

CHARLTON RIVERSIDE ACTION GROUP

Response to Allies and Morrison's February 2012 Master Plan for Charlton Riverside

“Sustainable...mixed-use....green....varied....creative....working....thriving....connected....high quality....” (some Master Plan adjectives)

INTRODUCTION

CRAG agrees with the main thrust and key features of the Master Plan and believes that, duly modified in line with our REQUESTS and NOTES and QUALIFICATIONS, they would provide an effective and potentially inspiring framework for the development of the location.

Our RESERVATIONS are set out in the numbered list on p3. We also set out the reasoning, related issues and associated conclusions behind those reservations on pages 4-13 under the general heading of requests and of notes and qualifications, in paragraphs numbered with reference to the reservations paragraphs on p3.

The points we make are the result of internal discussion within CRAG, illuminated and/or reinforced by the responses of people attending the CRAG open meeting.

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Reservations and Requests

The underlying theme of CRAG's approach to the Master Plan is integration: of Riverside with greater Charlton; of living, working, creating, studying and playing; of river and riverside; and of the built environment with the natural one.

Taking the existing Master Plan as our cue, we envisage Charlton Riverside as a place of predominantly intimate, small-scale but generous spaces, comprehensively endowed with green environments and greenery (confirming the overwhelmingly green, low-rise appearance of the existing southern riverside and hinterland as viewed from north of the river) and as a place that sets a new, 21st century definition and standard for a vital, close-knit, sustainable and truly mixed-use community.

RESERVATIONS

1. The Master Plan makes only limited mention about how Charlton Riverside relates to the rest of Charlton (greater Charlton); it does not seem to view it as part of a single community.
 2. The Plan's "mixed use" approach seems divisive. The impression created by the Plan's diagrams is that of a series of exclusive zones or blocks for different functions and activities (i.e. *not* mixed), especially relative to work place and living place.
 3. Better definition is required for the river front - mention of it being "animated" is dangerously vague.
 4. The treatment of the western end of Charlton Riverside (retail and industrial) requires clearer definition. In a certain sense this is the most challenging part of Charlton Riverside.
 5. The main residential quarter does not have its own orientating centre or focus.
 6. The Plan uses the (arguably contradictory) terms "Georgian streets" and "garden city" to characterise the proposed residential area. Although attractive in themselves, the terms do not seem to take into account greater Charlton's housing character in general (while "city" seems to contradict "village"). They also appear to contradict the Plan's promise to "*[continue] the large number of flatted development in the locality with family accommodation*" (p13).
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REQUESTS >>

REQUESTS

The numbering of the paragraphs below relate to the numbering of our reservations on the previous page (p3).

1. *An integrated Charlton*

Knit Charlton Riverside into greater Charlton

1.1. One place, one community. Charlton is a single strong community with a single, unique, centuries-old heart - Charlton Village. Charlton Riverside is and should remain an essential part of it. Thus everything possible must be done to remove barriers between Charlton Riverside and Charlton Hillside, and create a modern ambiance in the former that resonates with the traditional one of the latter. In this connection we think the Master Plan would benefit from making the railway - rather than the Woolwich Road - the southern boundary of Charlton Riverside.

1.2 An access-only Woolwich Road West. The Master Plan's proposals to traffic-calm the non-dual Woolwich Road between Anchor and Hope and the A102 flyover do not go far enough or are sufficiently explicit: it should be an access-only 20mph street with cycle lanes, wide pavements, landscaping features and convenient, safe crossings for pedestrians, especially at junctions and where CRAG proposes a new Charlton station exit at the western end of the down platform. Whatever the progress of the current Master Plan, this proposal is urgent in its own right, both to improve the environment and integrate the north and south sides of the Woolwich Road.

1.3 Reducing the bypass barrier effect, encouraging walking and cycling. To the east of Anchor and Hope Lane, the dual-carriageway Woolwich Road - together with its continuation along Anchor and Hope Lane and Bugsby's Way - is a hugely divisive 20th century bypass concept. Everything possible should be done to impose a 21st century interpretation on it by reducing the barrier effect and improving the environment for the pedestrian and cyclist. The approach should apply equally to Anchor and Hope Lane and Bugsby's Way. All of the dual carriageways inside the Master Plan area should be treated as avenues or boulevards, not bypasses, and be developed and landscaped as far as possible in terms of their value as civic assets.

1.4 Linking Village to River. Charlton Village and St Luke's Church - which, together with Charlton House are Charlton's historic heart at the top of the hill overlooking the river - have been linked in a straight line to the river for hundreds

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of years, and in the last two centuries at least, along Charlton Church Lane and Anchor and Hope Lane, a route that runs north-south almost exactly through the middle of Charlton. This traditional connection should be strengthened practically and visually, especially for pedestrians and cyclists.

1.5 Anchor and Hope shared surface space. The Village - at the southern end of the revitalised Village/River route - should be complemented at the river by converting Anchor and Hope Lane (the cul-de-sac north of Bugsby's Way) into a landscaped shared-surface space for farmer's markets, fairs or other activities, integrated with the riverside walk and the Anchor and Hope pub.

1.6 Charlton Station: transport hub, focal point. The intersection between the Woolwich Road and Anchor and Hope/Charlton Church Lanes axes - Charlton's strategic centre - marks Charlton's rail/bus transport hub. The intersection and any new development to its north should be designed to create a focal point and an architecturally considered space meaningful to Charlton as a whole that serves to link Charlton Riverside to Charlton Hillside and east Charlton to west.

1.7 Charlton Station integrated interchange. The existing interchange - and if necessary, the associated intersection - should allow better integration of and access to rail and bus services, including to a revived GWT link to CrossRail in Woolwich. Vehicular routeing across the intersection should not inconvenience and endanger pedestrians and cyclist lives and movements as it does at present.

1.8 Charlton Station redevelopment. Given the increasing strategic importance of this part of the borough (railway connections, not least north-south to Blackheath and Lewisham and east-west to Woolwich CrossRail and London Bridge ThamesLink; a riverside railhead; a unique north-south national cross-river highway artery traversing the capital; and a unique riverside centre for business and light and creative industry) as well as the massive increase in passenger numbers that would be engendered by up to 5000 homes in Charlton Riverside, the station should be completely redeveloped (with an additional entry/exit at the western end of the down platform directly into Troughton/Rathmore Roads and thence to Charlton Retail and Industrial Parks).

1.9 Charlton Station: Woolwich Road/Anchor and Hope Lane junction. This should be re-designed to allow traffic from Charlton Church Lane both to turn left into a limited-access Woolwich Road west *and* to move straight ahead into Anchor and Hope Lane. The existing Charlton Church Lane pinch points and bus entry point should be retained. The importance of this junction is critical in a number of ways and, whatever the future of the Master Plan, its design should be a major matter

of consultation at the earliest opportunity, not least because developments for the Charlton Retail Park are evolving rapidly.

1.10 A green corridor and link. Charlton's parks are one of its greatest assets and we therefore fully support the widening of Thames/Barrier Park and its integration with Maryon Wilson Park, Maryon Park and the Green Chain. The essential link across the Woolwich Road - whatever the future of the Master Plan - should in the long term be in the form of a "green bridge" (similar to the one at Mile End) but in the shortest possible term should be something much better than the standard pedestrian crossing.

2. The meaning of mixed use

Making more of mixed use

2.1 Linking living and working. Planning and design should ensure that a large spectrum of workplace opportunities are built into Charlton Riverside - respecting and building on its heritage of work - from small factory and office to artisanal workshop and creative studio. Also very much part of this definition of work is the role of the traditional shop, an ideal accompaniment in a walkable world to the residential. The presence of workplaces as a whole should as far as possible therefore be interwoven with living places as a whole, fostering quick or even immediate access between home and work, and encouraging the creation of work facilities and methods that are regarded as attractive civic assets rather than grotty liabilities. This approach does not reject concentrations of work places and, separately, of living places but, unlike conventional zoning practices, sees the one shading into the other in a spectrum of interacting activities (today's Hoxton is a case in point).

2.2 Linking living, studying, creating, working. The underpinning of a close association between work place and living place should be applied with equal vigour to the other core activities envisaged for Charlton Riverside, as the Plan seems to suggest it is in the eastern creative quarter, where creative, residential and study facilities are indicated as being located together.

3. Relating to the river

Setting a new, better precedent for living, working and playing by the river

3.1 Bringing the riverside to life. River frontage at ground level and first floor levels should be designed to engender activities that ensure that the river

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front is “brought to life” (which on present evidence the Peninsula, for instance, completely fails to achieve: the O2 shuns one of the finest river frontages in London; the office developments turn their shoulders to the river; and the apartment blocks offer no ground level opportunities to draw in the public - an essential ingredient of any “animation”). Such activities would benefit critically from a focal point such as a local setback in the building line and the availability of space for businesses, including cafes, etc. In this connection we also suggest that the north-south residential building line abutting the Barrier should open up towards the river.

3.2 Public transport access to the river. A critical element for riverfront success will be a local bus route (such as the highly successful 380 serving Charlton Hillside) running in zig-zag fashion parallel with and as close as possible to the river bank (a bankside bus).

3.3 The river playground. In addition to the additional “animation” inherent in the Plan’s proposed marina, flights of steps should make it possible to easily reach sandy/pebble areas of the river bed revealed at low tide (as near the Greenwich Yacht Club).

3.4 Piers. Existing fixed piers should be safeguarded while further planning definition takes place.

3.5 The river path. For pedestrians and cyclists, and rightly promoted by the Master Plan, the green river path should cut out the existing detour at the Barrier and take into account the fact that a high river flood wall forms a complete visual barrier between views of and contact with the river.

3.6 The Barrier tunnel. The possible use of this existing service tunnel for public pedestrian use when the Barrier is decommissioned should be borne in mind.

4. Charlton Riverside West

Bringing life to Charlton Retail Park

4.1 Evolution towards intensification: Charlton Retail Park. *Charlton Riverside West presents the biggest challenges to planning, design and development. While a slow, evolutionary approach is inevitable as perceptions and land uses and values change, there is also a major opportunity for immediate action.* It is noted with approval that the Master Plan does not exclude the long-term possibility of incorporating residential accommodation in Charlton Riverside West, an approach

that conforms to the principle of truly mixed-use development espoused in this document (see paras 2.1 and 2.2).

4.2 A strategic shopping park. The fact that the Charlton Retail Park is strategically - and uniquely - located alongside a combination of numerous bus routes; a commuter rail station linked exceptionally to both Greenwich and Blackheath/Lewisham as well as key locations eastwards and westwards; and London's only north-south, cross-river through-traffic artery, calls for the Park's role and benefits in respect of Charlton, Greenwich and the larger region to be carefully teased out and built on. Although seen by many as a liability - and even leaving aside the immediately self-evident benefits of frontage development and eventual intensification - it presents obvious and not so obvious opportunities in both the short and the long term for improvement, enlivening and optimisation that should be carefully explored in terms of 21st century trends.

4.3 Towards a one-stop retail experience. An opportunity for immediate action would be a comprehensive, professionally conceived plan for sheltered footpaths and for landscaping and plant screening designed above all to benefit the convenience of the pedestrian, whether arriving on foot, by public transport or by car; car parking should be designed around this priority. The key aim will be to make walking and lingering between and at shops, stores, cafes and other zones a pleasurable experience. An electric inter-store shuttle bus-train should be considered as part of a mix that recognises that large-area car parking is unavoidable for the foreseeable future. It is noted that a positive start to appraising the potential (partly modelled on American experience) has been made by LXB, the developers currently with an interest in various parts of the Retail Park.

4.4 Evolution towards intensification: Charlton Industrial Park. The Angerstein Wharf is protected, while the Sainsbury's distribution warehouse is built on land with a 65-year lease. Evolution in this area will therefore inevitably be particularly slow. A priority should be to assess how efficiently the Angerstein Wharf land is used and whether the safeguarded area could be reduced and the released land made available for more of the smart industries cited by the Master Plan.

4.5 Charlton Industrial Park: mixed use. If, as the Master Plan suggests it should be, any residential accommodation is considered for this area, it would be justified in the form of taller buildings, both to screen off the Angerstein Wharf and to relate to the generally higher Peninsula buildings on the other side of the Wharf.

4.6 Charlton Industrial Park: heritage for the future. The Industrial Park is the focus of Charlton's industrial - or work place - role. The proximity of the river suggest types of activity that could continue Charlton's maritime history but whatever takes shape here, it should help to break the British habit of centuries: that the workplace is all too often something to regret, neglect and avert the gaze from. As implied under para 2.1 and 2.2, work other than that on the truly industrial scale should be regarded as - and designed to be - something that is part of the community. (See Appendix Note 1, below)

5. *A residential heart*

A community the size of Charlton Riverside should have a local centre of its own

5.1 The main residential area defined by the Master Plan does not have an identifiable focal point . Given the relative isolation of the proposed riverside community, such a place is more important than usual and relates implicitly to the avoidance of anything resembling a "housing estate" - i e it should be a local magnetic centre worthy of the community that will emerge and live there. In this connection it will be essential to link this community to the local bankside bus service (see 3.2) and might also have visual or other connections with the river, Barrier Park and along the line towards the inland church spire suggested by the Master Plan and/or St Luke's Church tower. Given the proposed housing density, a small clutch of shops would be an essential part of this local centre.

6. *Streets to live in*

Learning the lessons of the past and bringing street space into the 21st century

6.1 **Small-scale, sustainable, vital, varied.** While the principle of a traditional street pattern with terraces and private gardens is a good one, it is important not to exclude other built forms in addition to those indicated in the Master Plan, whether private, public or housing association. While the intimacy of scale typical of greater Charlton is important to emulate, good design can achieve a variety of densities without losing that intimacy: given a general low density and low rise, other densities should be considered in appropriate locations where this would not compromise the generality. Such an approach would be in sharp contrast to development on the Peninsula, where the scale of even the Millennium Village is all too often bulky and oppressive (it could be argued that greater "village intimacy" could have been achieved there if densities and building heights had

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been more varied rather so evenly distributed). While greater Charlton suggests a certain small-scale character, any future housing proposals for Charlton Riverside should not be expected to ape this simply because it may be traditional. The aim should always be to better it and to have learned the painful lessons of modern housing, densities and social mixes of every kind. Whichever format or formats emerges over the years, intimacy, maximal sustainability, green spaces, green landscaping and green pedestrian and cycle routes should inform every one of them.

6.2 A precedent too far. “[*continue*] the large number of flatted development in the locality with family accommodation” (Master Plan - p13). The thrust of this statement is on the face of it a contradiction of the Plan’s stated “contemporary Georgian terraced neighbourhood” (Master Plan - p21) type of development and urgently requires clearer definition and explanation, arguably in the light of para 6.1, above.

6.3 Education for all. The area north-east of and immediately adjacent to the Anchor and Hope Lane/Woolwich Road intersection is designated for educational purposes (most significantly for an urgently required senior school for Charlton). Apart from careful design and positioning to avoid the pollution at the intersection, the integration theme that should permeate the whole of the Charlton Riverside development for the purposes of sustainability and vitality requires that this educational hub should also be conceived of as a creative and community hub incorporating workplace and residential components, a kind of twin of the other creative and community hub on the eastern edge of Charlton Riverside.

END

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NOTES and QUALIFICATIONS >>

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N1. **“Village”**: We are aware of the dangers in the use of this term. “Charlton Village” effectively refers to a 100-metre stretch of roadway and shops and perhaps the houses (not the blocks of flats) within a stone’s throw. Compare this with the population of Charlton as a whole today: this approaches 20,000, qualifying it for small town status. Add in Riverside’s new population and that figure increases to at least 30,000. Millennium “Village” on the Peninsula consists of blocks of flats trying to masquerade as a village - most of the blocks are higher than anything residential in central London. The Olympic “Village” consists of 7- or 8-storey blocks interspersed with green squares. In this case the term “village” is simply a convenient way of identifying a relatively compact set of rather large buildings. Our use of the term, on the other hand, is to suggest intimacy, harmonious proportions, small scale, low rise, sustainability and variedness - i.e. buildings that relate to rather than dominate the individual, whose height measurement is determined by the needs of the average two- or three-storey family home. Achieving that intimacy in a modern form for Charlton Riverside will be the responsibility of highly imaginative developers and architects ready to break the design mould of the post-war decades.

N2. **Leisure destination**. We note that Charlton Riverside marks the end of the Thames Path as well as the intersection of two major national cycleways. These features should be taken into account in designing the waterfront in addition to those already mentioned in our requests list.

N3. **Ship to shore**. It has been reported that the PLA, amongst others, is critical of any reduction in Thames shoreline industrial land and shoreline industry. Since the Charlton Riverside Master Plan radically alters the area in favour of residential development, and even though it retains the safeguarded wharves and the unique railhead, this seems to be a strategic issue that needs further consideration before the Master Plan can be finalised let alone accepted. The concern is reinforced by the fact that the GLA’s LDA/Design for London review of Charlton Riverside appears to seek a balance more in favour of industry.

N4. **Delivery 1**. It is noted that land assembly (and possible soil pollution) are major obstacles to delivery. It is not in the competence of CRAG to comment on this critical issue.

N5. **Delivery 2**. It is noted that the early insertion of the required infrastructure is likely to be critical to enabling delivery. It is not clear how this is to be achieved, given financial and other constraints.

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N6. Relocation. It is noted that there has been insufficient contact by the Council with existing businesses in connection with the Master Plan consultation and that fears have been expressed by some for their future and their businesses.

N7. Employment. It is noted that there have been expressions of great concern about the retention of employment in Charlton, and that this should be given careful consideration in any delivery plan. In this connection we record the comment that a so-called “landscape-led” planning process is insufficient; it should at the same time also be economy- and society-led.

N8. Railhead. It is worth noting that it is conceivable that more use might be made of the line that traverses Angerstein Wharf to the river, most ambitiously by extending it through to North Greenwich and from there to Custom House on the other side of the river. The latter use - though with different routeing - was suggested many years ago in connection with the creation of an orbital railway for London.

N9. Traffic. It is noted that no research has been carried out of the impact of the plan and any changes already in the pipeline on traffic and road capacity, locally and beyond.

N10. Developer appeal. It is noted that it has been commented that a Master Plan might create a straitjacket that would repel potential - and all-important - developers and thus defeat the purposes of the Plan.

N11. Signage. Whatever the progress of the proposed Master Plan, it is proposed that an immediate start should be made on improving signage in the Riverside and related Hillside areas.

N12. Urgent matters. Whatever the progress of the proposed Master Plan, a number of elements should be implemented regardless and at the earliest opportunity. These include the declassifying and calming of the Woolwich Road between the A102 and Anchor and Hope Lane; the redesign of the junction at Woolwich Road and Anchor and Hope Lane/Charlton Church Lane; the upgrading of Charlton Station bus interchange (linked to the junction redesign); the creation of a down-platform western exit for the station, ideally linked by a footbridge to the up-platform; the creation of a landscaped shared-surface space at the northern end of Anchor and Hope Lane, adjacent to the river, together with pedestrian and cycle linkages that reinforce the village/riverside route; the space-making and landscaping for a pedestrian- and cycle-friendly environment in Charlton Retail Park; the design and delivery of a green link across the Woolwich Road between

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Maryon Wilson Park and Thames/Barrier Park; upgrading of the Woolwich Road/Anchor and Hope Lane/Bugsby's Way dual carriageways to boulevard status complete with multiple pedestrian- and cycle-friendly north-south crossing points; the planning and design for extending the green Thames path for pedestrians and cyclists downstream of the Barrier and removing the existing detour; and research into the availability of any land surplus to requirements at Angerstein Wharf.

N13. Section 106 Agreement. In view of the large-scale impact on the immediate locality of development of Charlton Riverside, the application of Section 106 Agreements should favour that locality.

N14. Consultation. It is of the greatest importance that the highest possible level of consultation with the public is maintained at all times as the Charlton Riverside project unfolds.

END

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