

## South Kensington Station: What can we say? How about: what a mess!

FOR years and years, there have been discussions about the redevelopment of South Kensington Station. In 2016 TfL issued a proposal for the redevelopment. The proposal separated the upgrade and station capacity increase, to be paid for by TfL, from the further development surrounding the entire site along Pelham Street, on the Bullnose, and down Thurloe Street. Finally, in 2018 it was announced that Native Land was to be “the preferred joint venture partner” for all but the station upgrade. What was not stated was that Native Land would have controlling powers of 51%.

Having spent years working with TfL on a planning permission granted in early 2012 for the main works to the upgrade, with the introduction of Native Land all dialogue ended. Native Land and TfL did have glossy presentations which they called a “consultation”. Sadly, these “consultations” consisted of large boards carrying selected views with no reference to what was the view before. Every “consultation” entailed more and more shocking proposals. The development exploded into larger and larger buildings. The architecture, well suited for any modern city, has no context reference to the conservation areas or the many fine listed buildings. There was no dialogue. Then came the application this June. And the uproar began.

The application was validated on 3 July. Shockingly on 24 July, just 21 days later, TfL reported it was “pausing” the station upgrade because the cost of the projects has “exceeded original project funding”. We never have received any notification from TfL and, of course, not from Native Land. We called our contact, a lovely young man at TfL we had been talking to for years, and asked what was going on. The answer was, and was repeated several times without explanation, “TfL is pausing”. When asked what “pausing” means, the answer was “pausing”. We asked if he could call me back and explain what “pausing” actually means. He has not called.

The important, and often misunderstood aspect of “pausing”, is that the application submitted in June included these “paused” parts. In planning when you are given approval for development

there is no obligation/requirement to do all the elements of the permission. In other words, the application in July for a massive development, if approved, could be built without the major community element of the station upgrade. What many people seem to miss is that the “paused” works for the upgrade included the new ticket hall and importantly the new lifts from the new ticket hall to the District and Circle Line platforms to be funded by TfL.

It is the one element we all wanted from this development – step free access throughout the station to the D&C platforms, to the tunnel and to/from the street level. Museums, of course, want the improvements to the access and capacity, as well. Some have unreservedly backed the applications and have mounted a support campaign. Unfortunately, the campaign has not mentioned that, if approved, there is no guarantee that there will be any works to the station or step free access.

We, the Kensington Society, have supported the organised residents’ associations in their extremely researched and thorough objections. Thurloe Owners’ and Leaseholders’ Association and Onslow Neighbourhood Association have been particularly active. No stone has been left unturned. We appreciate that there will be development but not at this expense.

TfL was in a financial mess before the pandemic began and now is demanding £5.7bn from the government. That money will not go to this development.

The council planners have informed us on 2 October that “the applicants have decided to pause and consider the content of the large number of representations, 1,569 objections at the time of writing, before deciding how best to address the concerns raised and how to proceed. This would seem to be a sensible and positive step at this point”.

We still want to know what “pause” means. It is not a planning term.

**Update:** at the time of writing there are 1,765 objections, with 205 in support of which 111 stating the desire for step free access. Like we said, what a mess!

*The proposed new bullnose building with new buildings in Thurloe Street and Thurloe Square in the background.*



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