



Watercolour by John Spiers circa 1780 looking north towards Hampton Court Palace.

A proposal for the southern approach to Hampton Court

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Close by those meads, for ever crown'd with flow'rs,

Where Thames with pride surveys his rising tow'rs,

Pope's *Rape of the Lock* (Canto 3) 1712

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1. Summary

This report began as a talk given at the "*Views Matter*" conference, held at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew on 12th June 2019 to mark the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Thames Landscape Strategy. The report addresses the longstanding issue of encroaching development on the "Jolly Boatman" and Hampton Court Station sites that would - if allowed - cause great harm to the riverside setting of Hampton Court Palace, to its historic railway approach, and to the Thames flood plain.

The report proposes that the solution to the long-standing issue of the Jolly Boatman and Hampton Court Station sites is for the station car park to be relocated to Unit 3 of the Hampton Court Estate, with the storage functions currently accommodated there relocated elsewhere in Elmbridge or Richmond. The existing car park would be returned to parkland, completing a century-long project to protect Hampton Court Palace from encroaching development on its southern shore,

The proposal is a practical and appropriate solution to the future of Hampton Court Station and Jolly Boatman sites and is a rebuttal to the perceived need for massive development there. It is a responsible solution to the long-term presentation and use of this key approach to an internationally significant site.

2. Introduction

In 2016, Historic Royal Palaces mounted an exhibition of the illustrations of Hampton Court and its environs made in the 1770's by John Spiers, assistant to Lancelot "Capability" Brown, the Master Gardener. These images had been recently rediscovered in the Hermitage.

Several of the illustrations show the land around Hampton Court, including the land on the south side of the Thames. One of the most relevant of these (see the cover illustration) is taken from the south bank of the River Ember looking across what is now Cigarette Island, showing Hampton Court in an idyllic setting.

It might be thought that the scene drawn by Spiers can never be recovered. But this is not the case. No substantial buildings have been built on Cigarette Island since Spiers' time. If the car park was removed to a more suitable location, and with proper curatorship, there is no reason why the scene painted by Spiers could not be made to reappear.

To see Hampton Court Palace in its parkland and riverside setting is no more than should be expected. And yet the experience today for visitors arriving on the train is one of disappointment and disorientation. The scene from the train carriage, after leaving Thames Ditton, changes from suburbia to parkland. There are glimpses of the Palace through the trees, suggesting that a grand prospect is about to be revealed.

Instead, the view on arrival is of the station car park and a dense hedge (Figure 1). There is no sense that Hampton Court Palace is immediately beyond. This is a particular loss as the view of Hampton Court Palace from Cigarette Island is both beautiful and highly instructive. From this point, uniquely, it is possible to see all the phases of Hampton Court en-

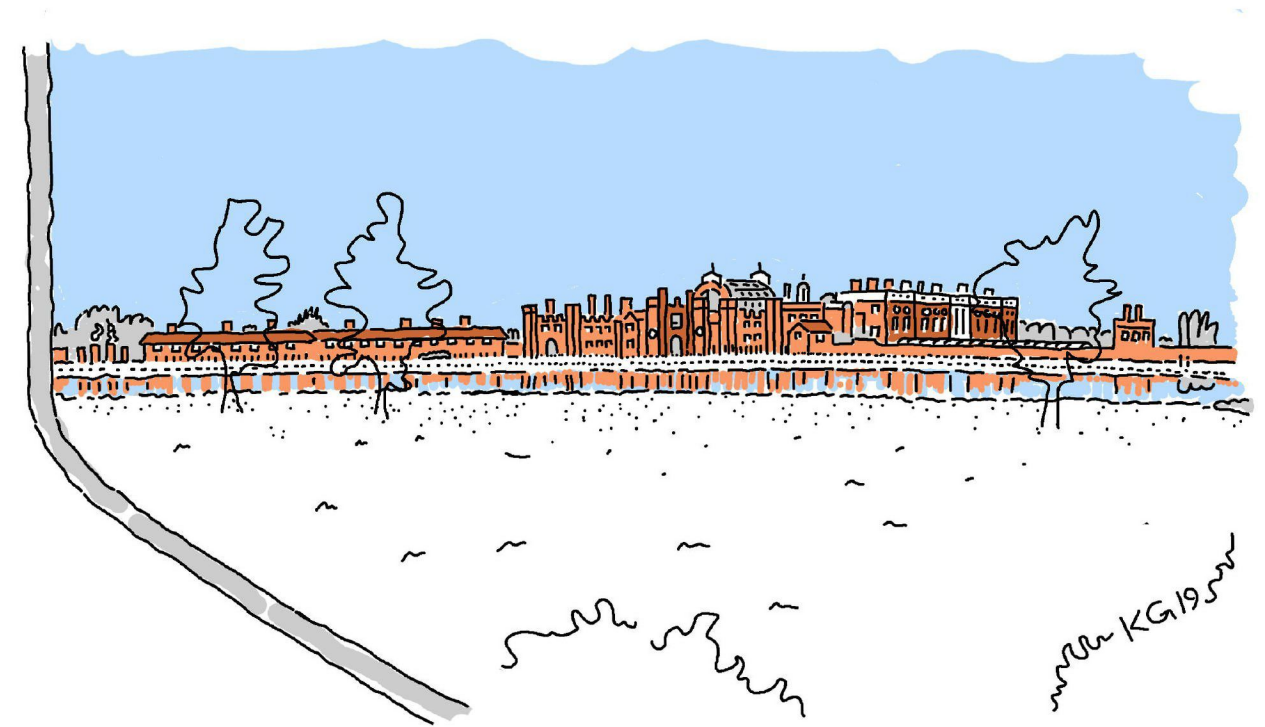
compassing its entire story: the Tudor parts, the Great Hall, the Wren block, the outbuildings, and the gardens. All are seen reflected in the Thames. It is the ideal start and end of a visit (Figure 2).

Arriving at Hampton Court should have all the joy, excitement and celebration shown in the illustration of the arrival of Catherine of Braganza at Hampton Court in 1662 (Figure 5). Instead the visitor progresses through a poorly kept station building, across a hazardous station forecourt, and around the ugly hoardings of the Jolly Boatman site before emerging on to Hampton Court Bridge, before finally seeing Hampton Court Palace itself.

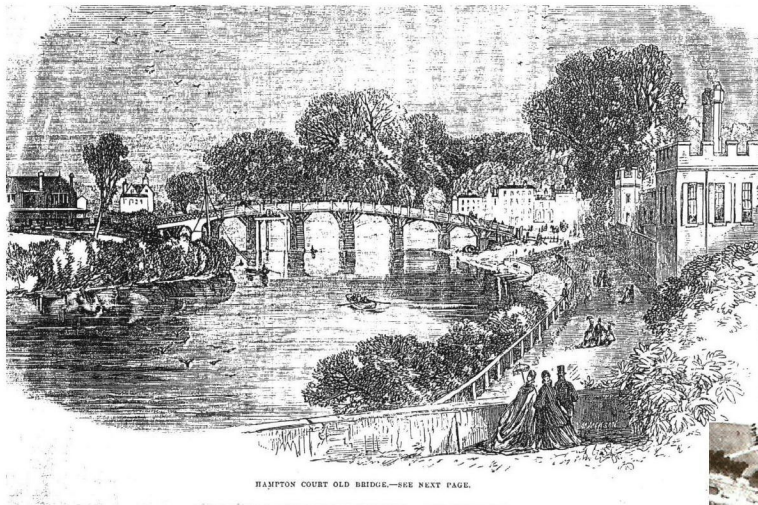
How did it happen that one of the great glories of European architecture came to be so badly presented on its key southern approach? And what can be done to reverse it? This report offers a suggested way to resolve the situation.



1. Cigarette Island, June 2018. View towards Hampton Court Palace from the train carriage. There is no sense of arrival at an important historic site. (Keith Garner)

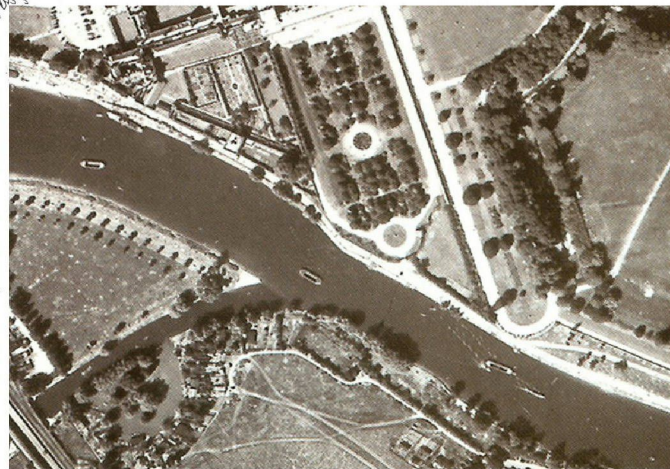


2. Cigarette Island, circa 2022. View towards Hampton Court Palace as above with the car park and bounding hedge removed and foreground trees allowed to die back. (Illustration: Keith Garner)



3. The Barge Walk circa 1865. Open banks with station, to the left, clearly seen from Hampton Court. East Molesey is seen beyond. (*Illustrated London News*)

4. Aerial view in 1941 showing new double row of municipal trees between Cigarette Island Park and the Thames. The station (out of shot to the left) is screened from the river and Hampton Court by dense planting. (Historic England)



3. The more distant history

The history of the site is well known. The branch line was built in the 1840s to bring visitors to Hampton Court Palace, recently opened to the general public. The station building itself was built on the southern bank of the Thames at the confluence of the Thames and the River Mole just downstream of the village of East Molesey.

The station building is attributed to Sir William Tite. Although perhaps not one of his finest station buildings (compare say to Barnes Station) it complements the Palace stylistically and in terms of materials, and acts as a quasi-gatehouse for this 'modern' method of approach. The new station is seen in view from the Barge Walk in the *Illustrated London News* of circa 1865 (Figure 3) with the two banks seen as a unified riparian landscape.

The visual separation of Hampton Court Palace and the station site developed more recently. Perhaps in order to conceal the railway sidings, coal yards and the general paraphernalia of the station, a hedge was planted between the station and riverside. When Cigarette Island became a public park in the 1930s (for the purpose of "the protection or maintenance of the amenities of Hampton Court Palace") a double row of trees was planted along the southern shore bounding the new park. These served to increase the screening of the station site from Hampton Court Palace. More regrettably still, the trees were planted in a regular line, in contrast to the naturally occurring clumping of trees seen in Spiers' view.

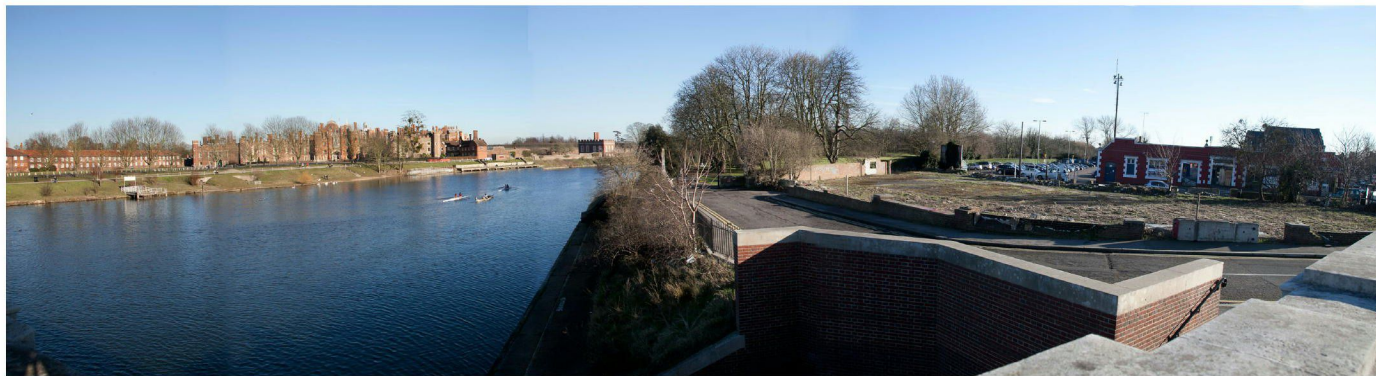
An aerial view from 1941 (Figure 4) shows the dense hedge between the new Cigarette Island Park and the railway sidings and the newly planted trees along the southern bank. The hedge remained in the post-war period, in order to hide the car park which replaced the railway sidings following electrification. The hedge and trees remain to the present day as significant barriers to the enjoyment and understanding of the site.

The screening vegetation planted in the twentieth century (which is at present the only reason why the visual relationship with the Palace is lost) can be seen in the photograph from Hampton Court Bridge in circa 2000 (Figure 6). This has served to separate two banks which should be a single unified landscape and reciprocal view, as seen in 1865.

This dense, and historically inappropriate, screening has served to justify a succession of inappropriate development proposals put forward for the Hampton Court Station and "Jolly Boatman" sites, on the grounds that these cannot be seen from Hampton Court Palace and do not affect its setting.



5. "Joy, excitement and celebration". Catherine of Braganza arriving at Hampton Court in 1662. The Palace seen from the approaching carriage. (British Library)



6. Hampton Court Palace circa 2000 in relation to the station site, seen from Hampton Court Bridge. Dense screening of the hedge bounding the car park and municipal trees on Cigarette Island prevent Hampton Court Palace being seen from its natural point of arrival. An arid and deserted scene compared to illustration 5 above. (John Inglis)

4. The more recent history

The current travails of the two sites originated in the 1990s with Railtrack, and later Network Rail, coming to see the station site - and particularly its car park - as commercially valuable, given its close proximity to and association with Hampton Court Palace. The deterioration in the condition of the Hampton Court Station site and the adjacent "Jolly Boatman" site also dates from this time and is not unrelated.

Also at this time, the notion originated that the improvement of the sites was dependent on achieving commercial development. To assist in this objective, the range of possible uses was extended to include housing in an updated development brief published by Elmbridge Council in 1999. A comprehensive approach taking in both the Jolly Boatman and Hampton Court Station sites was encouraged.

A proposal put forward by Gladedale in 2008 (2008/1600) was found to be in accordance with the development brief and was approved by Elmbridge Council in 2009. However the scheme did not progress and the site changed hands.¹ A new proposal put forward by developers Alexpo (IOM) Ltd (2018/3810) is similar to the 2009 scheme, although the site access is repositioned near to the river, with a more limited underground car park and higher and more solid blocks along the park boundary.

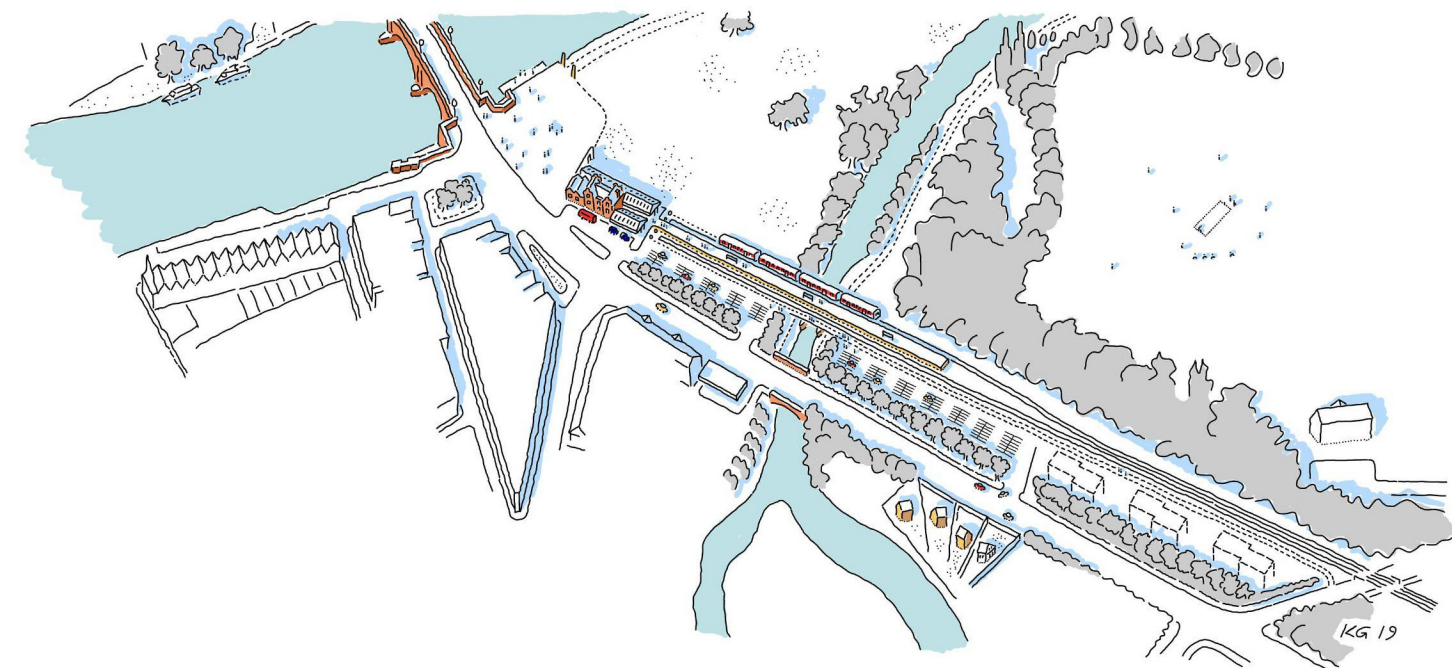
The configuration of the Hampton Court Station site - divided by the railway tracks with the car park on the side furthest from Hampton Court Way - makes it difficult to develop commercially.² The requirement of the Rail Regulator that the existing station car park be retained at its current capacity is a further impediment to viability.

¹ The permission was challenged in the High Court in *Garner & others versus Elmbridge Council* in 2010, and subsequently in the Appeal Court.

² A proposal was made in circa 1996 to build a new station at the southern end of the site by the River Ember, creating a single undivided plot of land with less development constraints, but this was not progressed.

At the heart of the issue is a fallacy that solution to bringing physical improvements to the Jolly Boatman and Hampton Court Station sites can be achieved via large scale commercial development. This analysis disregards both the difficulty in achieving a commercially viable scheme, and the manifest harm that any such scheme would cause to the setting of Hampton Court and to the Thames flood plain.

The tree screening between the Hampton Court Station site and the river, referred to above (and itself historically inappropriate), will be an inadequate barrier to overbearing development on the southern shore. HRP has made proposals (Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, 2015) to increase the screening as a means of ameliorating the impact of development, although this is unlikely to succeed given the overbearing scale of current proposals.



7. Hampton Court Station with the station car park relocated to the Hampton Court Way side of the platforms, and to Unit 3 of the Hampton Court Estate site, with new vehicle access from Hampton Court Way. (Car park shown as a single level but could be on two levels if required.) Screening on Cigarette Island Park is removed, allowing restoration of uninterrupted sight lines from Hampton Court Station to Hampton Court Palace. Possible future housing at the southern end of the Hampton Court Estate site shown dashed. A cycle and pedestrian route running the length of the Hampton Court Estate site from Summer Road to Hampton Court Station is shown dotted. (Illustration: Keith Garner.)

5. The feasibility of moving the station car park

In order to retrieve the idyllic scene depicted by Spiers and to achieve the presentational benefits of seeing Hampton Court Palace from the station site, it is clear that the station car park should be moved back from the river and this land returned to an open aspect without any built forms.

For some years the Hampton Court Estate industrial estate to the south of the Embankment has seemed - theoretically at least - to be the ideal new location for the station car park.³ The site is back from the river, out of the line of view to Hampton Court and is screened by trees. But it is still adjacent to the station itself. It is also adjacent to Hampton Court Way and thus more easily accessible than the current car park.

Until recently the Hampton Court Estate was in commercial use. However in 2012, Unit 3 of the Hampton Court Estate - effectively the northern half of the site - was bought by Historic Royal Palaces. Planning permission for a change of use was obtained for storage or distribution with ancillary offices (2013/2553). This site is currently understood to be used for storage of artefacts and for conservation purposes

Whilst storage of artefacts and conservation are of course important functions, they do not necessarily and specifically have to be carried out on this site and could be done elsewhere in the vicinity. Indeed Elmbridge and Richmond Councils may be able to offer suitable alternative storage facilities from within their own property portfolios.

³ The desirability of moving the car park to the Hampton Court Estate site occurred to me when I first reviewed the issue of the Jolly Boatman and Hampton Court Estates for Historic Royal Palaces in 1995/96 when I was a consultant to the Surveyor of the Fabric's Department at Hampton Court. However at that time, with the site in employment use, it was not appropriate to pursue this as a course of action.

It is suggested therefore that the solution to the long-standing issue of the Jolly Boatman and Hampton Court Station sites is for the station car park to be relocated principally to Unit 3 of the Hampton Court Estate, with the storage functions currently accommodated there relocated.

The existing car park would be returned to parkland, completing a century-long project to protect Hampton Court Palace from encroaching development on its southern shore, that has also seen Cigarette Island become a public park, as noted above, and Ditton Field becoming a sports ground together with the linear riverside park at Albany Reach which were also acquired in the 1930's.



8. Beaconsfield Station and car park. A similar car park on the Unit 3, on two levels, would be inconspicuous given existing tree screening on Hampton Court Way.

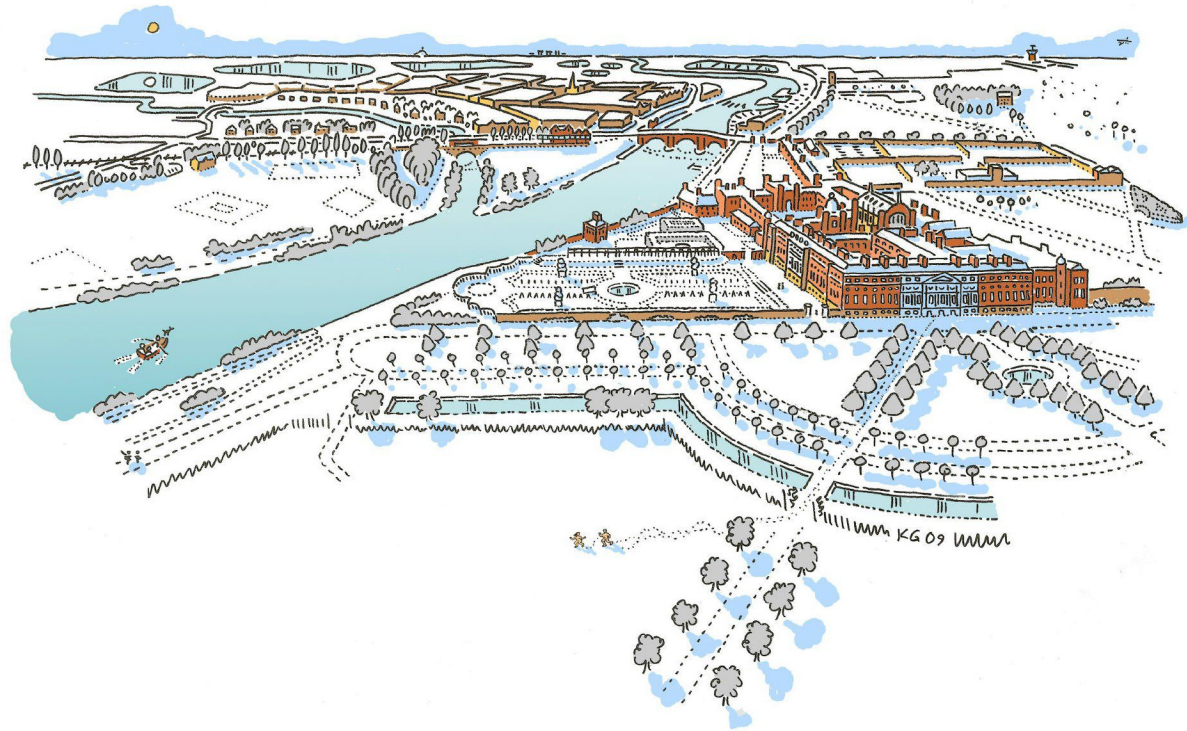
9. The railway bridge over the River Ember, seen from Hampton Court Way. Note the brick piers that would support a future pedestrian and cycle bridge.



6. The proposal in more detail

The proposal offers a practical and relatively easily achieved solution which, unlike the development proposals currently under consideration, does not damage the setting of Hampton Court Palace or the Thames flood plain, and indeed enhances these nationally significant cultural assets.

1. The Jolly Boatman site should be left as open space, likely to be paved between the station and Hampton Court Bridge and planted elsewhere. A proposal put forward in 2012 to turn the Jolly Boatman site into a public park received high levels of public support when submitted for planning permission (2012/2362).
2. The station car park should be returned to parkland. The dense hedge separating the car park from the remainder of Cigarette Island should be removed. The municipal trees on Cigarette Island planted in the 1930s, where these survive, should be allowed to die away naturally without replacement. A more naturalistic planting scheme, as shown in Spiers illustrations and other historic views, should be implemented.
3. The station building should be conserved to the high standard of other comparable outbuildings of Hampton Court Palace. Lost detail should be reinstated, in particular the ornate chimneys, which echo those of the Palace. There is a case for areas of the station that are no longer parts of the functioning railway becoming part of the visitor experience, with a visit to Hampton Court effectively beginning there. The station building should be listed for its architectural and historic significance.
4. Part of the station car park should be moved to the Hampton Court Way side of the station building. Additionally, this area could be used for buses and taxis. (Buses currently impede pedestrian movement between the station and Hampton Court Bridge.) However there is little justification for new buildings on this part of the site, particularly as these would inhibit flood water dispersal.
5. The principal part of the station car park should be relocated to Unit 3 of the Hampton Court Estate. This would have direct access from Hampton Court Way via a new entrance formed mid-way along the Hampton Court Way frontage which it is understood has agreement in principle from Surrey County Council as the highway authority. On an initial assessment, the existing car parking provision could be provided on a single level. Additional spaces on a second level could be provided if required. Given the existing tree screening, a two-storey car park would be inconspicuous (Figure 8). Pedestrian access to the station would be via a footbridge over the Ember (Figure 9). There is also the opportunity for a combined cycle and footpath running the length of the site from Summer Road (Figure 7).



10. Hampton Court Palace from the east with Cigarette Island and Hampton Court Station in the middle distance. The relocated car park is beyond tree screen at far side of Ditton Field at centre left. The open sweep of the riverscape restored. (Illustration: Keith Garner with apologies to Leonard Kniff.)

7. Notes on implementation

Recent development proposals have been based on the premise that the physical improvement of the Jolly Boatman and Hampton Court Station sites would be achieved through commercial development. If those improvements can be brought about in other ways, then the justification for commercial development falls away.

The proposal involves no new buildings and is therefore relatively inexpensive. Much of the expense incurred is “in kind”, involving Elmbridge Council, and possibly Richmond Council, making storage facilities available from within their own property portfolios. Otherwise, the project consists almost entirely of hard and soft landscaping.

It is likely that funding would be raised from the National Lottery and local and national benefactors. The project would be at no cost to Network Rail, which would benefit in having a new and superior station car park: both larger and better located.

Moving the station car park to Unit 3 is not however intended to free up the station car park for commercial development. Rather it removes any requirement for commercial development on the Hampton Court Station site at all, as its improvement is achieved by other means. Historic Royal Palaces should not allow Unit 3 to be used as the station car park unless there is a legally binding commitment that the existing station car park becomes parkland with a covenant preventing buildings being built there.

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