



Molesey Residents' Association

Press Release

June 2005

HAMPTON COURT STATION / JOLLY BOATMAN SITES THE FACTS!!

There has been much misinformed opinion expressed recently regarding these sites – hence it is thought worthwhile to give a recap of why things are as they are.

The Hampton Court station site has been in the ownership of three successive rail authorities, currently Network Rail. The Jolly Boatman restaurant site was abandoned after a fire some 20 years ago and has since been in four different ownerships, recently and currently Epsom-based Gladedale Homes. During every ownership many discussions for development have taken place – both for the two individual sites and for the combined site. Many plans have been proffered but only one plan, for a 67-bed hotel, has ever received planning permission. The permission was never issued due to the inability of the applicant to sign a legal agreement concerning the planning conditions.

Each owner has had but one intent – to maximise the profit from development. Originally the majority of the schemes were for intensive office development as this was the most profitable development route until about 12 years ago, since when the discussion has always centred on residential development since this is now the most profitable.

In 1986, as the result of a major office planning proposal which was refused by Elmbridge and again at appeal, Molesey Residents Association persuaded the Council to draw up a Planning Brief which looked for community and heritage uses for the combined site. The Brief also implied that part use of the site for restaurant/public house/hotel could be acceptable. No proposals have ever been put before the Council's planning committee although such uses have received much discussion and provisional schemes have been mooted, often from parties with no ownership of the site.

Owners of the site insisted that unless a serious proportion of 'Residential' was allowed on the site, no development was possible. In 2000 Elmbridge Council modified the Planning Brief to allow up to 25% of the combined site to be used for residential development (much more than MRA thought appropriate), facing on to the Mole or Cigarette Island. Since then owners have showed enthusiasm and promises for such a scheme but have not submitted a planning application.

Molesey Residents Association has both arranged and been invited to numerous meetings with developers. The MRA has made formal representations to all parties and to the directors of Hampton Court Palace. The Palace agrees with the mainly community and heritage use of the site, which is MRA's main contention but the Palace cannot legally spend funds outside its curtilage. The MRA has been represented at the so-called Portcullis House considerations. This has involved meetings of all interested parties and has been led by local MP Ian Taylor, MBE and Vincent Cable, MP for Richmond and Twickenham. The main thrust has been to examine whether planning law would allow acquisition of the Jolly Boatman site for public amenity use. There are not yet any successful results to report but such success seems improbable without a financial benefactor.

Following the raising of the national profile of the site by a radio programme, CABE (the Commissioners for Architecture and the Built Environment - a government quango) became

involved. A meeting was called and attended by every conceivably interested group to listen to the concerns and suggestions of those groups. An independent architect also attended and was charged to come up with a plan to meet the needs of all concerned. Some weeks later provisional drawings were lodged with the Council for massive residential development well outside the 25% limit. All interested groups gave this the thumbs down and the independent architect is reconsidering. No formal planning applications were made.

The difficulty of getting a solution for the site, as a whole or in individual parts, lies in the fact that the sites are in private ownership and the owners require substantial profit from any development. Only massive residential development will provide the profit required. The Council does not own the site and it would be unlikely to get acceptance for any compulsory purchase order attempt but, in any case, is unlikely to have the will or funds (which would come from council tax) to pursue this kind of action.

The often-expressed view that 'They' or even 'All parties' haven't done anything about the situation is patently untrue. The also expressed view that 'They' should solve it, presents the impossible situation that control can be wrested from the owners, or that 'They' can raise the finance to purchase and remodel the site. Since all the local able authorities and associations have not achieved a solution over a long period of time, perhaps some of those who are critical of the situation might care to come forward with some practical advice as to how to achieve success.

Ernest Mallett, Surrey County Councillor
Molesey Residents Association
June 2005

www.moleseyresidentsassociation.org.uk