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Statement to the Public Inquiry into Twickenham Pool Site re Section 3: the Relationship of the Proposed Development to Policies in the UDP and the Emerging UDP. Final version.

I would like to offer the UDP Inspector a vote of thanks for the clarification he has provided. His notes will be very useful in the future – as are the notes and conclusions in the 1991 Inquiry Inspector's report.

The Council's short term scheme meets many of the conditions of the provisional UDP, in that:

1. It is compatible with the improvement of the wider area;
2. It maintains the scale and character of this part of the riverside – with reservations;
3. Although it does not make a significant contribution to achieving the strategic policies of the Thames Landscape Strategy, it doesn't detract from its aims;
4. It does not take account of the vehicular and other access needs of river users, local residents and businesses, but on the other hand, it doesn't interfere with them;
5. It partially promotes the use and enjoyment of the River and riverside – with reservations;
6. It does not have a direct impact, positive or negative, on the rear access to King St via the service road. It does nothing to interfere with it, or to improve it;
7. The important trees are retained.

It has the advantage of removing some of the blight along part of the front and one end of the site. It does not – generally – conflict with the scale, as specified in the 1991 Inspector's report. And it does reinforce the site's position as a buffer zone between the river and the town centre.

However, point 1: the 1.8 metre high fencing around the play area is out of keeping with the riverside, and the Conservation area. Plans have been mentioned to introduce climbing plants to "soften" the mesh. This could have the effect of screening off the playground from the outside, and diminishing the safety of the families inside. If I were a mother with a young child, I'd think twice about going in there, especially with the problems we now have with vagrants.

Point 2: On the lower level, facing the Embankment, the retaining wall behind the seating will be 2.5 metres high. The walling around the pool itself will be on top of that, reaching a substantial height.

As well as the wall's apparent mass, there's another issue: the graffiti problem. It's already bad in the town centre. Are we in danger of providing a perfect stretch of canvas for aspiring artists?

Point 3: The UDP Inquiry inspector points out that any planning brief for redevelopment of the site must indicate the characteristics of the Conservation Area which justify its designation. We have not seen any planning brief for this short-term scheme, though we now hope to do so.

Point 4: The short term development does not actively promote use and enjoyment of the River and the riverside – any riparian experience on the site will be purely passive. The children’s play area could be anywhere, and the seating on the upper level is placed behind the 1.8 metre fencing and the screen of existing trees in the south-west corner of the site.

Point 5: It is not clear what proportion the public open space in this scheme will form in the whole of the long term development of the site.

Point 6: We have an ongoing problem with vandalism in this area. Maureen Payan at HANDS has had repeated break-ins, and there have been a stream of break-ins and vandalism around the pool site. This is of great concern to those of us who live locally, and this project does nothing to address it.

So though the scheme does accord with much of the UDP – as one would expect, with a scheme of such a small scale – it is not entirely in keeping with the conservation area. It fails to interact with or encourage enjoyment of the river.

The UDP inspector also says, in paragraph 11.17, that he doubts “whether the time scale for the implementation of even a modest scheme will be brief.” This sentiment, we echo: this scheme needs to be the best it possibly can. We could be looking at it for a very long time to come.