

WHY RIVERSIDE STUDIOS NEEDS TO BE REDEVELOPED.



Riverside Studios needs to be saved as a cultural asset for London and the people of Hammersmith. Concerns about the current development plan severely prejudice this, because if we don't achieve the joint development across Riverside Studios and Queens Wharf, we will close.

Planning permission for Queens Wharf has already been consented for a single site development. If this goes ahead without doing the joined up development as shown the Riverside Studios will stay as is and be inoperable during the building period, which is likely to lead to permanent closure of the Riverside Trust.

I have run the building now for 20 years since 1993 and this is by no means an easy task. When I first began the Riverside Trust was hugely in deficit and faced losing its entire Hammersmith & Fulham Council grant. When this grant ended we worked by managing a policy of bringing in commercial income to support the arts activity. By the late 90s we were again in trouble when TFI Friday ended its run here. The result was a difficult period which we got through with the support of the Arts Council Recovery Programme, which, again, built on the commercial and arts balance. This saw the main studio in the building turned into a full time television studio, which of course it originally was, as well an improvement in our Arts Council funding.

As part of this recovery the Arts Council required we undertook a condition survey of the building, which clearly stated it was past its useful life and needed redevelopment to make it fit for purpose within ten years (the report was done in 2002). As a consequence we

have been endeavouring to do this ever since. This has been a long and arduous task riven with the problems associated with any development on the Riverside Studios and Queens Wharf sites, given the relationship to Hammersmith Bridge and the fact this is one of the most prominent sites in the Borough.

In fact, going back in time, my shelves are littered with failed attempts to develop Riverside Studios. My office indeed was the base at one point for Will Alsop who, I think, was the first to attempt to design a new building here in the early 80s. The attempt failed.

Our present action has been precipitated by our neighbouring building Queens Wharf, which has been through a whole series of owners since Compass Catering moved out in the late 90s. Not only does Hammersmith and Fulham's own Local Development Framework want to see both buildings developed together, but from our point of view if Queens Wharf is developed without us, to operate through their building process would almost certainly close us down.

We have worked now with five sets of architects on possible ideas for the two sites either operating singly or jointly. Ideas have ranged from a series of six towers above a podium, to three towers to a sixteen storey hotel and a box full of plans sits beside my desk. If there were to be a single site development on the Riverside Studios site alone, this would need to be considerably higher than the present joint scheme in order for it to be commercially viable.

The present development has been led by A2 Dominion's purchase of Queens Wharf in 2009 and they achieved planning permission for their standalone site in December 2012. We previously tried for several years to achieve a joined up scheme through a relationship with Arab Investments, but this failed, to be replaced earlier this year when Mount Anvil stepped into the frame and spent many months negotiating a relationship between all the relevant parties. This has led to the current plans being considered by the public.

From the Riverside Trust's point of view these work well. They retain our three main studios, which move to the Crisp Road end of the new building and open up the river walkway providing a huge public foyer with both restaurant and café bar facilities. Our cinema, much loved by the public, especially for its international seasons, will have two screens, one a replica of the current space and a new 60 seater. It

all comes with a 200 year lease that allows us to plan sensibly for a coherent future, one which will allow us to sustain ourselves with a better income model, whilst also planning to maintain our arts provision.

Yes, there are issues of concern to the public the main one of which would seem to be height. The scheme is mainly seven storeys (exactly the same as the already consented Queens Wharf Development) but goes up to eight on the end section away from the bridge. This is still no higher than the Fulham Reach development just down from us and takes into account consideration of the height of Hammersmith Bridge. And it has to be borne in mind that if this new scheme is not approved, Queens Wharf will still be built on its own to the same seven floors of consented height.

Yes, there is mass. But without it the developers cannot take into account our requirements and that of the flats they need to build to make the project viable.

Yes, there will be some impact on light to our neighbours. But light surveys have been undertaken and these are well within the bounds of what is reasonably acceptable. The light surveys have been verified a second time after some residents asked for reassurance.

Yes, there are concerns about parking. But we continually get complaints at the moment about people being delivered to the front doors of Riverside Studios or queuing outside the building. We equally get complaints about manoeuvres of container lorries on Crisp Road into River Terrace The new scheme addresses these issues.

Yes, there is concern about an active frontage on Crisp Road as we move our front door away. But careful thought is being put into making the new building have an arts design on the scene dock doors with moving image presentations of what's going on in the building.

Yes I have heard concerns about timing, but A2 Dominion have held their single building for many years and if the joined up development is not approved by February their contract with Mount Anvil will default.

The obvious benefits:

The public walkway will be opened up along the river.

The scene dock will replace the noise and nuisance we currently have on River Terrace by being inside the new building.

The public space afforded will provide a much more convenient service and queues can be taken off the street.

Riverside Studios would become a “destination” venue rather than one lost down a back street.

One derelict and one run down building will be replaced by a new single building that is fit for purpose and will uplift the whole area.

The area between the building and Hammersmith Bridge will be improved.

The greatest benefit is that the Riverside Trust and Riverside Studios will survive and can be self-sustaining for many years to come.

I believe this is a one off opportunity for re development of the joint sites. In reality it is the first realistic prospect in decades. It's not perfect, but no project is going to be given the constraints of the site.

In the circumstances I would encourage people to give their support to the development. We hope you will be supporters of Riverside Studios for years to come.

William Burdett-Coutts
Artistic Director
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