

Public Inquiry

Former pool site, Twickenham Embankment Proposals for Temporary Development

13th Feb

Q1

Sir,

I have been asked to address from the Twickenham Society Group's point of view *whether the proposed development would prejudice proposals for the redevelopment of the former Swimming pool site as a whole.*

You will have seen our Proof of Evidence in detail and I just want to emphasise a few points from that. It was produced before we had sight of that part of the Inspector's report on the UDP Review Modifications which deals with the T1 site, and so some of the comments within our proof may have been superseded by what we now know.

Clearly, almost any development has an effect on successive developments on the site or on nearby sites. That effect may or may not be prejudicial, indeed the effect may be beneficial.

We are aware that the existing proposal for development, which has already been granted planning permission, makes substantial use of the existing buildings, and so would no longer be feasible if the Council's temporary scheme were to be implemented. In that sense, the temporary proposals would be prejudicial to that proposal. We submit, however, that the objection can only carry weight if those proposals can be demonstrated to be fully viable and realistic. In this we rely on the Council's view on viability. We suggest that what cannot happen cannot be prejudiced. The permitted scheme will not happen because there will be no confidence in its financial viability and because the landowners will not give their permission for works to commence. We note, in this context, that the Inspector's UDP Modifications Report clearly indicates that the building should not remain in any future scheme.

In our view, therefore, we are left with considering if the temporary proposals prejudice proposals emerging from the Twickenham Challenge Scheme.

The proposal before you has been designed to pave the way for a more significant development yet to be proposed in detail. It is for the Council to explain precisely how that will be achieved but I think we are content that that is the Council's honest intention and we are reasonably confident that it can be achieved.

But we do have reservations. The reservations are set out in section 1.1.3 of our Proof of Evidence on page 6. Further reservations are set out in sections 2.1.3 and section 2.2. I do not propose to deal with those latter reservations of our Group about the siting and detailing of the Council's temporary proposals. These matters will be addressed by my colleagues later in this Inquiry. I merely say that our support for the Council's case would have been more wholehearted if they had been willing to concede some points at the Modifications Inquiry.

The first reservation is on clarity of the Council's strategy.

Lack of clarity.

The clarification provided by the Inspector's report should enable all the parties to the

Twickenham Challenge to have a clearer view of what aspirations for this site will or will not be acceptable.

We were concerned that because the Council has not yet made it clear to the general public just how the Twickenham Challenge will work nor, perhaps more significantly, have they been able to inform our residents of the progress of the Challenge, there is mounting pressure to just get something done. There does seem to be an impression that the whole site is to be cleared as part of the temporary scheme. This is not, of course, part of the proposal before you.

We hope that the Council also may take this opportunity not only to clarify the details of its temporary scheme, but to produce a revised Development Brief for the long-term redevelopment of the whole site. I need hardly add that we would expect our Group to be consulted on the contents and detail of such a Brief. At least the outlines of a long-term scheme would be clearer to all after publishing such a brief.

Our next concern was,

Compliance with the principles of the 1991 Inspectors report.

We believe that to a large measure our stance at the UDP Modifications Inquiry has been vindicated by the Inspector's subsequent Report.

We hope that our suspicion, expressed in the second bullet point of Section 1.1.3, that the Council might be committed to a much larger development will now be laid to rest when the Council have reassessed their ambitions in the light of the Modifications Report.

The final reservation applicable to the scheme concerns,

Quality of design

The quality of the short-term scheme is of critical importance. Perhaps I can underline the point made on page 5 of our Proof of Evidence at the very end of section 1.1.1. If, for whatever reason, the long-term scheme should fail to be implemented, it will leave the temporary scheme in place indefinitely. The quality must therefore be such as will still be acceptable after five years and potentially for much longer. The Inspector's report on the UDP modifications relies on the Conservation Area designation to provide that reassurance. We have heard much already on the Council's behalf that it may be a long time before a final scheme can be implemented. Sir, this underlines the need for care at this early stage.

So much then for our reservations, which I know are well understood by the Council and which I hope are taken in good faith.

Returning to the issue of prejudice:

Could the Council's longer term plans for the site be prejudiced by their short-term proposals?

It is conceivable that when a final proposal is chosen, it may be that it will be found to have been prejudiced by some previous decisions. So, in that very tenuous sense, the Council's own scheme may be prejudiced by its own temporary proposals. On that basis Sir, nothing would ever be implemented.

I believe the sense of this Inquiry is asking not if a proposal would or could, in some hypothetical situation, prejudice any conceivable redevelopment, but rather whether it would in any practical or in reasonable expectation prejudice a likely redevelopment to a significant

degree.

To that we answer no, the short-term scheme is unlikely to prejudice significantly the long-term redevelopment of the site.

We have a choice. On the one hand, a scheme that would be prejudiced if it could be shown to be viable, on the other hand a potential scheme that is not yet detailed, but is potentially of great benefit to all sectors of the community. Sir, this is not an ideal choice, but our money, on balance, is on the Council's long term plan. And we do not believe that it could realistically be said to be prejudiced by their short-term scheme.

The welcome input of the Inspector's Report on the UDP Modifications should increase the possibility of achieving a worthwhile and fitting development on this treasured site. The Report must have given every party to this Inquiry considerable pause for thought. It may be that the Council would like to reconsider their immediate proposals in the light of the report, and that might provide an opportunity for re-examination of the issues we have consistently raised in an effort, not to impede, but to improve the temporary scheme. We recognise that, theoretically, the Council may not accept the Inspector's recommendations on the UDP Modifications in their entirety. However, we also acknowledge that the Council Leader has stated that his administration will accept all the Inspector's recommendations.

Sir, in summary, we think we see progress. We believe the Council is easing gently towards an acceptable long-term scheme and, notwithstanding our reservations about the short-term scheme, we think a temporary scheme is a step towards our ultimate goal. To that end, we welcome the opportunity to make suggestions about conditions to be attached to a possible permission

I therefore conclude that although the proposed temporary scheme is less than ideal, still, with all its flaws we prefer it to the present dereliction, and we believe that a majority of the people of Twickenham would wish it to proceed without further delay. If, additionally, this Inquiry can help resolve some of our remaining concerns that would be a very good result indeed.

John Bell on behalf of the Twickenham Society Group
13/2/2004