

Old Oak and Park Royal Local Plan examination

Agenda Session 14: Town centre policies

Participants: Inspector, Corporation, Grand Union Alliance, HGH (QPR FC and Stadium Capital Developments)

Summary of issues

- 1 Whether the plan's policies towards town centre uses and impacts are justified and consistent with national policy (derived from the thirty-second, thirty-sixth and thirty-seventh Key Issues of table 5 of Key document 5 identified at Regulation 19(1) stage (LBBrent representations 2/TCC1/3 and 4) in the light of the following comments (summarised from representations made at Regulation 19(1) and 19(2) stages;

Thresholds

- (a) the threshold of 5,000sqm for Impact Assessments within Old Oak Major town Centre should be reconsidered and revised down to the NPPF 2,500sqm threshold. Not sure how the 5,000sqm threshold for impact assessments has been arrived at. Under the proposed policy there is potential for out of centre development to cumulatively total in excess of 5,000sqm without being required to contribute to mitigation. It is considered as a maximum the threshold should be 2,500sqm, reflective of the default standard in the NPPF. Others (RBKC) support threshold of 5,000sqm for Town Centre Uses Statement in Old Oak High Street major town centre, Support wording in para 10.22 for greater need of scrutiny of town centre uses in emerging town centres. Support threshold of 2,500sqm for town centre uses elsewhere. The proposed thresholds for financial contributions for development containing town centre uses are too high and should be lowered to 2,500 sqm for development within and outside of identified major town centres. Policy TCC3 point b) is unsound. It should be amended to say proposals should reflect (rather than have regard to) thresholds.

Impact on neighbouring centres

- (b) The policy should be revised to state that development proposals should not have an unacceptable impact, either by themselves or cumulatively with other developments, upon existing town centres. Aspiration to meeting local needs and complementing surrounding centres has been watered down from 'promoting' to 'supporting'. Need a stronger consideration of how neighbouring areas will shape the plans

for the OPDC area in respect of town centre uses. Additional policy text should be inserted, stating that on applying for change of use, assessment of the impact on neighbouring town centres will be required, and planning permission will be subject to that assessment. If cumulative individual and smaller applications will have a significant effect on Harlesden and other neighbouring centres, provision for an impact assessment across co-located or multiple-site applications should be made. Policy TCC1 should state that development proposals should not have an unacceptable impact, either by themselves or cumulatively with other developments, upon existing town centres. Proposals for meanwhile uses should also mitigate impacts on neighbouring town centres.

Harlesden

- (c) Development needs to complement Harlesden Town Centre, rather than compete and overwhelm it. A clear statement is needed concerning what the potential damage to Harlesden of OPDC development might be across the range of town centre uses, thus in every TCC policy section, and what effective mitigation is required. Development principles for wider area of Willesden Junction should not be driven by station design. Access to Harlesden Town Centre will be key. Overstation development at the western end with active frontages and the provision of a new entrance facing onto Station Road would bring benefits to Harlesden and its community. The general London Plan aim of "managed growth" for Harlesden should be included here, noting the commitment then of the London Plan to enhance the quality and diversity of shops and to safeguard traditional retail uses. The character of retail uses in Old Oak North and Willesden Junction could negatively impact on Harlesden Town Centre. As such a lower threshold for retail impact assessments in areas of Old Oak North should be incorporated. The threshold for a Harlesden Enhancement Strategy should be 2,500 sq m as this is the level of development that the NPPF states should be the default level for impact assessment where a level has not been set. Special consideration should be given to the retail uses planned for the Willesden Junction place, Hythe Road and Scrubs Lane, which will be in close proximity to Harlesden. Welcome references of support of Harlesden Town Centre, but feel this is at variance with policies protecting SIL land around Willesden Junction Station.

Changes of use

- (d) Should remove the restriction of town centre uses to sites only within the town centre. This approach is overly rigid. Do not support trying to have predominantly A1 uses in primary shopping areas. This can result in multiple vacancies. A more

flexible approach should be adopted, as has been adopted for shopping parades in the St. Quintin and Woodland Neighbourhood Plan.

Unit sizes

- (e) Support the broad aim to promote small units but this should not stipulate a % target, and greater clarity should be provided on the what constitutes primary and secondary frontages

Retail development quantities

- (f) Need to set out how the diagrams showing active frontage are reflected in the estimates of town centre floorspace.

Management

- (g) Requirement for a Town Centre Uses Statement to include details of how it is proposed to manage retail uses is not appropriate at planning application stage as this information would not be known.

Hot food takeaways and betting shops

- (h) Concern that limitations placed on hot food takeaways and betting shops within the OPDC area will then lead these services to gravitate to surrounding centres such as Harlesden.

The Corporation's response (The following are summaries of responses made at Regulation 19(1) and 19(2) stages

Thresholds

The rationale for the 5,000sqm threshold is set out in the Retail and Leisure Needs Study. The Old Oak Major Town centre is a new town centre. If in existence, no impact assessment would be required, but the Study identifies that as the centre has not yet been delivered it is appropriate to still require impact assessments. The Study has assessed the broad impact of a new centre on the surrounding town centre hierarchy and this has shown that most impacts are likely to be positive as a consequence of the ability of surrounding centres to capture spend from the new population moving to the area.

While it was part of PPS4, the NPPF doesn't have a cumulative impact test, requiring schemes below locally set impact assessment thresholds to submit impact assessments. There's a requirement for schemes over the default threshold to take account of cumulative developments in testing impact, but if the scheme is under the threshold in the first place, there is no cumulative trigger for undertaking an assessment. An addendum has

been added to the Retail and Leisure Needs Study to clarify national policy in this respect. OPDC therefore considers the policy approach sound and consistent with the NPPF. The 5,000 sqm threshold applies to the Old Oak Major Town Centre given the unique scale of development to come forward in the Old Oak North in particular.

Impact on neighbouring centres

Policy SP1 has been strengthened to include both promoting and supporting. The supporting text relating to complement the wider network of town centre was removed to avoid repetition with policy SP6. The requirement to complement neighbouring centres is set out in Policy SP6. OPDC also requires schemes over a certain scale to measures that will support the continuing vitality and viability of Harlesden District Centre. Details for this strategy are set out in Policy TCC1. If a meanwhile use was large enough and of the appropriate use class to warrant an impact assessment, this would be governed through the requirements outlined in Policy TCC1 and potentially through Policy TCC8. Other relevant policies in the Local Plan would also be applied to a meanwhile use.

Harlesden

The Willesden Junction area is identified as a site for long term development. Development will have to take account of the technical requirements for this station. Access to Harlesden Town centre is key. Overstation development is supported in the policy.

Harlesden Town Centre is not within the OPDC boundary. While it is appropriate to make broad reference to the centre when referring to the Harlesden Enhancement Strategy, the planning policy for the future of centre should be set through LB Brent's Local Plan.

The impact of a quantitative provision of over 60,000sqm of A-class floorspace has already been assessed as part of OPDC's Retail and Leisure Needs Study and this has shown that Harlesden Town Centre is set to benefit from the expenditure arising from residents and workers in Old Oak. OPDC requires schemes meeting the thresholds outlined in TCC1 to contribute, where appropriate, to measures that will support the continuing vitality and viability of Harlesden District Centre to explore how these benefits can be appropriately captured. As per the tests of soundness for Section 106 obligations, any obligations must be necessary to mitigate the impacts of development. Only schemes considered to impact upon Harlesden Town Centre would be required to provide contributions, and not necessarily all schemes which exceed the thresholds set out earlier in the policy. The Retail and Leisure Needs Study identifies that Harlesden Centre will undergo growth over the next 20 years both as a result of background growth, and also as a result of expenditure from the OPDC area. Within OPDC's Retail and Leisure Needs Study, estimates for floorspace provision within the OPDC area have been made on the basis of 80% retention of convenience expenditure and 20% retention of comparison expenditure, meaning there will be significant opportunities for Harlesden to capture this growth. Enhancements to Harlesden are therefore likely to be focussed more on opportunities to capture growth rather than to mitigate impacts. Consideration would of course need to be had to the Section 106 tests. Regardless, OPDC does

not consider it appropriate to fix not what sort of measures will be required to support Harlesden. There will be a need for flexibility to consider what measures may be required to mitigate any impacts.

Support for the continued vibrancy and vitality of Harlesden Town Centre must be balanced against the need to protect Strategic Industrial Land as required by Policy SP5 and Policy E1. The Harlesden Bus Depot is required to continue to be designated as SIL in accordance with London Plan Policy 2.17 to continue to provide strategic functions as a bus depot and rail freight site. OPDC will work with landowners and the Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum to explore delivery of improvements to edges of the bus depot.

Changes of use

The definition of a town centre hierarchy and provision of policies to deliver a sequential approach for the location of town centre uses accords with NPPF paragraph 24. This supports a town centre first approach. Taking an alternative approach would not be consistent with the NPPF or in general conformity with the London Plan. OPDC considers it appropriate to specify that shop units should be focussed within primary shopping areas as these units tend to generate the greatest footfall and benefit from clustering, particularly for comparison trade. Neighbourhood Town Centres are much larger than shopping parades and in accordance with the NPPF, OPDC considers it appropriate to define primary shopping areas and that these should be the focus for A1 shops. The policy achieves the appropriate balance between being flexible and allowing for changing circumstances and having sufficient controls on A-class uses. Furthermore, the A-class floorspace requirements figures supporting the policy to which this policy states proposals should have regard to are indicative floorspace figures, and not thresholds as suggested.

Unit sizes

OPDC considers it appropriate to set a clear target for the delivery of small units, to support the establishment of independents and start-ups and to add variety, vibrancy and vitality to the centre. OPDC considers the approach sound, in that it is justified by evidence and the inclusion of a target is an effective way of securing delivery. Primary and secondary shopping retail frontages are identified in the policies map for established town centres. For centres such as Old Oak which are not yet in existence they have not been defined as it is considered more appropriate that this be achieved through the design and planning application process. The place polices of chapter 4 provide further information development should deliver the Old Oak major town centre.

Retail development quantities

The Retail and Leisure Needs Study factored in background growth and known planned expansions to town centres to inform the recommendations in the study. Active frontages do not solely relate to A-class uses - they can include other town centre uses. The annex of the Local Plan notes that figures (maps) in the Local Plan are indicative.

Management

The Town Centre Uses Statement will be expected to provide an appropriate level of detail for a planning application on the applicants proposed approach to managing retail uses. Detailed management arrangements will not be expected to be provided.

Hot food takeaways

OPDC feel that restrictions of the locations for hot food takeaways and betting shops is justified given the concerns over the growing proliferation of these uses and their impact on mental and physical health and wellbeing. This approach is supported by OPDC's Health Town Centres Study. Planning policy for surrounding centres outside of the OPDC area is the responsibility of the relevant local authority, and in the case of Harlesden this is Brent. Like OPDC, Brent's draft Local Plan places a similar restriction on the opening of new hot food takeaways within a set distance of new or proposed primary and secondary schools.

Matters for discussion

- 1)** Have I correctly understood the thrust of the representations?
- 2)** Is the threshold for Impact Assessment within Old Oak Major town centre justified?
- 3)** Would the policy on impact on neighbouring centres be effective?
- 4)** Would the plan's impact on Harlesden be justified?
- 5)** Would the plan's policies on controlling changes of use be justified?
- 6)** Would the plan's policies on controlling unit sizes be justified?
- 7)** Do the plan's provisions for active frontages conflict with its proposed quantities of floorspace?
- 8)** Is the requirement for the submission of management proposals justified?
- 9)** Would policies to control hot food takeaways be justified and effective?

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Inspector

27.02.19