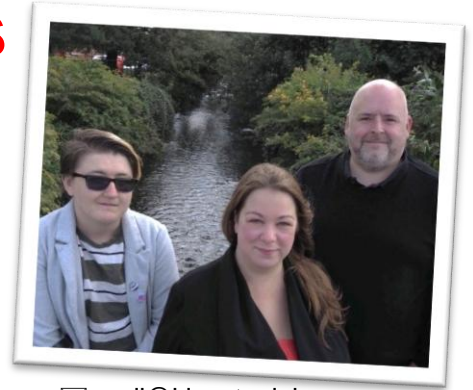


Kezia, Keegan and James

Your Kingston Town Labour Team

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(hand delivered)



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Dear Professor Spier,

We are writing to you to share the concerns of a wide range of residents that we have spoken to in the community neighbouring Kingston University.

The University's plans for a large new building at Middle Mill have alarmed many in the community and you will be aware that there is considerable local feeling about both the proposal itself and the way that this process has been handled to date.

We seek to propose a way forward that avoids unnecessary antagonism and conflict between the University and the surrounding residents.

We have listened to residents' views and examined the proposals in detail, and find ourselves in full agreement with the community feeling on this. We believe the current proposal to be an overdevelopment that is out of keeping with its local surroundings by nature of its design, scale and massing. We also have serious concerns about the impact on the ecology and setting of the Hogsmill River from the planning proposal and the effect on residents from the demolition and construction work.

As it stands, we believe that the local residents have an excellent case to see the current application refused permission by the local planning authority.

Rather than continuing what is certain to become an increasingly adversarial process, we suggest an alternative course. Why not take the initiative as a true community leader and offer an olive branch to local residents by withdrawing the current proposal and opening up a meaningful dialogue on the way forward?

The alternative, to press ahead knowing that you are not bringing the community along with you, can only lead to divisions between the University and the wider community that will become harder and harder to heal.

The University, its teaching staff and students are a valuable part of the Kingston community. For over 125 years it has been an institution at the heart of the town's life. We want to support the University in continuing to go from strength to strength.

We know that you value your place in the community. The University proudly states on its website that "*Community impact is a big part of life at Kingston University*" and "*Taking care of our community is important to us*". Almost half of Kingston students come from within a 10-mile radius of the University.

The University has an opportunity before it to truly live up to its stated values in practice, including being '*Inclusive* – by treating our community with respect' and '*Enterprising* - by recognising and acting on the opportunity in front of it'.

The University has a fine history in architecture, in education and in its innovative approach to equipping students with Future Skills. As your website states:

As the UK's leading university for Future Skills, our staff and students are sought after for their skills, knowledge and ability to innovate. We are committed to enhancing students' life chances, supporting staff ambitions and strengthening the University's impact on industry, policy and the professions to enable a sustainable future socially, economically and environmentally.

What better opportunity to demonstrate that Kingston University is at the cutting edge than by involving your faculties and students in a relaunched project to put their skills, knowledge and ability to innovate towards inclusively designing a building with the local community? Such a development would be celebrated and welcomed by all. Think of the businesses, organisations and government bodies who would be lining up to partner with the University with such a successful case study of your approach, expertise and values in practice.

For the long term benefit of all of the community, particularly Kingston University itself, we strongly urge you to:

- 1. Withdraw the current planning application**
- 2. Commit to co-designing any new proposal in cooperation with the local community, starting with a full, meaningful and inclusive consultation**
- 3. Fully engage in a meeting with residents, including yourself as the Vice Chancellor, to start to move forward together.**

With this approach, the University can start to rebuild its relationships with residents, focusing on an inclusive approach.

A University's reputation is one of its key assets. It benefits no one to risk tarnishing this reputation by attempting to impose an unwelcome development on your neighbours against bitter opposition. Even if planning permission was eventually obtained, perhaps after a lengthy appeal of further cost and entrenched opposition, would the reputational damage and soured community relations really be worth it? The University would be an unwelcome neighbour in its own community for years to come.

This can be an opportunity for Kingston University to show itself as a true community leader. It is our sincere wish that you grasp this opportunity to build an even stronger relationship with your neighbours that will benefit the University now and into the future.

With all best wishes,

Kezia Coleman, Keegan Hillier, James Stanton
Kingston and Surbiton Labour Party