

28th March 2024

Dear Ms Dutton

Re: Appeal reference: APP/L5810/W/24/3339062

I am writing to draw your attention to our serious concerns about proposals for a large new secondary school with a 6th Form, within our catchment, on the Former Stag Brewery site. If this new school is needed, we should not object, but there is strong evidence that it will not be needed.

Local schools jointly objected to this proposed new school at the Planning Committee held by Richmond Council at the end of January 2020. However, our objections and deep concerns were not upheld. This is despite explaining the damage another school could cause to us and our 6th Forms. Although this application was rejected by the Mayor of London, a new application has been submitted.

At that time, there was serious doubt raised as to the 'need' for this school, which Richmond Borough had presented to the DfE. An in-depth Report prepared during 2020 by the Mortlake Brewery Community Group (MBCG) showed clear anomalies in the Borough's forecasting that would lead to overstatement. For example, the local shortfall of Year 7 places in 2021 forecast two years earlier to be 142, turned out to be 20 not allocated on PAN: easily accommodated by a single bulge class. This is further amplified by the tangible reduction in primary school pupil numbers in the area, a situation which local primary heads have most recently confirmed is even more prevalent this year, with most primary schools experiencing pupil numbers well below capacity.

Richmond's most recently published forecasts again predict significant shortfalls in Year 7 places. This time, 132 in each of 2026 and 2027. But once again there are significant anomalies: in particular, no allowance is made for shrinkage in primary year-groups as they progress to Year 6, which is well documented. Once these anomalies are removed, the forecast shortfall becomes about 30 in 2026, falling away thereafter. Data indicates a short-term increase in secondary pupil numbers, but this falls off, and will have done so by the time any new school could realistically get through the GLA planning process, detail design, tendering and construction. ONS (NOMIS) forecasts of Richmond's population, together with GLA yield calculations for all currently projected local housing developments, strongly suggest that future secondary needs in the area up to at least 2043 can be provided by modest expansion of the existing schools.

We believe that 3 strong, consistently improving, local secondary schools are a more sustainable and appropriate outcome than 4 schools which would then all have specific and unnecessary challenges to effectiveness, viability and quality of offer.

We are willing to consider the current expansion of our school, which we maintain is a more viable strategy both for any immediate new place needs, and importantly for a stronger educational offer in the locality. It would also allow us to expand our 6th Form to a more effective capacity and provide a broader curriculum.

In short, we urge you to consider our alternative strategy and appropriate expansion of the existing local schools which is perfectly feasible and is a more robust educational strategy in terms of quality schooling and financial viability. We also strongly support the proposal for Thomson House School to be situated at the Former Stag Brewery Site. This would provide a much needed, safer, and more appropriate site for an excellent local primary school.

We respectfully urge the rejection of the application to build a new secondary school on the Former Stag Brewery site and eagerly await the outcome of your analysis of this situation and your discussions with the borough.

Yours sincerely,

James Whelan, Head of School at Richmond Park Academy (AET)
Nabila Jiwa, Regional Executive Principal at Academies Enterprise Trust (AET)
Laura Ellener, Principal of Chiswick School
Amanda Letch, Executive Head of Thomson House School (WLT)
Tom Holmes, Head Teacher, Sheen Mount Primary School