

February 2004 Twickenham Poolsite Inquiry – Adam Brand, York House Society.

#### LONG TERM

The Twickenham Society Group of societies, with some reservations, is in support of what the Council is planning. I will, however, speak about the long term issues relating to the site as a whole - the site as a whole, in its wider context, being a key issue in the emerging UDP.

The short term scheme – the call-in proposals - must in the absolute be the best possible, because this is a Conservation Area. Furthermore, by default, the short term scheme could become a long term scheme; it is already behind target. Because of these points, the plans for the short term scheme should be enhanced.

The proposed scheme does accord ‘with policies that seek to provide public open space and recreational facilities’(1), but the public space is in the wrong area.

The architect Sir Terry Farrell has said, “Public spaces around a building are ...the most important aspects of a development – what I call ‘space positive’(2).

The west side of the short term scheme could, however, be better described as ‘space negative’. The plan includes a high protective fence around a playground facing a blank high wall. Conservation Areas are by definition ones that must be ‘safeguarded from ill considered change’ (3). The proposed public space on the west side is, unfortunately, a change which is ‘ill considered’.

If the precedence is established that this west side strip is the public space in accord with policy, then it could well remain the public space for the long term development.

Yet what the people of Twickenham want is for the public space to be at the bottom of Water Lane on the embankment at the south east corner of the site.

I know this because I recorded the views of interested parties at an open meeting on March 27, 2003. (The meeting did not consist of a statistically selected random sample of residents, so the views cannot be extrapolated to represent the views of the whole of Twickenham. None-the-less that meeting has been the only one where an officer of the borough, Tom Mckevitt, has had the chance to explain the Council’s plans for the short term scheme. The Council itself apparently has not carried out any statistically valid survey of residents; on the contrary, it appears that its policy is only to consult through the planning process.)

Why is the south east corner of the site so vital? It is because it is the third corner of a Recreational Triangle. The first corner of this Triangle, enjoyed by picnickers, is the grassy knoll opposite the pool site at the bottom of Water Lane; the second corner is the ‘steps area’ down into the river next to the bridge. Here fast river currents by-pass the inlet and so ducks, swans and geese can rest, and it is usually safe there for children to feed these birds.

The Council, however, plans to have a public space down the west side of the site along Wharf Lane, as it wants to revitalise what it describes in its press release as a ‘no go’ area (4).

But at the bottom of Wharf Lane the river current is often too fast to attract birds; it is dangerous for children to come down to the river’s edge there, and because of the secluded nature of the area - near trees, a high wall and the river - it is also a gathering spot for troublesome vagrants. The letter (5) from Mr Tony Arbour to Mr Ian Tyson, who lives opposite the site, highlights how difficult it is to enforce ‘no drinking zones’. As a result it is unlikely to be an attractive place for parents to take their children.

The solution is for public space to be in the south east corner of the site.

The Council may say the gradients at the bottom of Water Lane are too steep to give access to the disabled. But the architects for the previous scheme had no issue with this, as an entrance to the south east corner can be made higher up Water Lane.

Nobody is fooled, then, that the south east part of the site, in the Recreational Triangle, is the critical and most valuable area. It is what developers want to get their hands on, and it is what the people of Twickenham want to keep for themselves.

In a press release (3), the Council has said that it is planning for a market square in the long term scheme. In addition, the UDP Inspector has recommended that there should be ‘more explicit emphasis on the provision of public open space as the predominant feature of any redevelopment scheme’ (6).

All that is encouraging; but in the short term, it is still vital that public space be made available on the key south east side, as well as elsewhere.

Notes:

1. Council’s Proof of Evidence – Planning Considerations 7.12.
2. page 14, Green Places Magazine, December 2003, Publisher – Landscape Design Trust.
3. LBRUT Leaflet ‘Conservation Areas’.
4. February 26, 2003.
5. February 3, 2004
6. Modification Ref: D/T1/2.