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OPDC Board—the cracks appear

Events have moved swiftly since our last open meeting on Zoom on March 2nd.

On Thursday 4th March, the OPDC Board had a presentation by planning officers on the proposed 'modifications' to the OPDC 'Post Submission Draft Local Plan'.

Significantly, the Leader of Hammersmith & Fulham Council voted against the recommendation to submit these 'modifications' to the Planning Inspector. He suggested that these major changes to a much altered set of plans for the Old Oak area should be allowed to 'lie on the table' until the next meeting in 3 months. This would have given the OPDC time to try to convince local people in the area that the alterations made by planning officers add up to a coherent plan.

Hammersmith & Fulham is the Borough which back in 2015 had the largest part of its own area (as compared with Ealing and Brent) removed from the Council's control over planning issues. This was when London Mayor Boris Johnson created the OPDC as a Mayoral Development Corporation.

Local LBHF councillors on the OPDC Planning Committee have become increasingly unconvinced that the modified OPDC Draft Local Plan hangs together. Last month Cllr Wesley Harcourt and Cllr Natalia Perez abstained on a recommendation to progress these proposals to the OPDC Board.

In its six year life since it was first set up, the OPDC Board has never voted on any significant issue. So what happened at the March 4th Board meeting was significant. In a '*Plea to the Planning Committee*' last month, the Old Oak Neighbourhood Forum, Grand Union Alliance and St Quintin and Woodlands Neighbourhood Forum all signed up to a jointly agreed case for the Development Corporation to pause and think again about its Local Plan.

Councillor Cowan's proposals for a few weeks of delay to let the public absorb and discuss the modifications did not go down well with OPDC officers. Director of Planning Emma Williamson advised the Board that Planning Inspector Paul Clark had set a deadline of March 2021 for modifications to be finalised. The Inspector suspended his examination of the Draft Local Plan back in July 2019. The OPDC Draft plan was first submitted to him in September 2018.

It seems that the Inspector came to the view some time ago that a 2108 Draft Plan would no longer be 'sound' and up to date unless its Examination resumed by March 2021. OPDC kept this decision to itself, until the Board meeting on March 4th. This is contrary to national guidance that the process of Local Plan examination should be 'transparent'.

OPDC wasted no time after a majority decision on the Board on March 4th. The package of 'modified post submission' documents was sent to the Planning Inspector on March 5th. An OPDC press statement was released the same day. This reaches new heights of OPDC hyperbole, with CEO David Lunts saying *By focussing on public sector-owned sites we can coordinate major regeneration at scale, fully exploiting the amazing potential created by the largest new rail station to be built in over a century here at Old Oak Common.*

The major flaws and inconsistencies in the modified Draft Local Plan will be communicated shortly to the Planning Inspector, by the local groups and neighbourhood forums in the area. Not least of these is the fact that Old Oak Common HS2/Crossrail station will now have no vehicle access by buses, cars or taxis other than a single entrance at its western end, off Old Oak Common Lane in East Acton.

This was not part of the plan. It is the product of Cargiant withdrawing its proposals for a new town centre and 6,000 new homes at 'Old Oak Park' back in 2019, along with the Inspector's subsequent 'findings' that this part of OPDC proposals was not going to be financially viable.

Local residents will be telling the Inspector that this is the wrong time to be fixing in place a Local Plan for this part of London. Old Oak Common station is not due to open until 2029-2033. Very few of the sites proposed by OPDC for '*transit oriented high density*' housing development are destined to be available in the first five years of the of the OPDC Local Plan.

Delivery on the ground by OPDC since 2015 has been limited, other than the tower blocks emerging at North Acton (planning decisions delegated by OPDC to LB Ealing). The future of a post Covid London (assuming that we get there) remains very uncertain. So why rush a Local Plan now?

Take a look at the slide on 'phasing' new development in the OPDC area from our March 2nd session (see at

In a lengthy office presentation to the OPDC Board, this map was *not* shown. Not hard to see why. It exposes the fact that very little of the development proposed for the area will happen in 'Years 0-5' of this modified Local Plan.

Significant proposed new roads and infrastructure cannot take place within the 'plan period' of 20 years because of rail safeguarding and other reasons. The Planning Inspector is not someone who will be easily beguiled by diagrammatic maps and press releases. The whole Draft Plan needs to restart from the beginning, rather than be crudely 'modified'.