



Friends of the River Crane Environment

RFU East Stand Planning Application 16/2611/FUL

Presentation to the committee by FORCE – 14th December 2016

Good evening. My name is Rob Gray and I am Chair of Friends of the River Crane Environment (FORCE), a community and environmental charity formed in 2003 to protect and enhance the River Crane and Duke of Northumberland's River.

The RFU has a 700-metre frontage at the heart of the Duke's River. This is the loveliest part of the river but also the narrowest path, which is single file only and impossible to use with a pushchair or wheelchair.

FORCE addressed this committee three years ago, on 19th December 2013, on RFU proposals to develop a new Energy Centre adjacent to the Duke's River pathway. We gave our conditional support to that application – in large part because the RFU also proposed to step back their fence line to widen the path – and to create a green wall on the Energy Centre itself.

In the last three years Richmond and Hounslow councils, along with the GLA, have invested £600,000 improving much of the 4 kilometres of the Duke's River corridor. In 2014, the RFU built its Energy Centre and set back the fence. However, in 2015, without planning permission, it built a second and higher fence outside the line of the existing fence, and thereby further narrowed the pathway, and further degraded its environmental and community value. Of the promised green wall on the Energy Centre there is nothing today but a grid of steel wires.

FORCE therefore objected to this East Stand application on the grounds that (a) the terms of that previous application had not been met and (b) there were no community or environmental benefits to offset the impacts of this development.

The officers' report acknowledges the failure of the RFU to meet the requirements of the Energy Centre, and other planning approvals, but says that is not relevant to this application. It acknowledges a key impact on the Duke's River corridor during the construction phase. However, ironically, it then proposes another green wall on the new stand as the sole significant environmental mitigation for this project.

We ask the committee; surely 1. An applicant's failure to meet the Conditions of previous applications is entirely relevant when considering the merits of a new one and 2. The mitigation should target an area of key impact.

The RFU cannot say they are not aware of the issues regarding the Duke's River path. FORCE has met them several times; LB Richmond and LB Hounslow have raised it with them, as has Tania Matthias the local MP.

Neither can they say that improvements are difficult to deliver; LB Richmond has set out a simple minimal scheme, moving the fence in key areas by a metre or two only. This action would give the local community the final link in a 4km green corridor and a major improved asset for local people and for the RFU themselves.

We ask the Committee to consider carefully how to ensure the RFU delivers on its obligations from previous Planning Applications before granting any new ones. We also ask you to consider how the environmental and community benefits of any new scheme can be made more appropriate to its impacts.

FORCE believes that a pause is required in the planning process to achieve these planning objectives.