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OUR STORY CONTINUES

GENESIS OF A FOOTBRIDGE FROM A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE

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Summary

At Footbridge 2014 two members of the West London community, Richard Woolf (an architect) and Mark Wing (a creative strategist), presented their dream to develop, and ultimately see installed, a cycle and pedestrian bridge between neighbouring communities separated by only 100m of the River Thames.

And the story continues. Since its inception in 2010 the project has gained recognition, ideas have evolved, challenges have arisen, local meetings attended and many discussions undertaken. In tandem, the wider world has changed and the way we engage with each other, disseminate information and potentially even manipulate outcomes, can afford opportunities for our heroic bridge champions to cultivate the debate further.

Keywords: Radnor Bridge; concept; proposal; River Thames; Richmond; genesis; community; Twickenham; Richmond; bifurcated

1. Introduction

'Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm' - Ralph Waldo Emerson.



Fig. 1. 2016 visual of Radnor Bridge, with Ham Lands, left and Radnor Gardens, Twickenham, right

2. Building on our enthusiasm

What began as a discussion over breakfast in 2010 became the idea for a new bifurcated pedestrian and cycle bridge, a radical intervention that inspired positive imagination amongst some, while at the same time garnering a negative, almost hostile response from others who were resistant to change.

2.1 Why – to build a river crossing

Radnor Bridge will link two separated worlds within the same borough and thus stimulate change – break down barriers, facilitate movement, sharing of interests and goodwill. Recent and proposed intensification of land use in Ham, including a large Housing Association initiative, resulting in several hundred new homes has placed the need for viable transportation links into stark contrast as the existing road system is slowly grinding to a halt. Combined with the adoption of cycling as a viable form of transportation and a new generation of Londoners keen to connect, this has given the bridge proposal new momentum as a much needed piece of transport infrastructure.

2.2 Where – to build at Radnor Gardens

The proposed location between Radnor Gardens and Ham Lands will deliver the most strategic advantage to the wider community and will provide additional infrastructure to support the local investment in the area.

2.3 What – to build

The design intention remains consistent, using the natural topology of the land on both sides of the River Thames to provide an obvious crossing point for the bridge to be timelessly woven into its landscape. The bridge deck will be bifurcated, providing two levels of transfer across the Thames. The first higher level, facing up stream, will be for foot passengers, the lower level, facing downstream, will be for cyclists. However, the overall the structural design must remain as minimal and elegant as technically possible.

2.4 How – through communication and debate

Our intention has always been to cultivate debate and establish if a community wishes to see connection between separated geographies and histories. This has been carried out at both macro level through social and traditional media and micro level through direct dialogue with individuals.

2.4.1 Social media

Through continued updating of the Radnor Bridge Facebook pages, Twitter and blog accounts, social media is being used as a critical method of information dissemination. Examples of some of the resulting dialogues and debates are outlined in more detail in the full paper.

2.4.2 Traditional media

Editorial in local and national press has garnered interest and will continue to be a route for communication.

2.4.3 Dialogue

Engaging with a global city such as London, establishing an agenda and generating a debate has required the creation of a lobbying strategy to create dialogue directly with stakeholder individuals and groups. Recent engagement with community representatives, elected councilors and local families has garnered various responses, but these have all served to keep Radnor Bridge on the wider agenda.

For example, Mark had an opportunity to put a question to Richmond Council leaders at a local Question Time session in January 2017, to ensure Radnor Bridge had not been forgotten and to ask that it be included within the Council's Village Planning documents and discussions. Although both initially cagey in their response, both the Leader of the Council, Lord True, and Councilor Pamela Fleming agreed that it was an item that should be kept on the agenda and debated again in the future.

3. So, what's next?

Interest in Radnor Bridge appears to be gaining momentum. At a time when our society finds itself politically beleaguered, it is the vision and energy of loan citizens which have the potential to harnesses big thinking and to make things happen. We have a number of ideas about what our next steps could be, and which we open up for further debate at this conference.

Mark and Richard would welcome the opportunity to enter into dialogue and debate with anyone who wishes to contact them, and to ensure that the story continues. And that maybe it can become more than just an aspirational vision for their local community in London.