

Dear Cllr Roberts

30.04.19

Thank you for attending the Mortlake Brewery Community Group, (MBCG) meeting at St Mary's on 18th March, which our Group arranged as part of our regular cycle of meetings concerning the Stag Brewery redevelopment proposals; in this case specifically to discuss the proposed secondary school.

It was a shame that both Cllr Frost and yourself didn't announce yourselves earlier in the questions sections between each part of our agenda as that would perhaps have allowed more time for the community attendees to debate with you on this important part of the Stag site proposals. As Cllr Frost had to leave immediately after her comments this too lost a similar opportunity.

You will already have established from the meeting with MBCG colleagues earlier this year that we seriously question that there is a 'robust and evidence based' case for the new secondary school. Such a case has not been presented to the community nor, as far as we are aware, to the GLA, as required in their Stage 1 Report on the planning applications. Despite this the Local Authority continues to impose upon the developer the requirement to allocate land for a new school within the overall masterplan proposals.

The initial justification for the school put forward by the Local Authority used data (in Model 1 as we term it), which after detailed analysis revealed fundamental flaws in the figures and assumptions embedded in the predictions. This was discussed with you back in February this year.

Following that meeting with MBCG members new data were published, which we term Model 2. Model 1 was dropped without explanation and removed from the Council website. This was unhelpful as it had contained useful data on the leavers from local primary schools which it is not now possible to review. Model 2 significantly changed the basis of prediction used over the previous years, and now takes into account the whole of the east of the borough including the area adjacent to the Kingston boundary. A complete 'change of goal-posts'.

The public case for a new secondary school in Mortlake has always rested on the children in the north-east who will be unable to obtain a local secondary space and not on the demand from the whole of the east of the borough. Predicted extra demand in other parts of the east of the borough, much of it out-borough, should be provided for in the appropriate catchment area. The new scenario, Model 2, still does not justify a new 1150 pupil school, and if it did go ahead, would seriously threaten the success of other local secondary schools. This was all fully explained and presented in some considerable detail at the meeting. Should you wish to study the presentation it is now available on our 'Love Mortlake' website.

We understand that Cllr Avon recently asked a question of Cabinet - "Can the Cabinet member confirm that she supports the proposed secondary school on the Stag Brewery site?"

Cllr Frost's response was, "for a number of years it has been clear that the east of the borough is not well served for secondary school places and that all three schools in that area are now full in Year 7, with demand to grow further, as evidenced by the increased number of primary schools and ensuing secondary admissions".

This opening part of the statement, as established from our research of the Council's own data, mis-represents the situation - indeed we would say is incorrect. Firstly justification for a new school now takes into consideration predicted demand from the whole of the east of the borough including the area adjacent Kingston, but ignores the fact that the demand represent a bulge which falls off quickly, and certainly before any school could be built on the Stag site. We understand that a fall off in primary place demand is already materialising, which reads true with up-to-date census data for the primary schools. Circumstances have changed over the several years since the Stag site was first identified as a potential location for a secondary school.

The secondary school was imposed upon the Stag site by the previous administration after initially proposing a primary school in the Planning Brief for the site. This switch has never been adequately explained or justified and neither has there been any consultation or transparency with the community on awarding the running of the secondary school to the Livingstone Academy. You will undoubtedly have sensed the frustration and indeed anger expressed at the meeting and as the new administration you will surely wish to address this with the community. This sentiment is reflected in the responses to the planning application for the school, which (according to data provided on the Council's website), was only supported by 9% of respondents.

Your; 'Message from the Leader', in the latest Council Tax broadsheet states - " Importantly we will also continue our approach to making sure residents have a real say over the decisions that affect the future of the borough". We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you again to discuss this crucial aspect of the education provision in Richmond and avoid ending up with a 'White Elephant' in Mortlake on the Stag site, or failing schools elsewhere, or worst of all, both. We are certain that as Leader you would do all you can to avoid such a disaster.

Dealing specifically with the points raised by Cllr Frost and yourself can we highlight the following responses which it was not possible to make fully at the close of the meeting.

#### *1.0 Sub-optimal Site*

Cllr Frost stated that schools now have to be built on much smaller sites.

Clearly land is precious and financial pressures require efficiency of land take. However the Stag scheme shoe-horns the school into the site with totally inadequate space beyond the building footprint for recreation and high quality external environment.

The Stag site is large, ( 22acres) set within an environment of sub-urban character. The cramped nature of the current school design is more urban/town centre in layout, (based as it is on an urban "super-block" blueprint) so much so that it necessitates a rooftop recreation space. Is this really what children of the future and Mortlake deserves?

This is especially bewildering as the scheme chooses to completely remove the adjacent grass sports fields, which are part of the protected open green space (OOLTI).

#### *2.0 Alternative Approach - Expansion of Existing Local Schools / Planning Issues*

Cllr Frost stated that expansion of RPA/Christ's schools was not possible due to MOL/planning issues.

Our Group have investigated the feasibility of expansion on both sites. At RPA it is possible to expand without use of MOL, or negative impact on MOL. In the case of Christ's the Council and the GLA have both supported recent development here, immediately adjacent MOL - ( see Outline Planning Consent 3.7.13 and Full Planning Consent 20.11.13). Subject to normal planning considerations we believe expansion on these two site is perfectly feasible.

#### *3.0 Expansion of RPA and Christ's*

Cllr Frost stated that RPA did not want to expand.

This is clearly not true; A School Governor present at the meeting confirmed quite the opposite. The audience on 18th was naturally extremely shocked that the Cllr as Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools was unaware of RPA's position.

#### *4.0 Alternative Approach - Expansion of Existing Local Schools - Funding*

Both Cllr Frost and you outlined that funding for expansion presented a hurdle - the Council did not have the funds - 'it has already been spent' - you quoted. Please could you expand upon this?

Our understanding is that funding for expansion of schools is available through the ESFA. Government published documents are clear that Basis Needs funding is available to expand existing schools. Furthermore if a new secondary school is not located on the Stag site and places are provided by expansion of existing schools then the Section 106 monies could be apportioned to assist such expansion as specific mitigation measures; monies which would otherwise be necessary for the Chalker's Corner junction, (50% of the increased am peak traffic is generated by

the school - Chalker's Corner works are costed at £5.36m plus £2.85m for Lower Richmond Road ).

We are not party as to whether the developer requires payment for the Stag site land or whether annual leasehold costs are involved, but of course that would be unnecessary if the local schools were expanded.

To deviate from the idea of a new secondary school on the Stag site may be a difficult shift for the Council to contemplate, but as a new administration you have the perfect opportunity to interrogate the old scenario and seriously consider our proposed alternative to meet your statutory obligation to satisfy the future educational demand - both secondary and primary.

So many positives could result, namely:

- Existing local schools could flourish and improve, supporting their continued success and viability.
- These schools already have marvellous environments and existing sports facilities, and as a result the existing protected OOLTI green open space at the Stag site could be retained as envisaged and in compliance with your own Planning Brief.
- The land allocated for the school on the Stag site could accommodate further residential development and facilitate an increase in affordable housing, more in line with planning policy and the GLA's objectives.
- Works at Chalker's Corner may not be required, or at least would be far more modest, and the damaging impact on Chertsey Court residents and adjacent OOLTI would be removed.
- Safety at the Mortlake Station level crossing would be far less an issue without the peak time additional movements of 1150 pupils, staff and parents.
- The site could possibly accommodate a re-positioned Thomson House primary school to take it away from the split-sites and dangerous level crossing, giving it direct access to the retained OOLTI playing fields
- Vehicular journeys would be much reduced in the immediate vicinity, favourably impacting delivery of the Council's obligations in respect of the immediately adjacent Air Quality Monitoring Area at Chalker's Corner and delivery of the related Air Quality Action Plan.

This scenario seems to be a win-win situation in terms of enabling the Council to approve a scheme that would, we strongly suspect, be backed by the community, the GLA and the developer.

We therefore ask you to thoroughly review the data which underscores the Council's current course of direction, properly investigate the expansion alternative, and consider the very significant positives and other benefits which would accrue with the proposed alternative approach.

( please note our recent letter to the GLA, attached, which further outlines important details on the school scenario - this is copied to your planning officers and the developer for their active involvement on this key issue).

We invite you to continue the debate with our Group and the wider community in a transparent manner, as requested by the unanimous show of hands on the 18th, so that the very best results materialise both from a borough educational perspective and for this hugely significant strategic site on the former Brewery.

This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to deliver on the aims of the 2011 Planning Brief and improve Mortlake for generations to come. We cannot afford to get this wrong.

Peter Eaton for and on behalf of the MBCG