

Comment on a planning application

Application Details

Application: 22/0902/FUL

Address: The Stag Brewery Lower Richmond Road Mortlake London SW14 7ET

Proposal: Erection of a three-storey building to provide a new secondary school with sixth form; sports pitch with floodlighting, external MUGA and play space; and associated external works including landscaping, car and cycle parking, new access routes and other associated works

Comments Made By

Name: Mr. Geoffrey Stanton

Address: 18 Deanhill Road East Sheen London SW14 7DF

Comments

Type of comment: Object to the proposal

Comment: Inadequate evidence has been provided of the need for a new secondary school. Either a new sixth form will damage the existing sixth forms in the area or it will itself prove to be unviable.

Squeezing such a school onto a highly constrained site would have a range of negative impacts. These include the adverse effect on the density of the rest of the site, the creation of additional traffic on an already congested access road, and preventing a local primary school transferring to the site. Thompson House is on a split site, on either side of a busy level crossing, and with one building that has no outside space whatsoever.

The LA knows that its methodology for predicting future secondary need has been questioned. The delay caused by the initial rejection of the scheme means that it would have been possible to check on the methodology by comparing the actual level of demand against that predicted five years ago. This has not been done.

At the original planning meeting local heads argued that the creation of a new sixth form would threaten the viability of the existing ones. Despite this, the new submission does not address the issue. Where there is a group of small sixth forms all can struggle to provide the necessary choice of subjects.

The arguments put forward by officers have been inconsistent and contradictory.

For instance, when sixth forms were introduced Mr Matthew Paul quoted the example of a school in Harrow that was able quickly to establish a large sixth form. However, the school in question was very large, ten forms of entry, nearly twice as large as any Richmond secondary school at the time. More recently, when questions were asked in committee about why some Richmond schools were still struggling to establish sixth forms, Mr Paul said that this process “typically” takes ten years.

Not only does this contradict his original argument, it is not logical. If sixth forms grow this slowly, it is inevitable that current 16 year olds will attempt to move elsewhere at 16 to obtain the necessary choice of subjects, thus further delaying the growth of the sixth form. The tendency is for larger sixth forms to grow, while smaller ones wither. This has been shown in Richmond.

Expansion of the existing schools would both cater for an increase in demand and underpin sixth form viability. Initially officers asserted that neither of the schools wished to expand. It turned out that RPA positively wished to expand and Christ's said it would be willing to consider this.

Officers then asserted that there were insuperable planning difficulties about such expansion. When planning experts on the MCBG suggested ways in which these difficulties could be overcome officers simply repeated their assertions.

A recent paper on “The supply of state-funded secondary education in Richmond” made further unevidenced assertions in

favour of a new school. it said the following

“one key reason for the drift to the private sector is because there is not much choice of state funded schools in the Surrey half of the borough.” However, no figures are offered for the alleged “drift”, and surely no one “drifts” towards something that would cost them over £20k per annum

“there are no easily accessible alternative high quality state schools outside the borough”. This is not true. Chiswick School in Hounslow is a “good” school which is less than a mile from the Brewery site.

“it is probable that demand (for year 7 places) will grow exponentially from 2027 onwards.” No figures are given, but a truly exponential rate of growth would soon outstrip the capacity of all local schools put together, including a new one.

I do not envy the those tasked with school place planning. However, I have sadly concluded that officers have allowed themselves to become advocates rather than providers of objective analysis.

I therefore strongly suggest that an independent review of the data should be commissioned before any decision is made.