

FORCE Press Release – October 2014

FORCE concerned at Richmond College re-development

The group promoting development of the Richmond College site at Egerton Road, the Richmond Education and Enterprise Campus (“REEC”) partners, have just launched another public consultation on the development. The REEC have sought community engagement in the development for the past six months through a Local Community Forum. But the principal environmental group on the Forum – Friends Of the River Crane Environment (“FORCE”), with a membership of around 500 local residents – is becoming increasingly concerned that the REEC is showing no signs of taking any notice of its input, and is instead promoting a development which will significantly degrade the quality of green spaces adjacent to the College. This will be to the disadvantage of residents throughout the Crane Valley and the Duke of Northumberland’s River (“DNR”).

FORCE has consistently maintained that the open spaces of the Crane Valley need to be considered as a whole, not in isolation from each other: residents don’t just use one space, but access a range of spaces, often in the same visit; and the density of the local population means that changes to one space have implications for a number of adjacent spaces. FORCE has pressed Richmond Council over a number of years to adopt a “masterplan approach” to the green spaces that recognises these interdependencies – but all to no avail.

FORCE is concerned that the Council is once again applying its piecemeal approach to the REEC development. Earlier this month the REEC group revealed, for the first time, that the planned development will result in the fencing off from public use of the entire Craneford East playing field. Just last week, the REEC revealed its estimates that some 200 additional housing units will be built on the current College site, to help fund the development. This increase in the number of residents, as well as students, will greatly increase the pressure on open spaces, at the same time as the number of local public playing fields will be halved.

FORCE has a number of concerns. It is concerned at the Council’s continued piecemeal approach to developments in the Crane Valley. It is concerned that the REEC proposals increase pressure on the open spaces whilst at the same time reducing public access to those spaces. It is also concerned that the REEC have, since their appointment last April, denied FORCE an opportunity to meet with their environmental consultants.

FORCE raised concerns with REEC about the limited scope of their assessment at the outset. FORCE has also regularly requested meetings with their consultants, to discuss both these concerns and the opportunities for environmental improvement and mitigation. FORCE has approached the consultants directly, via College and Council representatives, and latterly via leader of the council Lord True, but without any success.

A spokesperson for FORCE said: "FORCE is not against college development per se, and we have a long term and constructive relationship with Richmond College, working with them on several local projects. We only ask of REEC what we would of any developer – and indeed what the Council's own local planning guidelines require – to provide net environmental and community benefits for the Crane valley as part of the development".

"We are though disappointed in the way the development has progressed to date - and we are despairing at the refusal of the REEC over the last six months to allow FORCE, as a local environmental and community charity, to discuss these matters with their consultants."

For more information please contact info@force.org.uk