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OPDC Draft Local Plan – Inspector's interim report

Following the final public session of the Examination of the Draft OPDC Local Plan on July 18th, Planning Inspector Paul Clark has issued an interim report.

This focuses on the dispute between Cargiant and OPDC on the realism and viability of early housing development at Old Oak North. Several months ago Cargiant abandoned its own plans for 'Old Oak Park' and announced it wished to retain its business on its existing site. In response the OPDC has said it will proceed with compulsory purchase of up to 25% of Cargiant's land.

There will be press coverage of this latest news. Cargiant has issued a press release titled *Disaster for the OPDC as Inspector finds development of the Car Giant site is 'unviable' and orders its removal from the Local Plan.*

OPDC has yet to publish a press statement but has commented as part of coverage by Planning Resource. This online journal provides a balanced account of the implications of the Inspector's interim report. Extracts from this are provided below:

In his interim findings on the draft plan, inspector Paul Clark said the two allocations for land belonging to vehicle dealership Car Giant - allocations two and three, totalling 5,900 homes - should be deleted from the plan.

Car Giant, which owns a 19-hectare site in the development corporation area, has long been at odds with OPDC over their differing visions for the area's redevelopment.

In his letter, Clark said the "extinguishment cost" of relocating Car Giant from the site could mean that the redevelopment of the two allocations would deliver no affordable housing.

"In my view, this is a conclusive demonstration that site allocation two is unviable and ought to be deleted from the plan," he said.

He added that the inclusion of allocation two "would not be deliverable in a policy-compliant form over the plan period and, because of its significance within the plan as a whole, its inclusion makes the plan itself unsound".

The inspector said that Car Giant "is a highly successful and profitable business with prospects for growth. It employs about 800 people directly and a further 1,200 indirectly. Its extinction simply does not make sense in planning terms, nor does its relocation at an expense which would preclude the likelihood of paying for any contribution to necessary infrastructure or affordable housing."

Clark said the deletion of allocations two and three

A statement from the ODPC said that the inspector considered its plans for Phase 1a to be "deliverable and has directed us to make changes to the local plan to support the delivery of this phase of development."

However, Car Giant claimed that the first phase of the scheme was now in doubt as one of the conditions for receiving a tranche of Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) money is for the OPDC to have an adopted local plan.

It added that the Phase 1 plans would still require the compulsory purchase of Car Giant land. "It now seems highly unlikely that the OPDC could succeed with a future compulsory purchase order against Car Giant, even were they somehow able to draw down the £250 million of HIF money," Car Giant said.

OPDC chief executive officer David Lunts said: "The inspector's decision not to designate the remainder of Cargiant's land for future housing development at this stage is not entirely unexpected, given Cargiant's strong opposition and their recent change of heart to keep their business on the site.

"He has, however, de-designated the site from its protected strategic industrial designation, and given the recent announcement of a two-year delay to the opening of the HS2 station at Old Oak, and the Oakervee review of the entire HS2 scheme, we appreciate that it may be some time before the rest of Car Giant's site comes forward for redevelopment. We will of course continue to work closely with the inspector, Cargiant and other landowners to see our local plan through to adoption."

It will take a little time for the dust to settle on this latest turn of events. What seems clear is that OPDC's aim of seeing its Local Plan adopted in early 2020 is now unlikely. Inspector Clark still has to issue a final report, and may await the outcome of the Oakervee review before doing so.

Liz Peace, OPDC Chair, has already acknowledged that if HS2 is cancelled, the whole rationale for the Corporation disappears. Were the HS2 line to end at Old Oak and not continue to Euston, a major rethink of the station design and plans for Old Oak South would be needed.

The Forum has questioned for many months the approach taken by OPDC, and has argued since 2016 that the 25,500 housing target was both excessive and unrealistic.

There may now be a chance to persuade the OPDC and Mayor of London that a more evolutionary plan for Old Oak, better integrating existing and new communities, is the more sensible way forward.