



RIVERSIDE RESIDENTS NEWSLETTER

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SERIOUS CONCERNS ABOUT INVESTIGATION INTO WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Three critical factors will determine the credibility of the planned independent investigation into the provenance of and contract for the massive Arora hotel/apartment scheme in Staines: its Terms of Reference, who will manage it for the Council, and who will conduct the actual investigation. The Riverside Residents (Staines) Coalition has serious concerns about the first two (announced recently), and as a consequence concerns also about the third (to be announced soon). [Click here](#) for a detailed summary.

The Arora development, two-and-a-half times the height and several times the mass of anything anywhere near it in the sensitive riverside Staines Conservation Area shocked the community and overwhelming majority of Councillors when it was announced in the summer last year.

The call for an independent inquiry followed. The investigation into the “officer led” development of the project and contract was first announced several months ago “to explore the possibility of misconduct and/or fraud”. Its Terms of Reference were comprehensive, robust, and specific ([click here](#)) with the roles of the Council’s Chief Executive and Leader at the time, and the views of other bidders, in sharp focus. New Terms of Reference ([click here](#)) were announced recently. They are very different, more generalised, and with important specifics no longer in them. Very troubling in this context is a concern about who wrote them, and the role the Chief Executive as revealed in this extract from a Council minute: *The necessary delegation to establish the inquiry was given to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Review Group. This is the only constitutional way to allow issues arising to be resolved without having to refer back to the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.*

“Many issues arise from this and appear to challenge the credibility of the investigation before it has even begun.” says a spokesperson for the Riverside Residents Coalition. “For example, why were the Terms of Reference changed, and why did the Chief Executive not recuse himself (or be persuaded to do so) from any role in establishing or administering the investigation? If the inquiry is not seen to be comprehensive, robust, and beyond reproach in terms of its independence, it will reflect very poorly on the Council and risk compromising the administration’s determination to improve the Council’s record of democratic accountability.”

Riverside Residents (Staines) Coalition – a working group of six residents’ organisations representing several hundred residents. Supported by other residents’ organisations across Staines and the Staines Town Society.

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