

Twickenham Riverside – Short Term Scheme

Planning Statement

This planning application is for full approval of a scheme to partially redevelop the former Twickenham swimming pool site by removal of the changing room building, its replacement by a hard landscaped garden area, the creation of public access to the area from Wharf Lane to the Embankment and a range of planting, environmental improvements and hard landscaping features to the areas which will be redeveloped. For convenience, the changing/plant room identified for removal in this application will be referred to as the "pool building".

The site, owned by London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (the applicant) is located on the Twickenham Embankment / north bank of the river Thames directly opposite Eel Pie Island. The site is bound on three sides by roads, The Embankment (south east), Wharf Lane (south west) and a service road to the rear of the properties at 1-33 King Street (north west). The remaining boundary to the north east is a wall abutting a private car park

The site was developed in the 1930s as an open air swimming pool with lido areas and associated structures housing changing rooms and plant. The original site was sloping ground to the rivers edge following the incline evident on surrounding roads. The swimming pool itself was constructed largely above this level resulting in a substantial increase of ground levels above The Embankment. This is reflected in the construction of the pool building which enters from street level and raises one storey to access the poolside with a 3 metre (\pm) concrete retaining wall to the rear of the Embankment. This retaining structure extends to each side of the building joining the Café building to the north and turning into a surface embellished retaining wall, matching the main building, on the Wharf Lane boundary which holds the lido area above.

The pool building is a concrete and steel framed structure with clad external walls which appear to be insitu concrete cast with the steel frame and the aggregate face. There is a horizontal brick creasing detail to ground (street) level and brick above exposed edge of intermediate floor slab. Brick parapet walls approximately 1 metre high conceal a flat roof. A central entrance feature projects forward of the main frontage with a flat canopy extending over the doors and the parapet - rising almost 2 metres higher than the adjacent walls.

The pool facility was closed in the 1980s and has remained unused since then - with the exception of some voluntary and community group usage of the river end of the café block. There is currently one tenant providing voluntary support services.

Virtually all structures at the site are boarded and heavily vandalised, the general fabric is deteriorating and the areas around the pool are covered with graffiti, strewn with rubbish and overgrown with a number of self-seeded plants and trees. At the boundaries generally, the unrestricted growth of both original and later trees, particularly from root spread, has caused damage to walls and retaining structures.

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Previous attempts to secure the site have resulted in concrete plank fencing, which runs around the two open perimeters. However, at much of the perimeter of the site this has also been damaged and has been augmented with ply wood panels.

The Council intends that the duration of this scheme will be no more than five years – and has set out its objectives for a long term and wider redevelopment. As a long term solution is likely to take a number of years to implement, this scheme is designed to put in place an interim scheme to significantly improve the ambience of Twickenham Riverside, create public benefits by improved amenity, public access, specific recreational uses for parents & children and overall, to make the area less threatening and unattractive. The scheme will also result in a dramatic reversal of the decay apparent at the main public frontages of this site.

The design proposals incorporate features which reflect pre-application discussion with the Council's landscape architect, the Head of Parks and Open Spaces, officers responsible for planning seasonal educational and leisure activities for children, the Metropolitan Police Crime Prevention Officer and the Environment Agency.

Broadly, works are at two areas of the site. The lower road level fronting the Embankment and the upper level of the poolside along Wharf Lane. The chief features of the scheme are:

- a raised pathway on the Embankment area with seating, planted areas and hard landscaping features
- the provision of hard landscaped steps linking the Embankment with a new children's playground at the Wharf Lane end of the site
- fencing, gates and appropriate lighting throughout
- the introduction of access to the site for people with mobility difficulties

The principal element of the scheme on the Embankment is the removal of the existing pool building back to its existing retaining wall line to create a recessed and slightly raised garden area. Brick planters to the rear of the space will link with a brick cladding to the existing retaining wall and also the new flight of steps to the children's playgrounds. The design allows for a seating area to provide enhanced views across the river and Eel Pie Island (compared to those currently achievable). The dereliction of the existing building will be replaced by a landscaped and highly accessible public space.

The screening to be provided above the existing retaining wall will provide security to the existing pool area. The proposed secure construction will be clad with decorative timber to provide a more visually acceptable appearance and will have a number of climbing plants trained on it to provide a "green" screen.

This screen concept (i.e. securing the derelict pool area) is continued into the children's playground where it will run to a junction with the existing fencing on the service road. The internal finish to the screen in the children's playground could follow a similar approach – but there may also be scope for a context-sensitive decorative finish (e.g. a mural). This is currently being researched.

The redeveloped Embankment will provide a major improvement to the amenity of the area. The area currently attracts very high numbers of informal users (for example,

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visitors to the draw dock and parents with young children feeding the ducks). This scheme, by virtue of the improved ambience and attractiveness of the area, is intended to significantly reinforce and increase such informal uses. The feasibility of further amenities to be provided around the children's playground is being explored.

During the brighter months of the year, the redeveloped Embankment area is likely to be very well used by those who currently make use of the area in their leisure time and in the summer months particularly, will be well-used by those who use the small open space at the junction of Water Lane and the Embankment.

To each side of the pool building footprint are existing raised areas set behind brick and railing walls. The walls will be retained and repaired / restored (as with retaining structures onto Wharf Lane) and densely planted for visual amenity. This will further improve the Wharf Lane approach to the river replacing the currently derelict and rubbish strewn garden area adjacent to the pavement. The existing trees will be assessed (in consultation with the Council's arboriculturist) and will be retained where not causing structural damage, with a programme of tree surgery being implemented as necessary.

The design seeks to eliminate the potential for misuse. By introducing a very specific use (the children's playgrounds) in an area where there is already a high volume of potential users of such a facility, the type of visitor can be predicted with some certainty. The scheme not only provides facilities lacking in the area but can also be viewed as a natural addition to the informal leisure opportunities which run along the River Thames (including Radnor Gardens & Orleans House). The scheme will provide a respite for shoppers on the high street and a higher level view of the river and Eel Pie Island will be created at the Embankment perimeter of the children's playgrounds.

Public access to the playground (including pushchair/wheelchairs) is from the corner of Wharf Lane and the service road with an additional route by steps from the Embankment. The Wharf Lane access gate will be fitted with staggered barriers to maximise safety for children using the area.

The mature hornbeams are retained on the service road maintaining the screen to the rear of the King Street shop units. Mature existing trees at the boundary will be retained with new planting designed to compliment that which exists following clearance of the uncontrolled vegetation.

The children's playground will incorporate play structures using wood, rope and metal as the key materials or recyclable play equipment - which will be set in a wet poured rubber granule continuous safety surface. The play equipment shown on the drawings is indicative of the size and type proposed and will be finalised at detailed design.

The design provides well defined open spaces and access to the Wharf Lane park will be restricted out of hours using secure open mesh fencing to a height of 1.8 metres on the perimeter with robust gating arrangements. The open mesh (similar to that used for school playgrounds and play facilities) will:

- maximise the sense of openness due to increased light permeation
- maintain visual links to areas outside the playground, particularly the river
- reduce the physical weight of the barrier when viewed from outside.

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- Provide a meshed/sprunged surface which will minimise the risk of collision injuries when compared to a more “solid” option (since the area is likely to encourage boisterous play!).

The external base of the fence will be planted to add to its effectiveness and to assist with visual blending into its surroundings.

Planting schemes will be finalised with the Parks Department and in consultation with the Borough’s in-house landscape advisors. Schemes will be finalised once the existing stock has been assessed and any necessary tree surgery identified.

Specific security features include:

- Robust gating and fencing to be secured out of hours (to the children’s playgrounds)
- The play area creates a pre-determined usage designed to attract particular users
- Lower areas are designed to maximise visual openness and will also feature low/dense planting
- The intermediate levels (at either side of the pool building footprint) are proposed to provide soft landscaped features only – with sufficiently dense new planting to dissuade unauthorised entry – in contrast to the current arrangements

The Embankment area (which will remain open to the public at all times) and the children’s playground will both feature appropriate lighting

The proposals would not appear to prejudice the future implementation of planning proposal T1.

Discussions have taken place with the Environment Agency on matters relating to the flood plain and other issues pertinent to the Environment Agency. The flood storage volume will be slightly increased for the temporary development with the applicant reserving the right to re-establish the existing flood defence line in the future. A continuous and effective flood defence will be established on the site to protect against the flood defence level of 6.02 ODN. The requirement for a land drainage consent for the works is recognised by the applicant. These and other issues are expanded upon in the Flood Risk Assessment, which meets the requirements of PPG25.