



Liz Peace CBE,
Chair
OPDC
Brent Civic Centre, 32 Engineers Way, Wembley HA9 0FJ
(by email)

February 25th 2024

Dear Liz,

OPDC Board meeting on 28th February – latest HS2 plans at Old Oak descend into chaos for residents

As you will know, we had asked David Lunts whether the Board meeting on the 28th could be preceded by an informal session at which London Assembly members and local resident groups could question both OPDC and HS2 on the current position on plans for OOC station, Euston terminus and the planned tunnel to Euston.

David has responded with the offer of a meeting for OONF members with him and Peter Gow from HS2. A date is being arranged. We have said that we think it essential that TfL are present at this session.

This is because plans for access and surface transport at the planned OOC station seem to be descending into chaos. Residents in the area have lost all faith that there has been enough dialogue and joint planning between DfT, HS2, OPDC, TfL and the Boroughs for the station to be completed on its revised schedule and to operate successfully.

Firstly, we are concerned that the Board did not discuss at its November 23rd meeting (when HS2 were present) the October 17th analysis by TfL of the major problems with the Old Oak Common Lane junction design and bus circulation within the station. **The relevant set of TfL slides is attached.** There appear to be major flaws in the design of the layout for surface travel at and around this £1.7bn rail interchange. The Board should surely be aware of and addressing these issues?

A second related issue is the **continued lack of any workable proposals for road access at the eastern end of that station.** This was raised again by LBHF councillors at the OPDC Planning Committee on February 22nd.

Thirdly, in the past week, HS2 representatives at a consultation session with residents of Wells House Road announced that the section of Old Oak Common Lane south of the station entrance/exit **could be closed to vehicle traffic for as long as 4 years, from the end of this year.**

The repercussions for those living (or travelling to work from) areas such as Wells House Road and the Old Oak Estate are immense. As has been regularly noted since the OPDC was established in 2015, the main north/south roads in this part of London are limited, already congested, and without nearby alternative routes.

Local residents are now questioning the need for lowering Old Oak Common Lane to enable double decker buses to access Old Oak Common station. In light of cancellation of the HS2 project north of Birmingham/Handacre, what will HS2 passenger numbers be? Who will want to use buses for inward or onward transport at OOC, rather than take the Elizabeth line to or from a different station on the same line with better public transport connections in all directions?

Overall, the main local concerns are:

- The chaos caused by closure of Old Oak Common Lane for any period longer than the forecast in the HS2 Environmental Statement (which was *for up to ONE year for road lowering and bridge replacement*).
- The continued lack of any proposed solution to the lack of eastern road access (or for good quality ped/cycle access) to OOC station.
- The growing concern that neither OPDC nor TfL are local Highways Authorities and that the Boroughs seem insufficiently involved in transport planning at and around OOC station.
- The extended timescale for the release by HS2 of the Channel Gate site, pushing ever further into the future the OPDC 'vision' of a major new town centre at this location.
- The cumulative impact on developer interest in 'Old Oak West' of cancellation of the major part of the HS2 project.
- the lack of an updated 2015 OPDC Transport Strategy, no firm decisions on Euston, and uncertainty over whether limited Government infrastructure funding may now pivot towards an 'Euston Quarter' as a better bet for public investment than 'Old Oak West'.
- Continued lack of openness in OPDC deliberations (such as over the attached TfL slides). The OPDC's Development and Infrastructure Committee conducts its activities entirely in 'Part 2' private sessions. At the Assembly's Budget and Performance Committee on December 12th, Krupesh Hirani AM was promised by David Lunts a map of OPDC site acquisitions completed or in train. Has this been provided to the committee and can it be made public?

We have noted that the CEO report on the Board agenda for Wednesday refers to 'approval' by DLUHC and DfT of the OPDC's Outline Business Case. There is no mention of any Government infrastructure funding attached, nor of a final HMT decision. The 2018/19 experience of the HIF bid makes us wary of OPDC assurances on claims of Government 'approvals'. **Does this latest approval come with conditions attached?**

A July 2019 FoI request to see the conditions attached by MHCLG to the OPDC £250m HIF bid was refused by officers as '*manifestly unreasonable*'. Lack of openness by OPDC at that

time led to further wasted months and abortive spend prior to the Corporation's withdrawal of its HIF bid and a 'change of direction' in November 2019. Assembly Members were kept in the dark during this period. They should not have been.

May we ask when OPDC became aware of HS2 plans to close Old Oak Common Lane for several years, and why this decision has been made? If there has been no consultation with OPDC or with Boroughs, this rings one set of alarm bells. If this decision was made some weeks ago and OPDC chose not to pass on the news, this rings another set and reinforces the cynicism of local residents over OPDC's claims of high quality 'community engagement'.

When OPDC was established the DCLG Explanatory Memorandum to the *Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (Planning Functions) Order 2015* noted the following, following the Mayoral consultation on proposals for a MDC:

Many respondents, including the London Assembly and the London boroughs, raised questions about how the local community would be involved in planning and decision making in the Corporation. In response, the Mayor has agreed that representatives from both the local business community and local residents would be offered a seat on the Corporation board and therefore ensuring they are involved in all future decision making.

Amanda Souter, chair of Wells House Road RA was subsequently appointed as a Board 'community member'. Communications back to local people were good in those days, helped by Victoria Hills as the first CEO of OPDC.

Amand Souter's term on the Board was not renewed after 3 years, despite her wish to continue. Her views on the implications of the Old Oak Common Lane road closure have been sent to LB Ealing and are [now posted on the OONF website](#) for those with a moment to read them.

The extent of frustration amongst residents who have already experienced a decade of disruption to their lives is evident in her comments. **We ask that a seat on the OPDC Board for a representative of the local community be reinstated at the start of a new Mayoral term, along with the commissioning of an independent review of OPDC as previously requested in OONF submissions to London Assembly committees last autumn.**

Yours sincerely

Henry Peterson, Adviser to the Old Oak Neighbourhood Forum

cc Andrew Slaughter MP, Rupa Huq MP

Neil Garratt AM, Krupesh Hirani AM, Sakina Sheikh AM, Keith Prince AM, Caroline Pidgeon AM

OPDC Board Members

David Bellamy, Mayor's Chief of Staff

David Lunts OPDC, Gareth Blacker OPDC, Emma Williamson OPDC

Mark Walker, Chair OONF and Robin Brown, Grand Union Alliance