

Cllr Alexander Ehmann

On behalf of Cllrs Geoff Acton, Alexander Ehmann & Ben Khosa  
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19 June 15

Cllr Pamela Fleming  
Civic Centre  
44 York Street  
Twickenham  
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Dear Cllr Fleming,

St Margaret's Village Plan

The Liberal Democrat Councillors for St Margaret's and North Twickenham have not been provided with any opportunity to meet or contribute to the St Margaret's Village Plan on behalf of their constituents. It has therefore been necessary to write in this way to ensure that the Conservative Council are provided with views of all three Councillors from the aforementioned Ward.

As the elected representatives for the area covered by the proposed Village Plan it would have seemed appropriate for the Council to have more actively sought our views. The following constructive contributions are offered and we would be grateful if the Council leadership could respond to them.

## **A LIBERAL ST MARGARET'S:** Our Liberal Democrat Plan for St Margaret's Village

The following is a document detailing our asks of the Conservative administration in order to improve our much-loved community of St Margaret's. We would like to preface these requests made as part of the Village Plan, with the observation that the Council are not arbiters of style or taste - it is the residents who should decide. As such, we believe that the following proposals have the broad support of our residents. Of course all significant changes should remain subject to meaningful consultation with those in our communities, before being implemented.

We would also add that it is not for the Council's leadership to be grammar-tsars or punctuation-chiefs. As such, we politely request that the Council desist from their efforts to remove our community's rich variety of approaches to the punctuation used or refrained from in the name 'St Margaret's'. As Liberals, we believe that everyone is entitled to the freedom to choose how they ink the name of their community. We would discourage any Council efforts to en-

force a certain style of address and believe that the question - what is the right way to punctuate 'St Margaret's' is as eternal as the question, what is the meaning of life, the universe and everything?' - and should be left as a welcome, yet unsolved challenge to future generations of residents. For the record, we Liberal Democrats favour the apostrophe in 'St Margaret's', but we will not force this on the community.

## **1: St Margaret's Train Station:**

St Margaret's Train Station sits at the heart of our St Margaret's Village and it presents an important opportunity to improve the aesthetics and connectivity of the area. Practically, our approach to the Station can be broken into the following key points:

**(a) Maintenance of the Station:** The Council should consider designating the Station a "Building of Townscape Merit" and that a sympathetic (to the period) refurbishment should also be undertaken. At present the Station is graffiti covered and its maintenance has not appropriately focussed on maximising heritage elements in its design. A strong example of the unsympathetic decor of the Station is the UPVC window frames (in many cases without glass panes) on the stairways to platforms. Such, incongruous elements should be replaced with more fitting elements.

The Station itself requires extensive cleanup, enhancement and we would recommend the Council work with local Councillors to press for these changes. Softer enhancements, such as appropriate floral displays should also be explored as possibilities - even if they would require the assistance of the local community to be sustainable.

**(b) Train Services:** The Station provides many local residents with their primary form of transport and there is significant use of the Station for commuter services. The Station would benefit from additional services if they could be provided, but significantly the reliability and punctuality of existing services remains an issue that does need addressing. It is not uncommon for South West Train services that are due to call at St Margaret's to skip the station in order to make up time if delays have occurred elsewhere. Travellers from St Margaret's should not be sacrificed so easily when this not infrequent challenge presents itself and we would welcome the Council's support in challenging South West Trains on this approach.

**(c) Step-Free Access:** We would like to see St Margaret's station furnished with full step-free access, which would require the installation of lifts. Recognising that this has significant funding implications for Network Rail and South West Trains, we suggest (as an interim measure) that the existing gate on Amyand Park Road be re-opened and equipped with an Oystercard reader, so as to allow partial step-free access at a much reduced cost.

**(d) Litter:** The Station has a significant issue with a build-up of litter along the Amyand Park Road fence and particularly behind the advertising hoarding on this side of the site. These 'grot-spots' need cleaning and continual vigilance to ensure there are not further build-ups. There is also a need to reconsider

the provision of recycling/bin facilities outside the Station. At present it is only possible to deposit paper size/shape waste. No provision is made for the disposal of cups, cans, bottles etc outside the station entrance and they are therefore frequently items of litter in and around the station. Facilities that enable the disposal of these items should be introduced.

**(e) Over-bridge between Amyand Park Road and Winchester Road:**

While this bridge appears to be functional (and we would wish to see this continue), we are conscious that other pedestrian footbridges in the Ward have been neglected (St Margaret's - A316) and have subsequently required sizeable refurbishment budgets that have been unforthcoming. As such, we would recommend some improved ongoing maintenance of the bridge to avoid the 'feast or famine' approach to its preservation. In doing so, we would also encourage the Council to consider some lighting options over the bridge to improve pedestrian safety.

## **2: Moormead Park & Surroundings**

**(a) Youth Facilities:** Some residents have expressed concern that there is little in the way of youth facilities in Moormead Park. We would encourage the Council to consult with residents and local teenagers over the support for/type of youth facilities, such as an outdoor gym or some similar small-scale activity area. We are not suggesting large-scale investment, such as a skate park, but rather, a more modest installation, which would nonetheless improve the offering available to teenagers.

**(b) Moormead Pavilion:** The lack of progress on improvements to Moormead Pavilion is a real cause for concern to our local residents. We understand that the Council have been approached by a number of parties about provision of services from the building and we request that the Council distill its thinking on the financial and contractual tolerances toward any such arrangement. Having done so, we believe that the Council should produce a document inviting expressions of interest within these criteria and that applications should then be considered on their merits and proposals meeting minimum criteria should be put to the local residents to decide on how/whether to proceed with any of the suggestions.

As you will be aware, the Friends of Moormead have surveyed their membership about the desired community assets that such a bid should deliver. These include cafe provision, public toilets and a space that could be used for community activities and classes. We would hope that these considerations could be factored into the Council's assessment of bids.

**(c) Service Alleys:** A number of properties in the Moormead Park area, including Kenley Road were built with alleyways connecting the rear gardens of properties to one another. These alleyways have been neglected for many years and are often littered with fly-tipped items. We understand that these areas are not the legal responsibility of home owners or the Council, but we feel that the neglect justifies a response, regardless of legal exactitude. We recommend that following a Council arranged risk assessment of an alley clean-up, a resident and local Councillor supported clean-up day could take

place, supported by provision of rubbish collection and appropriate equipment from the Council.

**(d) Single-flow for St Margaret's Grove:** We believe that residents should be consulted over the introduction of a one-way system along St Margaret's Grove. There does seem to be a strong level of support for such an initiative and with right turning from the A316 into Brook Road being prohibited in the near future, the through traffic is now no longer a reason for inaction. We would ask the Council to approach residents over this change.

### **3: General Aesthetics/Facilities**

**(a) Road Maintenance:** Many roads in our Ward suffer from unsatisfactory upkeep of pavements and road surfaces by the Council and St Margaret's Village has its fair share of these roads. In consultation with local Councillors, the Council should undertake a programme of road and pavement maintenance focussed on local priorities.

**(b) Cycle Improvements:** We would like the Council leadership to explore greater provision of cycling racks. The Village has a number of places where bicycle storage is already in place, but it would be worth assessing whether these sites are correctly located and what utilisation of the facilities there is.

We would also encourage the Council to consider more secure long-term bicycle storage solutions - as many residents in the Village reside in Houses of Multiple Occupancy or apartments, where bicycle storage can often present challenges. The Council should investigate ways of supporting such residents, including improved roadside bicycle racks/other storage as well as considering whether the Council can do anything to simplify and improve the planning process so that resident installation of bicycle lockers in private gardens is less burdensome.

**(c) Heritage Street Signage:** The Council should take a record of all heritage street signage in the Village Plan area and consider actions that will safeguard their future. When signs of heritage value are stolen or damaged the Council should commit to like-for-like replacement. Furthermore, the Council should where possible (and supported by residents) replace existing modern signage with more traditional alternatives that compliment the heritage signage in our Village.

**(d) Street Lighting:** The area has street lighting which varies in age and quality. More outdated street lighting should be replaced with well designed alternatives that are energy efficient. The siting of and new/replacement lighting should seek to avoid a loss of parking provision and where possible seek to increase it through sensible repositioning.

**(e) Car Parking:** The St Margaret's area faces huge pressures on parking from the prevalence of many multiple occupancy properties. We believe that the Council should look at the areas of acute concern in the St Margaret's area and explore options to extend or introduce bays where they are presently unavailable. Key opportunities include the repositioning of street furniture,

such as signs and (when renewed) street lighting. In many cases there are also outdated reasons for yellow-lines. The Council will also find there are many opportunities to extend parking bays marginally beyond their existing footprint and extract valuable additional parking space. We would encourage a Village-wide audit of parking space gains and a programme of work to enact these opportunities.

#### **4: Community-Building**

Not all valued parts of a village are necessarily made from concrete or brick. Many elements that make an area a genuine living community are about the individual activities of our local residents and the enhancements they offer to the quality of life in our community. As such, the Council need to consider the support that it offers to those minded to make such contributions. This is a general principle, but there are some specific instances where we feel that it is necessary to highlight a potential role for the Council.

**(a) St Margaret's Fair and Other Activities:** We would like to see the Council continue to support and indeed encourage the activities that many local residents take upon themselves to bring colour and culture to our area. We understand that the permissions and approvals that have been needed from the Council for events this year have proven quite onerous and time consuming. We would the Council reviewing its processes and seeing whether any demands on organisers can be pared back to the essentials in the hope of alleviating unnecessary burdens.

**(b) Twickerati, & Other Social Media:** It has recently come to the attention of the local Councillors that Twickerati, which is an extremely well written and entertaining community blog will be downscaling its activity. 'My St Margaret's' also provides an excellent community service of a similar, but slightly different nature. In both cases, these sites have been driven by an individual who has shown immense dedication to the curation of content for the community. The Council should engage with these important online community services and see whether any arms-length support from the Council or brokered third-parties (editorial independence of these sites needs to be ensured) would be able to assist their more active continuation than would otherwise prove possible.

**(c) Resident Groups/Associations:** Some parts of the Village area are covered with Resident Associations or similar, but that is not universally the case. The Council should positively encourage defined areas, such as clusters of roads to set-up such bodies in order to ensure better dialogue with the Council over issues and problems. At present there seems to be very little support for community-minded individuals that want to create such organisations and this Council's laissez-faire approach to these bodies does not encourage their set-up or growth.

#### **5: Shops and Amenities:**

**(a) Resident Requests:** We would suggest that the Council consult residents as part of the Village Plan or as a separate exercise to find out what shop

types would be most desired by local people. The results could then be disclosed (indeed promoted) to relevant trade bodies and publications to encourage the introduction of such business. For example, if residents said that they would really value and use a fishmonger then relevant trade publications and networks could be accessed by the Council (when a shop was to become vacant) to ensure that aspirant fishmongers knew that St Margaret's had pent up demand for their services.

**(b) Preserving and Improving Crown Road:** Working with the local traders, the Council should work hard to ensure that there is no loss of retail amenity along Crown Road. The centre of St Margaret's Village is its high street, which is Crown Road and any loss of shopping amenity would have a huge impact on the feel of the wider community. Improvements to street scape should be considered, but any changes must not result in the type of inconvenience and loss of earnings that recent alterations to Church Street incurred.

**(c) Business Bays:** We would like to see the introduction of further business parking bays where possible the removal of yellow lines where practicable. This is about getting the most out of our existing infrastructure, but we believe improvements are possible without causing knock-on consequences elsewhere.

**(d) Twickenham Film Studios:** We would ask the Council to support the success of this local employer (as we do) and proactively work with the company to explore opportunities for the Studios' expansion onto additional sustainable sites in the Ward and elsewhere in the Borough. We remain committed to Twickenham Film Studios' success in its present location, but the increasing demands of this growing business are likely to place challenges on residential parking. Longer-term solutions to growth of the enterprise need to be sought in partnership with the Council.

## **6: A316 Footbridge**

The footbridge immediately next to St Stephen's School serves the community of St Margaret's in its navigation of the A316 (Chertsey Road). The bridge is a vital safety feature for children and other road-users and the last Liberal Democrat MP; and Councillors for the Ward successfully fought off (with the strong support of local residents) Transport for London (TfL) plans to remove it. The bridge will remain for at least a further two years and will receive some resources from TfL to ensure that it function for this period. We would ask the Council to ensure the bridge's longer-term viability by doing the following:

**(a) Support with funding:** The Council should enter into a dialogue with TfL about the likely costs that would need to be incurred to maintain the bridge or fund a direct replacement. Having assessed these demands, it would be wise to set aside some monies over the coming two years to ensure that the Council are in a position to make a potentially decisive financial contribution to this important asset's maintenance - should TfL decide that the costs of maintenance make the bridge 'unsustainable'.

**(b) Designate the Bridge - An Asset of Community Value:** An Asset of Community Value enables communities to ask their local council to list certain assets as being of value to the community. If an asset is listed and then comes up for sale, the new right will give communities that want it 6 months to put together a bid to buy it. In the case of the bridge, the owner is TfL, so removal would trigger a 6 month moratorium at which point the Council and other groups could intervene to find the capital to sustain the existing structure. This makes the previous point regarding Council funds all the more relevant.

**(c) Name the Bridge:** We believe that the bridge is such a prized asset that it deserves a better descriptor than simply being referred to as “the bridge”. We also recognise the amazing work of our out-going MP, Dr Vincent Cable, who intervened with TfL at the request of his St Margaret’s and North Twickenham Councillors and was central in securing the reprieve that has been given to bridge. As such, we propose that the Council officially name the Bridge, “Cable’s Bridge”.

## **7: Primary Schools**

**(a) A Local School for Every Child:** The areas of East Twickenham and St Margaret’s are insufficiently well served by primary schools. In April 2015, 28 parents from St Margaret’s and East Twickenham found their children were left without a school place. We remain hopeful that places will yet be found for the children concerned, but the present administration’s complacency towards the increasing difficulties of securing a school place in the area covered by this Village Plan should not be allowed to continue. The Conservative Council should explore ways that the Village Plan for St Margaret’s could be used to assist the elimination of this dreadful under-provision of places.

Your sincerely,

Councillor Geoff Acton, Alexander Ehmann and Ben Khosa