



The Egham Gateway West (Station Road North) redevelopment scheme

The committee of the Egham Residents' Association has now formally discussed the revised Egham Gateway West (Station Road North) redevelopment proposals. And although the submission of this response is outside the set time-limit, we hope it will be taken into consideration. We shall be forwarding it to Runnymede Borough Council.

We are very much committed to a rejuvenation of the Egham town centre. In principle, moreover, we welcome the fact that the revised scheme – like the original – puts forward some bold and imaginative thinking for a new Station Road North. Our major misgivings about the scheme have only been slightly diminished, however, by the modifications to it.

We remain greatly concerned about car-parking provision or, rather, the lack of it. How can it be realistically suggested that a complex including a 750-student theatre school and a 750-seat theatre does not require any additional car-parking? Put bluntly, we just don't believe it.

Our concerns about this have been aggravated by the new discovery that – contrary to what we had previously been told – all of the students of the theatre school would be aged 18-plus. Well over 100 of them would be resident on the site, furthermore. The idea that none of the students would want to park a car in Egham stretches credibility beyond snapping point.

Further parking worries: 1) The scheme would involve the loss of the current free parking in Station Road North. We have been told that this is to be replaced. How and where? 2) The most convenient car park for attending the theatre would be Waspe Farm. But it is currently largely occupied for much of the day, Monday to Friday, by the cars of people commuting to London.

Many of these people do not return to London until after 7pm, so many of the spaces in the car park would not be available for people wanting to see a theatre production starting at 7.30pm. 3) Are the promoters of the scheme including the Hummer Road car park in their calculations? We believe that many people wanting to visit the theatre would be loath to use the Hummer Road car park, not least because the most direct route from it to the town centre, Town Path, is not user-friendly (especially for women) when it is dark.

We welcome the reductions in building heights and mass in the revised proposals, but we think they are still excessive in both respects (not least when seen from Grange Road). The view of Egham from Station Road North would still be diminished very significantly.

Moreover, while we welcome the proposed retention of buildings of architectural and historical interest on the western side of Station Road North, we cannot approve of the design of the new theatre complex buildings. A comment we keep hearing is that "there is nothing of Egham in them", and we agree. They are further examples of the modernist 'slab' architecture that is only too prevalent these days. Why couldn't the theatre school be housed in new buildings that are empathetic to the architecture and character of the buildings on the western side of Station Road North between the High Street and the stub of Grange Road? We have repeatedly said that we don't want a scheme that looks as if it belongs to Woking or Addlestone. But, as things stand, that is what we are heading for.

Is a theatre school really desirable in Egham, moreover? Has a study been made into the demand for such a facility? Bringing yet more students to Egham sounds like a modern take on 'coals to Newcastle'. What about a cinema, with adequate parking, instead? What about affordable accommodation for people other than students?

We believe this scheme requires a lot more thought and revision.

Yours faithfully,

Chris Fisher

Planning Co-ordinator, Egham Residents' Association

