set up along the lines of the successful one that has worked well for resolving the knotty problems of who does what and how on the Surrey side. This will bring the Council, PLA, Environment Agency and local amenity groups into a working partnership.

He thought Elizabeth Wood had drawn attention to issues that needed to be resolved and announced his intention of working with the Tow Path Forum. However, he noted that we were dealing with human nature as well as material world. He fully recognised that the Council needs to do something about Champions Wharf, and anticipated that work would soon be ordered to repair the corner of the balustrade. He was also aware that the public could be certain in their views but divided in their opinions. For example, some thought the new lighting on the Embankment was excessive and constituted light pollution, whilst others thought it was not bright enough. He urged the public to make their views known so as to establish where the consensus lies.

Philip Wealthy (LBRuT, Head of Policy & Design)

The Conservation Area Policy for Twickenham Riverside was prepared in the 1980's after lengthy consultations with the community. It is still in force and has been used to inform the proposals made for Embankments and the redevelopment of the poolsite. However, it is a policy, not a plan, setting out guidelines for landscaping and other improvements.

It will have to be reviewed soon as one of the new performance indicators for the Council.

Jim Trimmer (PLA) accompanied by Dave Foster (Deputy Harbour Master)

Since 1908 the PLA has been responsible for the river and riverbed. Currently, the prime issues in this area are access to the river and river works. Car parking below the high water mark is a common problem. Occasionally, the PLA has to intervene to prevent property owners creating barriers that prevent legitimate access, e.g., when the White Swan recently tried to build up a drinking area on the riverbank they blocked off boat access from Twickenham Sailing Club.

Responding to other speakers, he promised that there would be a draw-off later this year, which will enable the structural survey of the Embankment to be carried out. He also supported the idea of having a Tow Path Forum for the Middlesex side, since the one for the Surrey side has worked well and proved very useful.

Lenny Davis (Environment Agency) had to withdraw on the day for personal reasons and sent his apologies.

Jason Debney (Thames Landscape Strategy, TLS)

The TLS has three major programmes in hand that are relevant to the Twickenham Waterfront:

- (a) Arcadia (Improvements to the Embankment)
- (b) Teddington Gateway (Improvements to river access to Teddington Lock and encouragement of river use)
- (c) Waterspace and Visitor Action plan.

Of these, Arcadia is most advanced and best known. £200,000 is earmarked for Twickenham Embankment and a preliminary consultation with local groups and residents has taken place. There is no point in working on improvements to the surface of the Embankment until the question of the stability of the Embankment itself has been resolved. As well as the cracks in the wall, there are problems arising from the complexity of pipework and cabling that lies just below the surface of the Embankment. It is necessary to sort out these issues before beginning the Twickenham Embankment section of Arcadia. Hence the proposals made by Andrew Darvill for a structural survey and co-operative resolution of issues that cross boundaries of responsibility need to be adopted and implemented as a matter of urgency.

B. QUESTIONS ASKED AND MATTERS RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE

These are grouped by theme. The name and allegiance of the questioner is given, where known.

1. PLANNING & ORGANISATIONAL MATTERS

- a. **Ownership** Joy Lee (York House Society): Who owns the Embankment?
Ans (Andrew Darvill): It is probably LBRuT, but this needs to be confirmed by the Council's Legal Dept in a similar manner to ownership issues on the Surrey bank.
- b. **Where do responsibilities lie within the Council** (Cllr Denise Carr): Within the Council, who does what in respect of the matters raised?
Ans (Andrew Darvill): The Public Space Group cuts across several of the departments that have responsibilities for these matters. It meets monthly to look for shared opportunities. It works quite well, but not perfectly, for example all members are agreed something needs to be done about Champions Wharf, but at present no Department is accepting responsibility. Hopefully, that will soon be resolved. Philip Wealthy has chief responsibility for the Management Plans for Conservation Areas.
- c. **Setting priorities** Phillip Morgan (Twickenham Society) : How does the Embankment get lifted from no 72 to no1 in the Conservation Area review?
Ans (Andrew Darvill): There is not a list that puts the Conservation Areas in pecking order. All of the Areas have to be reviewed within the near future, because of the new performance measure, with which all Councils have to comply. It is particularly challenging for Richmond with 72 Areas, which is far more than the average. A variety of factors or pressures may well influence the order in which reviews are undertaken. Availability of funding can be a spur. For example, at the moment Transport for London want to get things done and they are contributing towards the cost.
- d. **Development on the riverside** Barry Edwards (River Thames Society): Are the regulations applicable to change of use of boatyards going to be applied rigorously? Is the river going to get 1st priority as required by the Mayor of London's plan?
Ans (Philip Wealthy): The Council has a strong commitment to protecting riverside uses. In relation to any particular planning application where there is a river use already on the

site the policy is to protect these uses and this would be the most important consideration. However in any specific case there will inevitably be other relevant policies and material considerations which will also need to be taken into account.

- e. **Consultation processes** John Armstrong (Thanet Craft & York House Society): What consultations does the Council have with the local community?

Ans (Andrew Darvill): Consultation about individual projects can take a variety of forms, such as issuing policy documents and design guides, formal consultation (see Council website) and day to day maintenance.

- f. **The Council and Arcadia** Ron Chappell (Twickenham Riverside Terrace Group): What is the relationship between the Council and Arcadia?

Ans (Philip Wealthy): The Council works together with the TLS and other partners on the Arcadia project. It is the Council that is ultimately responsible for environmental improvements along the Embankment.

2. THE WORKING RIVER

- a. **Damage to the riverbed:** David Wood (member of several river user groups): The drain on the outfall at Champions Wharf has been diverted so that the outfall now goes onto the slipway area, not into the river. This results in added pollution of the river and it appears to be damaging the bed of the river.

John Armstrong (Thanet Craft & York House Society): Provided photographs of the damage to the riverbed and questioned the state of the piles supporting the bridge to Eel Pie Island.

Ans (Jim Trimmer): Must check the licensing records of the PLA re the diversion of the drain. If there is damage to the riverbed, it is a serious matter and the PLA must do something about it.

- b. **The wharf:** Elizabeth Wood drew attention to the state of the mooring piles which deteriorated badly within a few months of installation. It is very difficult to use as a working wharf, and Pat Walsh, who is a frequent user, has had to construct a makeshift arrangement himself.

John Perry, who lives opposite the wharf, chronicled the successive stages of the decline of the new mooring piles and communicated this to the PLA. He provided a copy of the letter he had sent.

Ans (Jim Trimmer): The PLA licensed the works to the Council. He is willing to discuss the problem further in the hope of finding a solution.

3. AMBIENCE OF THE WATERFRONT

- a. **Lighting** Tony & Adrienne Rowe (Magic Carpet Café): They operate in the evenings and a lot of their potential customers are frightened off by the goings on the Embankment. There is a need for much better lighting so people feel the Embankment is a safe place to be.

Ans (Andrew Darvill): There are conflicting views about appropriate levels of lighting. More opinions would be welcome.

- b. **Bread dumping** Barry & Val Armstrong and Colin Heath (local residents): A new form of litter on the Embankment is the massive dumping of bread. Individuals doing this think they are helping feed the waterfowl. The amount of bread is far in excess of requirement, and it is attracting rats and crows as well as making a very unseemly mess on the Embankment. There are photographs to demonstrate the problem.

Ans: All the Ward Councillors and several from adjacent Wards were present and remedial action is underway.

- c. **Litter** John Perry (Keep Twickenham Tidy): Litter on the Embankment creates a very bad impression of the area. Some of it is spillage from litter bins, so it is a pity that the Council have rejected a design modification invented by himself and Trevor Bayliss that prevents birds and other scavengers from tipping out the contents of the bins. The Council's own proposals are for mobile bins, apparently unaware that anything and left on the Embankment that is mobile ends up in the river.

- d. **Public conveniences** Trevor Bayliss (local resident): It is evident from the unseemly displays on the riverbank that the Council's current policy for provision of facilities is not working. The public conveniences at the foot of Water Lane should be reopened immediately.

4. For the future

- a. **A novel design** Jim Deasley (local architect) showed a sketch plan of what the Embankment could look like. He proposed that it be pedestrianised in front of the pool and cut back to make a new spot for feeding the ducks that would be more child-friendly. The road and parking would not be lost, but relocated to the rear of the shops, leaving a major public pedestrian open space fronting the river.

Many of the audience liked the idea. (It can be seen at <http://www.rivercentre.org.uk/mayors100.htm> .)

- b. **Further actions.** Jack Betteridge (Convenor of the meeting). It was obvious that what was seen as "the" problem of the Embankment is a sum of many problems. Some are straightforward to deal with, others less so. But if it is agreed what they are and a plan of action devised and implemented we would see dramatic improvements in the quality of the Twickenham Waterfront within a few years.

Some good constructive ideas have been put forward on behalf of the Council, and supported by the PLA, for working with local amenity groups to make the Waterfront a better place for those who live and work on the river, and those who just enjoy it.

IN CONCLUSION

Cllr Orchard, Chairman of the Twickenham Society, noted that numerous speakers had made it clear that something needs to be done. The speakers for the Council and the PLA had made excellent positive suggestions for action. He pledged the support of the Twickenham Society, and of the other local groups that had organised the meeting, to work with the Statutory bodies as proposed by the speakers. He felt we now have an opportunity to halt the decline and restore the Waterfront to a state of which we can be proud. He thanked all of the speakers and members of the audience for their contributions.

C. ADDITIONAL POINTS COMMUNICATED IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING

Several people communicated points of view in advance of the meeting. Those not raised at the meeting itself, are itemised below:

1. WORKING RIVER

- a. **Helen Montgomery-Smith (Eel Pie Boatyard):** Access, moorings, use of Embankment
- b. **Ken Dwan (Eel Pie Slipways):** It is very difficult to use the Embankment as a working waterfront. There needs to be a change in regulations that create problems of access when loading or using boats, and the mooring facilities leave much to be desired.
- c.

2. RECREATIONAL RIVER

- a. **Robert Sheppard (local resident and river user):** It is not really possible to moor one's boat safely on Twickenham Embankment. It would greatly enhance the ambience if decent moorings were available to recreational boaters so that they could tie up at Twickenham to visit the Centre or have a drink.
- b. **Sally Howard & Katherine Kinch (Twickenham Rowing Club):** Our objective at the meeting is really to confirm our need for access to the slipway by the church for loading boats onto the trailer, and unloading boats and also for novice sculling. As you know we have permission to park the trailer here. We recently managed a Head Race (The Remenham Head) where visiting crews used this slipway to boat. And we have considered running a Twickenham Head on an annual basis. We also use this slipway beach at low tide to teach novices how to get in and out of a sculling boat and learn balance. The conditions are ideal for this teaching exercise.
- c. In addition, we use the steps by the footbridge for loading sculls and pairs onto vehicles.

- d. For your information, the Club has recently invested heavily in the Junior program and have partnerships with a number of schools in the area as well as managing a squad of some 40 Juniors from the club. In addition to supporting recreational rowing.

3. GETTING THINGS DONE.

- a. **Angela Kidner (Environment Trust RuT):** Work of Tow Path Working Party
- b. Need for rigorous structural survey of Embankment

4. NEED FOR VISION

- a. **Jack Betteridge (Twick Soc & River Thames Soc):** Boat yards on Eel Pie Island are changing hands and there is a trend towards change of use. There is a real danger that this trend, if it continues unchecked, will result in major change in the vistas we take for granted. A view out to the residences on Eel Pie Island (which are the likely consequences of creeping development) won't have the same charm.
- b. Planning decisions should take the long term consequences into account. Alternatively there is an urgent need to rethink the future of the Riverside as a Conservation Area.