

Twickenham River Centre



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The development of the Twickenham River Centre is being led by the **Environment Trust for Richmond upon Thames**. The project is in the public spotlight and detailed information about it can be viewed at www.rivercentre.org.uk. Below, the Trust's project team responds to some frequently asked questions about the River Centre and the Trust.

QWHAT IS THE RIVER CENTRE FOR?

A The River Centre will be a new type of building. It will serve the whole community, with a specific purpose: *to help everyone understand and enjoy the river.*

- Environmental education for all age groups will be provided, linked to practical **EXPERIENCE** and **ENJOYMENT**. The River Centre will also be a venue for nature exhibits, activities, talks, films and courses.
- The River Centre will house a **WORKING BOATHOUSE** and workshop that will demonstrate traditional boat building and repair skills, a showcase for Twickenham's working history. Boats will also be available for hire.
- A ground-floor **CAFÉ** overlooking a new children's **PLAYGROUND** will become a flexible **RESTAURANT** space in the evenings. It will be run on a commercial basis and promote healthy and sustainably sourced food at good value prices.
- There will be a "one-stop shop" **INFORMATION CENTRE** explaining everything local residents and visitors want to know about enjoying and using the Thames.
- An **ENERGY-EFFICIENT BUILDING** using the very best technology, the River Centre itself will be a teaching tool, demonstrating sustainable construction and practice.
- There will be shared office space for **LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS** (such as BTCV, Thames Landscape Strategy, Richmond Environment Network and HANDS) in addition to the Environment Trust.

Most importantly, the River Centre will become a **PLACE TO GO** in Twickenham, an educational and recreational facility for local people and an attractive destination for visitors from further afield. It will generate a lively atmosphere on the riverside all year round, daytime and evening. The River Centre is for the whole community and the Trust welcomes further ideas from people about what they would like to have in it.

QWHO WILL IT APPEAL TO?

A Nearly everyone you can think of: **YOUNG CHILDREN** and their parents in the boat-themed playground; **OLDER CHILDREN** and **TEENAGERS** in the environmental education courses, apprenticeships and the boating and recreational facilities; **FAMILIES** looking for leisure activities in a safe environment; **ADULTS** interested in the river and wider environment; **OLDER PEOPLE** wanting new skills and company; **VISITORS** seeking exhibitions and information, and anyone wanting to have a coffee or meal while watching the river.

ENVIRONMENT TRUST FOR RICHMOND UPON THAMES

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Q WHY WILL THE ENVIRONMENT TRUST MANAGE IT?

A The concept of a River Centre, celebrating the River Thames and providing practical environmental education for the whole community, was first conceived by local groups including the Environment Trust 10 years ago. In 2003 the then Conservative Council launched the *Twickenham Challenge*, a competition to find an appropriate community building as part of the Twickenham Riverside development, and the Trust's proposal for a River Centre was shortlisted with two other ideas.

In 2006 the new Liberal Democrat administration identified the River Centre as the best scheme for the site, due both to its relevance to the riverside location and to the benefits it offered to the widest cross-section of the community. The Trust, and its partners including Thames Landscape Strategy and BTCV, put together a team to develop the River Centre and this team has been working on the project for the past three years.

Q WHO IS THE ENVIRONMENT TRUST?

A The Trust is a well established local charity that has operated across the borough of Richmond upon Thames for 25 years and carried out a great many popular environmental and educational activities. We have good relationships and experience in dealing with grant-giving bodies and have gathered the expert advice and support needed to conceptualise, build and manage the River Centre. The Trust's board of trustees has a range of skills gained from careers in government, local authorities, education, charities, commercial organisations, and their own companies.

The Trust is the lead for a strong network of 40 local and London-wide partner organisations, working together to deliver the River Centre.

Q WHAT IS THE SIZE OF THE PROPOSED BUILDING?

A It is an inspirational two-and-a-half storey building with a green roof, designed to fit into the land form and make the minimum impact on its open setting. Spaces will be flexible to allow optimum use.

Q WHAT WILL THE CENTRE OFFER FOR TEENAGERS?

A One of our partners in the project is Richmond Youth Partnership and, with their guidance, we will ensure that the River Centre is both fun and a constructive experience for young people. Currently, we are planning to have a chill-out area, a mobile refreshment kiosk run by young people, and facilities for filmmaking and learning other skills, but we are keen to get ideas from young people of what they would like to see. There will be a wide range of training modules for teenagers, providing environmental education, work training and apprenticeships.

Q IS THERE A BUSINESS PLAN FOR THE PROJECT, AND WHERE CAN I SEE IT?

A The Trust started work on its business plan for the River Centre in early 2007. Version 3.5 of the plan was submitted to the Council in September 2008 as a confidential document, as is normal practice for plans in the approval phase. This has subsequently been reviewed by all parties in the Council. A 32-page public version of this plan was released in October 2008.

Over the past six months there has been an open competition between three developers to design a scheme for the overall riverside redevelopment and these designs proposed significantly different solutions for the River Centre. In that time it has not been possible to provide a formal update of the entire business plan, but the Trust has produced two update reports on its progress.

All of these documents, with the exception of the initial confidential plan, are available on the independent River Centre website www.rivercentre.org.uk and the Trust welcomes comments, suggestions and concerns regarding any aspects of the plans from the public as well as interest groups. A full update of the business plan incorporating the plans of the winning developer, Countryside Properties, will be released for public review and comment in the autumn.

QWHAT DOES THE TRUST THINK ABOUT THE WIDER DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITE?

A The Trust has had an interest in the Twickenham Riverside site for many years and has been an active party in opposing previous schemes for the site, which it judged to be over-developed.

The Trust accepted the principle of mixed development, including housing, open space and leisure uses for the site that was put forward in the Unitary Development Plan in 2002 and was subsequently taken successfully through a planning inquiry by the previous Conservative Council. For this reason the Trust felt able to respond to the *Twickenham Challenge*.

We have remained mindful of our wider remit regarding appropriate development in the borough and stated clearly to the Council and each of the developers that we would only be involved in a scheme for the overall site that we would support were we not involved. We were very pleased therefore that the proposals by Countryside were selected unanimously by the Council's evaluation panel, as they fully meet this requirement.

The Countryside scheme features an innovative River Centre building, surrounded by new public open space that extends over the top of the building in the form of a green roof. The river frontage will be improved, many of the parked cars removed to the rear of the site and a new children's play area, with a river theme, will be created. The Trust is confident that this scheme provides a significant net benefit for the riverside, Twickenham town centre and the borough as a whole.

QHAS THE TRUST CONSIDERED ALTERNATIVE SITES FOR THE RIVER CENTRE?

A The River Centre was a site-specific response to the *Twickenham Challenge* and is there to provide a boost to Twickenham's attractiveness and viability and to revitalise the embankment, as well as being a highly valuable resource in its own right.

During the exhibition of alternative schemes by other local groups in February 2009, it was suggested there is a viable site for the River Centre on Eel Pie Island. However this site would be very unlikely to meet planning requirements as a Planning Inspector has already ruled that the site in question must stay as a boatyard with B2 (river-related industry) use; a river centre with small-scale boat repair facilities would not meet this requirement. Nor would the Trust want to be the agent of removal of valuable commercial boat-repair facilities from the island. Additionally, there would be serious concerns about emergency service access, access for disabled people, and flooding, in a situation where large numbers of people - especially children - would be visiting in groups.

QHOW WILL THE RIVER CENTRE'S EDUCATION PROGRAMMES BE CARRIED OUT?

A Our aim is to develop a wide range of education programmes designed for people of all ages and abilities, exploring the river, the environment and the wider issues of sustainable living. These courses will provide employment training, qualifications and general interest and information. They will help to engage the community with the river and promote greater awareness and practical improvements to the environment.

The Trust is already building relationships with well established education providers to offer a wide range of environmental education programmes. We currently conduct environmental education for primary and secondary schools in the borough, supported by Thames Landscape Strategy and Thames Explorer Trust (based in Chiswick). We also have an existing partnership with Kingston University on sustainable building and this is being broadened. We have good links with a major

London agricultural and environmental college and plan to launch joint courses with them next spring. The Trust launched a series of adult environmental courses this spring and these will be expanding in the autumn. We also have a partnership with Richmond Adult Community College, providing courses for students with learning difficulties, and this partnership is also expanding.

QWHAT IS THE CONCEPT FOR THE CAFÉ/RESTAURANT IN THE RIVER CENTRE?

A The River Centre will provide a good-quality café during the day, which is transformed into a restaurant in the evening and will be open seven days a week. The restaurant will be run by a commercial operator and the contract will be awarded to a restaurateur who shares the values of the River Centre with respect to such issues as sustainable produce, local apprenticeships and training.

The River Centre will receive a rent from the operation of the restaurant and this will help to fund the operation of the River Centre and the provision of activities for the benefit of the community. The fact that the restaurant will be supporting the local community in this way, as well as its unique riverside location, should help to ensure its success.

QHOW WILL THE RIVER CENTRE BE PAID FOR?

A The development stage of the project, up until the receipt of planning permission next year, is being supported by grants from City Bridge Trust, plus a large amount of voluntary effort from local people and outside specialist advisers.

The main building costs will be paid for by the developer as one of its requirements for the overall development. Income from the housing will fund the construction of the River Centre and landscaped public open space, the restored waterfront and a new parking area at the rear of the site. The Trust is preparing bids for fitting out the River Centre. These will be submitted around the time of the planning application, in late 2009. The finance for the interior is required by 2011 and will be raised from these charitable grants, potentially in combination with commercial sponsorship and private donations.

The restaurant, along with rents from the charities that will occupy the building, will go towards the running costs. The educational activities will be self-funding and provide extra income to support the operation of the River Centre. The operation will essentially be funded from the activities delivered, with salaried and contract staff supported by a network of volunteer groups.

QWHAT HAPPENS NEXT AND WHEN WILL IT OPEN?

A The Trust has already started developing the activities that will operate out of the River Centre. The Business Plan will be formally updated in the autumn. The Trust is working with the developer to produce a detailed planning application for the overall development and this will be submitted by the end of the year. There will then be a full public consultation on this final design, and the opportunity for individuals and community groups to make detailed comments, as with any planning application. The expectation is that, subject to planning approval, construction will start in 2010 and the River Centre will be open by early 2012.

QWHERE CAN I REGISTER MY OPINIONS AND FIND OUT MORE?

A You can add your comments about the River Centre at www.rivercentre.org.uk, where the various public documents for the River Centre can also be viewed. Anyone with further questions, suggestions or offers of support for the project can contact the Environment Trust at office@environmenttrust.co.uk.