**BY EMAIL & POST**

 21st September 2018

Dear Councillor

**Planning Application 18/0151/FUL – Former Imperial College London Private Ground, Udney Park Rd, Teddington**

I am writing to you on behalf of Quantum and the Teddington Community Sports Ground CIC (TCSG CIC) regarding our joint planning application which will be heard at the Committee meeting this Wednesday 26th September. We have taken the decision not to speak at Committee and this letter sets out our rationale behind this decision and key points we would wish the Committee to consider.

Our application has generated a lot of local interest, both in support and opposition.  It should be acknowledged that following the 21-day public consultation, the representations of support from local people, who see the merits and benefits that this scheme can bring to the community and want to see it progress, far outnumber the objections.

We recognise, however, that there is a minority of vocally interested people, who from the outset formed an opinion, choosing to ignore and in many cases deliberately mislead the general public and the media on a number of facts that were simply untrue. The main one being that we were taking away public sports facilities, when in fact the site has always been privately owned.

Their intention from the outset was to see this scheme fail, which we consider to be borne out of very specific self-interests, with no thought or consideration to the wider community’s interests and benefit.

Our engagement has been thorough, in-depth and fully transparent. Hardly anybody in the Hampton Wick ward and beyond could say that they haven’t heard about our proposals at some stage. We have spent considerable time, effort and resource to keep people in your electorate up to date with our plans throughout every stage. This involved regular newsletters to Hampton Wick and Teddington wards, dedicated websites from both Quantum and the TCSG CIC, a drop-in Consultation Hub in 2016; hosting two 3-day exhibitions in June and December 2017 and door to door visits and face to face meetings with thousands of residents, businesses, associations, charities sports and community clubs. Councillors were included in our newsletter updates and invited to our public exhibitions yet very few showed any interest from the outset.

We believe this is a unique scheme which will benefit many and deliver much to the community, both young and old, which is why we are committed to reaching a positive conclusion.

However, we have taken the decision not to speak at committee, as we believe the likely level of hostility means our application would not be given the open mindedness it rightly deserves. We have made this decision for several reasons, and would like to take this opportunity to explain these to the Committee and to the wider community:

1. The application is now at appeal due to the failure of the LPA to decide the application within the statutory determination period, resulting in the decision being taken out of the hands of the LPA.
2. We do not feel that local Councillors have sought to consider our proposals with an open and unbiased mind.  This is reflected in the actions and comments made, which are summarised below:

Public opinions were expressed by LBRuT Councillors on the proposals without engaging with us on any aspect of the scheme:

**Councillor Stephen Knight:**

“.......the move is just positioning so Quantum could push through its “grubby little deal”

*Quote from press article on 22nd April 2016 – Richmond & Twickenham Times*

**Councillor Tony Arbour**

“we want to make this area even better by ensuring there is no development on Udney Park Road”

*Quoted in April 2018 – Richmond Borough Conservatives Pre-Election newsletter*

**Lord True, former Leader of the Council:**

“We heard strong arguements from both sides, but we stuck to our initial decision last night. It will give great pleasure I am sure to some of the Teddington resident’s groups. My heart does not bleed for Quantum, they knew they were buying green space in a Borough which protects its green spaces”

*Quoted in December 13th, 2017 – Cabinet Meeting*

**Councillor Martin Elengorn**

**“**Any substantial development is in direct breach of the Council’s proposed designation of the whole site as Local Green Space which would enjoy the same protection of Green Belt”

*March 2018 – Teddington Lib Dems Newsletter*

**Paul Hodgins, former Leader of the Council**

 Question 8 at the public meeting was put to the leader of the Council, Paul Hodgins

 “Whilst of course respecting the planning process, can the Council please confirm their commitment to preserve the green spaces in Hampton Wick and Teddington, in particular the need to preserve in their entirety the playing fields in Udney Park….so essentially the answer to your question is yes?”

Paul Hodgins then responded that he was opposed to Quantum’s proposals.

*Hampton Wick & Teddington Leader’s Question Time, 1st February 2018*

1. The unwillingness of the Local Planning Authority to discuss the application proposal before an application was formally lodged. The Government expects Local Planning Authorities to engage with applicants and demonstrate no pre-determination of planning proposals. It will be noted that the National Planning Policy Framework (2018) states the following:

Paragraph 39:

*“Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.”*

Paragraph 41:

*“The more issues that can be resolved at pre-application stage, including the need to deliver improvements in infrastructure and affordable housing, the greater the benefits. For their role in the planning system to be effective and positive, statutory planning consultees will need to take the same early, pro-active approach, and provide advice in a timely manner throughout the development process. This assists local planning authorities in issuing timely decisions, helping to ensure that applicants do not experience unnecessary delays and costs.”*

The Council’s own Statement of Community Involvement (Paragraph 3, Page 25 “Major applications pre-application discussion and early consultation”) says:

*“Seeking community views on the acceptability of proposals, especially before an application is finalised, strengthens people's ability to exert influence and provides an opportunity for problems to be ironed out, thus reducing the potential for later confrontation.”*

1. In our view the Officers have approached this application with a negative and closed mind set, and this is evidenced by:
	1. The advice received following a pre-application meeting held on 20 January 2017. Officers did not assess the proposals against the true tests of its own planning policy. The advice given was that “there is a fundamental policy objection to the proposals”, which we disagree with. The site is presently allocated in adopted Policy LP14 as “Other Open Land of Townscape Importance” (OOLoTI.) (Development Management Plan (2013) policy DM OS 3). The adopted policy wording and the supporting text enables a judgement to be made about the merits of any proposal and allows for some loss of open space to be acceptable, so there should not be a fundamental objection to the proposals.
	2. The unwillingness to register the application leaving us having to resort to obtaining a legal opinion. The planning application was submitted on 16 January 2018 and was not validated until March 2018, primarily as a result of officers not agreeing that the proposed extra-care use was not Use Class C2 (as proposed) and was Use Class C3, therefore an Affordable Housing Statement was required. Eventually, officers registered the application following a considerable amount of time and expense on seeking Counsel opinion supporting our view that the proposed extra care use is C2.
	3. The case officer, Lucy Thatcher, warning off Members from engaging with the applicants, with the suggestion that we would be invited to present to members once the planning application was submitted. A year before our planning application was submitted we emailed all 54 councillors to ask if they could meet or allow us to send details of our early proposals. A meeting was duly arranged with Councillors Nicholson and Allen. On April 13th, 2017 we received a call from the case officer, who informed us that we were not able to meet with any councillors as it was against protocol. We then received an email from Cllr Nicholson, cancelling the appointment which stated:

“I understand that the planning department will be organising a briefing for all councillors at which the Quantum team will be asked to give a presentation”. **We were not invited to any such presentation when we submitted our planning application to the former council.**

* 1. The approach taken at the Local Plan inquiry by officers, which was to introduce the equivalent of a Green Belt allocation for the site without any evidence or justification. The Inspector stated that he “*is unable to conclude that the* (Local Green Space) *designation is justified at this time.*” Officers have approached the proposed scheme by assessing it against a Local Green Space allocation, which does not exist and so is fundamentally wrong.
	2. The explanation of the application proposal, within the committee’s report does not appropriately recognise the benefits that the proposed scheme will bring. Whilst the report acknowledges that elements of the proposals would be beneficial to the local community, it does not assess these in any detail. This “weighting” demonstrates, in our view, the closed mind of officers and previous members of the Council on the merits of the scheme and it is of no surprise that the recommendation is therefore to refuse.

Rather than inflaming the situation we have chosen not to speak at the planning committee meeting, not least because it is now less important since the application is at appeal for determination. Instead, the following provides a thoughtful written explanation to raise awareness of the reasons why we consider our application (now at appeal) is in the community’s best interest: -

In reaching a decision we want the Committee to explain to the wider community exactly on what basis they would have either:

1. approved the application, had it not been appealed; or
2. why they consider the application proposals are both contrary to the Local Plan and why the material considerations are not considered to form the basis of an approval.

To assist, we have set out below a summary of the key considerations we think the Committee should bear in mind and to help them specifically explain their views in reaching a decision:

* **Policy –** The planning policies applicable to the site do not, as some would suggest, mean that development of the site as a matter of principle is unsupported. What the policy says is that a judgement needs to be made and whilst the intention is to keep the site open and undeveloped in nature, that doesn’t mean development is unacceptable.

The Council and other interested parties have sought to secure a Local Green Space designation on the site through the emerging Local Plan (which is being legally challenged). The Inspector dismissed the appropriateness of the Local Green Space proposal.

It is therefore incumbent on the decision maker to weigh up the pros and cons of the scheme to reach a judgement. A reliance on policy not supporting development on a number of principles is false.

In approving such proposals, this will not set a precedent for other sites coming forward with similar issues, as each scheme surely should be determined on its own merits.

**Community Use –** The site extends to 5.2 ha (12.8 acres). The entire site is presently in private ownership with no public access rights. The scheme proposes that 3.9 ha (9.5 acres) of the site (including the proposed built facilities) will be legally transferred to the community for the community to operate and occupy as they see fit in the interests of the public. This is a major benefit and differentiator to the current ability of the community to access and use the site and will have no impact on either the council or the taxpayer. It is only through a redevelopment such as proposed that the funding for “state of the art” facilities can be secured, which must be in the wider community interest to have access to.

**The proposals will bring the following benefits to the Teddington Community:**

* Significant new public open space (gifted to the TCSG CIC as custodians of the Community) to enrich the life, health and well-being of residents and visitors;
* Enhanced play and sporting opportunities for all ages and abilities;
* 3G Pitch will significantly increase the number of hours of sport played throughout the year in comparison with previous provision of turf pitches and deliver the necessary income stream to ensure the site is sustainable in the future.
* Space for local schools, clubs, groups and associations to have access to a wide range of community, sports and recreational facilities including meeting rooms; changing rooms a cafe, children’s play area and crèche;
* A modern multi-use Pavilion, open to the public. Built and managed at no cost to the Council or the taxpayer;
* Affordable housing solutions for older people, designed for independent living in a safe and secure environment;
* Enhanced biodiversity and habitat creation;
* A sustainable long-term legacy for future generations;
* A new GP surgery to help address the demands of the growing number of NHS patients in an already heavily subscribed catchment area;
* Extra care accommodation will help to stimulate ‘downsizing’ and free up much needed family sized (and under occupied) housing onto the open market;
* Employment opportunities;
* Older persons retirement communities offer communal living, with associated ‘soft services’ and care provision that help sustain independence and reduce isolation and loneliness;
* Retirees make important economic contributions through local spending;
* Retirees are active citizens and help to sustain community cohesion;
* Extra care housing will help to reduce rates of delayed transfer of care (bed blocking); and
* Reduced demand on elderly social care as residents live independently in their own homes
* Underground and onsite parking for all facilities to alleviate traffic and congestion concerns
* A new riding arena for Park Lane Stables, part of the National Riding for Disabled Association
* 9.5 acres of private land to be community owned and managed providing sports, leisure and community use - at no cost to either the council or the tax payer.

If permission is refused, then none of these benefits arise and the fields will remain private, under-utilised and unchanged.  Who wins in this scenario?  In coming to a conclusion on this application, an overall judgement is needed, weighing up the overwhelming benefits that our scheme will deliver for the wider community against the very localised and minimal impact the scheme will have. We, therefore, cannot see how a decision to refuse the planning application can be justified in the context set out above.

Whilst we appreciate the change in leadership and cabinet, we believe that the council as a whole has a reputation to protect, and a duty to serve its residents and taxpayers in the Borough. It is disappointing that during a time when we are facing a housing crisis, struggling National Health and Adult Social Services, increasing obesity rates amongst young people and lack of suitable accommodation for older people that LBRuT is doing its utmost to keep a minority of residents happy, whilst denying the wider community some fundamental needs.

Following the change in Council in May, we fully respect that many new councillors may be unaware of our application or the benefits that this scheme will bring to the community. We therefore include an Overview of the proposals that Members may be interested in perusing prior to the meeting.

Should the committee decide to approve our scheme - had an appeal not been lodged - and want to engage in discussions, then as applicants, we can confirm that we would welcome this and would submit a new application for local approval and, following this, withdraw the appeal.

Yours sincerely

Sam Hobson, on behalf of the Board Directors of Quantum Group & Bob Smith, Chairman Teddington Community Sports Ground CIC.

cc

Members of LBRuT Planning Committee

LBRuT Ward councillors for Hampton Wick and Teddington Ward

Cllr Gareth Roberts, LBRuT Leader of the Council

Simon Graham-Smith, LBRuT Planning Case Officer

Dr Nick Grundy, Park Road Surgery

Sir Vince Cable MP

Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London

Juliemma McLoughlin, Greater London Authority

Tim Salter, The Planning Inspectorate

Robin Meakins, Barton Willmore

Daniel Osborne, Barton Willmore

Grainne Cuffe, The Richmond & Twickenham Times