

# Old Oak and Park Royal Community Charrette



## Overview

The Engineering Exchange and UCL's Transport Institute undertook a community planning charrette in December 2015. The event was run in partnership with the Grand Union Alliance (GUA), a community network responding to development planning in Old Oak and Park Royal; the London Tenants' Federation, a charitable consortium of tenants' federations and organisations from across 18 London boroughs and Just Space, a network of community groups, campaigners and independent organisations providing grassroots responses to London's planning strategy. The event attracted more than 50 participants from across the GUA network.

Planned regeneration for the 'Old Oak and Park Royal Opportunity Area', led by the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC) set up by the Mayor of London, will involve major changes for the area over the next few decades. Proposals indicate the creation of 25,500 new homes and 65,000 new jobs across the two sites<sup>1</sup>.

JTP, an architectural and planning firm, was hired to facilitate the day, which aimed to provide participants with the skills to respond to the OPDC Local Plan consultation process for the area and for the community to formulate its own vision for the area.

## Project detail

The Charrette took place on Saturday 5th December 2015, and was held within the catchment area of the OPDC Local Plan at the Harlesden Methodist Church in London. It was aimed at sharing local knowledge in the context of the proposed development. The day consisted of presentations from a range of stakeholders including community interest groups, and was structured around two participatory workshops.

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<sup>1</sup> JTP (2016). 'Old Oak and Park Royal Community Charrette: Record of Activities.' (pp. 1). London, UK. Retrieved from [http://www.engineering.ucl.ac.uk/engineering-exchange/files/2016/07/01136-summary\\_S.pdf](http://www.engineering.ucl.ac.uk/engineering-exchange/files/2016/07/01136-summary_S.pdf)

The morning workshop consolidated ideas on indicators relating to potential issues and opportunities resulting from the proposed development, looking at (where appropriate) current gaps in provision; hopes and concerns about the planned developments and potential alternatives if required; areas where additional support and/or research are needed and other stakeholders to involve in similar discussions in future. Participants wrote down their ideas, which were then collected and summarised by the facilitators.

The afternoon workshop built on ideas discussed before the break. Participants self-organised into 6 smaller groups based on the previous emerging themes, to map out the results of their earlier discussion in a visual form.

## Impact

In May 2016, the charrette was referenced in a report by the Independent Transport Commission (a charity providing independent research on transport, planning and land use) as an example of ‘capturing the benefits from transport investment’ through citizens and civil society<sup>2</sup>.

## Community Engagement

It was felt by partner organisers that the event facilitated a wider reach within their member database, as some members came that had not attended Grand Union Alliance events previously. It was also felt that working with a well-established professional organisation such as JTP added credibility to the event within the generally more informal GUA network. Finally, some participants thought that the visual nature of the workshops and the guided, hands-on nature of the roundtable exercise enabled participants at different stages of involvement with the issues to operate on a level playing field.

In September 2016, on behalf of the GUA, the proceedings and outputs of the charrette were discussed with the OPDC. The key messages were found to match those of the emerging Local Plan and would be used to structure the next round of public consultation workshops. Community representatives now had higher expectations for involvement in future consultations and would be continuing to press for improvements to the OPDC’s Statement of Community Involvement<sup>3</sup>. These community expectations are informing Just Space’s formulation of proposals for meaningful and effective public involvement in planning across London.

## Lessons Learned

During a de-brief session with London Tenants’ Federation, Just Space and the Transport Institute 5 months after the event, the EngEx received feedback from the partner organising networks about the charrette methodology, content and outcomes. Some aspects of the approach were viewed as beneficial, for example the Executive Summary document prepared by JTP Architects, as well as the model of taking a proactive rather than a reactive approach to the making of community responses to London planning.

However, lessons for improvement can be taken from the feedback on the running of the charrette, which indicated that not all participants were comfortable with what was seen as a top-down approach. Additionally, partner organisers felt that due to the high-level approach of the workshops and the limited time available during a one-day event, the complexity of the issues was not explored in enough depth. Questioning of the fundamental assumptions within the Old Oak Common plan around for example housing provision, and attempts to explore alternative forms, were not seen to be adequate.

It would therefore have been beneficial in this context to ensure delivery of the event remained flexible and by building in a process enabling the needs and feedback of participants during the event to be taken

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<sup>2</sup> Independent Transport Commission (2016). ‘High Speed Rail and Connected Cities: Accessible Places for Growing Economies.’ (pp. 14). London, UK. Retrieved from <http://www.theitc.org.uk/our-research/research-reports-2/>

<sup>3</sup> OPDC (2016). ‘Statement of Community Involvement.’ London, UK. Retrieved from <https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/organisations-we-work/old-oak-and-park-royal-development-corporation-opdc/planning-old-oa-3>

into account. For example, opportunities could have been given for participants to lead the direction of the conversations, rather than relying on moderators/facilitators. It could also be helpful to create a break-out space for those participants who don't feel their interests are being addressed in the dominant topics of discussion.

There were further concerns that the work from the day would have no real, long-term impact on the planning process adopted by the OPDC which is largely driven by what are seen to be very challenging development targets set by the London Plan for this Opportunity Area<sup>4</sup>. Opportunities for the GUA to provide on-going input were not seen to be thoroughly explored, and further comments on the content suggested some participants did not feel the day adequately built up the community's concerns into an alternative planning vision for the area.

In future, the EngEx will try to ensure that all parties are involved in organising and project planning as early as possible in the process, and to ensure aims and objectives are carefully considered and agreed by all parties. It is, however, important to find the right balance of pre-determination in the charrette model that is best served by being reactive, fluid, flexible and organic.

## Quotes from charrette participants

"In the future this is going to be the UK's most connected place."

"There is a lot of history in the area - it's important not to lose it!"

"I dream of an all-age, all-class community. Somewhere with permanence where everyone is a homeowner or rents from a housing association (no buy to let) - a whole community with the spiritual, makers, facilitators, educators and carers at its heart and lots of bike routes."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Greater London Authority (2015). 'Old Oak and Park Royal Opportunity Area Planning Framework.' London, UK. Retrieved from <https://www.london.gov.uk/about-us/organisations-we-work/old-oak-and-park-royal-development-corporation-opdc/planning-old-oa-4>

<sup>5</sup> JTP (2016) 'Old Oak and Park Royal Community Charrette: Record of Activities.' (pp. 1). London, UK. Retrieved from [http://www.engineering.ucl.ac.uk/engineering-exchange/files/2016/07/01136-summary\\_S.pdf](http://www.engineering.ucl.ac.uk/engineering-exchange/files/2016/07/01136-summary_S.pdf)