



## St Quintin and Woodlands Neighbourhood Forum

95 Highlever Road. London W106PW  
email [info@stqw.org](mailto:info@stqw.org)  
0207 460 1743  
[www.stqw.org](http://www.stqw.org)

Liz Peace CBE  
Chair of the OPDC Board  
City Hall,  
The Queen's Walk,  
London  
SE1 2AA.

May 7th 2019

Dear Liz Peace,

### **OPDC governance arrangements and current Board membership**

Thanks for your further letter of 24<sup>th</sup> April, and for your responses to a number of questions in my letter of 22<sup>nd</sup> March.

The information that you provide on the current roles of David Lunts, in the period when he is combining those of Executive Director of Housing and Land with part-time responsibilities as OPDC Chief Executive Officer, is helpful in clarifying his non-involvement in GLA planning decisions at Stages 1 and 2.

You also say that OPDC has clear lines of demarcation between its roles as delivery agent and as planning authority, and that Mr Lunts is operating in accordance with these. I don't think that I am alone in questioning whether this was the case with the letter of 18<sup>th</sup> March which David Lunts sent to Planning Inspector Paul Clark. It seems to me that the roles of delivery body and planning authority become blurred in this letter. But I will await the planned extra day of the public hearings at the Examination of the OPDC Draft Local Plan to see if the Inspector and other parties share this concern.

### **Gifts and Hospitality**

On Gifts and Hospitality, you say that David Lunts has completed an updated Register of Interests form to encompass both of his roles at the GLA and OPDC, which will be available on both websites shortly. On the GLA system, the most recent entry still seems to be from August 2018. On the OPDC web pages, I am not sure where to look as I understood that the Register is published only at intervals in a report to the Audit Committee? I am glad to hear that a 'real-time' reporting system, similar to that of the GLA, is to be introduced, but cannot yet find anything on the OPDC page on 'Transparency'.

### **Register of Interest declarations**

I mentioned in my October 2018 letter that the Register of Interest statements for Councillor Cowan and Rahul Gohkale had yet to appear as a link to their biographies on the OPDC web page on Board members. You replied that this was an oversight that would be remedied, and indeed it was. But the same situation has since arisen on the published biographies of three of the new Board members appointed last October (Michael Simms, Natalie Campbell and Shevaughan Rieck). Their RoI statements remain shown as 'to follow' on the web page of Board members.

You may feel that this is a trivial point, but please recognise that local residents do take an interest in the background and outside/financial interests of all Board members. Elected local councillors are very familiar with such a level of transparency and RoI information is available for these individuals is routinely available on all Borough websites—as it for London Assembly members. Those coming from other sectors may not realise this.

## **Board member roles on community engagement**

The issue of the way in which OPDC and the Mayor have portrayed the roles of several of the Board members appointed in October 2015 continues to cause some confusion for the public, as we discussed at our meeting in February.

When these appointments were being recruited, the emphasis in the application pack was on seeking people who *'will have already proven themselves in senior positions within the industry' and who 'should have direct experience of regeneration, property development, investment, and commercial finance'*. Knowledge of the Old Oak area was not a requirement, this criterion being worded as *Experience in and understanding of the local community, the socio-economics of the area or similar urban communities* (my emphasis).

In response to a recent written question from Assembly Member Navin Shah, the Mayor has given a reply as below:

*We were seeking Board Members who would demonstrate a proven track record in key areas, including knowledge and experience of the local community.*

*A number of candidates with a local community background were interviewed, and it was recommended that Michael Simms be appointed to the Board. Michael is Chair of the Acton Community Forum and is well known to communities in and around the London boroughs of Brent, Ealing and Hammersmith & Fulham. I was very happy to approve Michael's appointment on that basis.*

*Michael has begun to build upon his existing networks to engage with people with whom he is not already connected. OPDC's Community Conversation coffee morning events are a good example of this, as they provide an opportunity local people to discuss topics that they wish to raise with the OPDC team.*

The question asked of the Mayor by Navin Shah did not mention Michael Simms, while the Mayor's response did. I have no idea whether Mr Simms was consulted in advance on the Mayor's response. Michael Simms is not in fact the Chair of the Acton Community Forum. He was its part-time Executive Director until earlier this year.

I do not know if you as OPDC Chair are aware of the history of the closure of this organisation in early 2019, as a result of financial problems? Mr Simms may have discussed the background with you. If not, there is material in the public domain (an Employment Tribunal judgment) which I feel that you should be made aware of given that there is inevitable local public interest in the sudden closure of the organisation.

I have discussed the background to the closure with the interim chair of Acton Community Forum who is sorting out the consequences. As a result, I think that that I have a reasonably full and balanced picture of the part played by Michael Simms in these events. I can pass on further information, in the form of an Employment Tribunal judgment from last October, if these events come as news to you.

In terms of Mr Simms *'building on his existing networks to engage with people with whom he is not already connected'* my understanding he has yet to contact the Old Oak Neighbourhood Forum (details on the Forum's website) or its chair Mark Walker [markjonathonwalker@gmail.com](mailto:markjonathonwalker@gmail.com) or its secretary [ewacwirokogodycka@gmail.com](mailto:ewacwirokogodycka@gmail.com). The Forum held open meetings jointly with the Grand Union Alliance in February and March, and a further meeting is taking place on May 7<sup>th</sup>.

## **List of perceptions**

When we met in February, I left with you a list of perceptions of local residents which I had understood would be responded to by Mick Mulhern, or by Tom Cardis after Mick's departure. Your latest letter says that it is not intended to provide a response to each of these concerns..

On one of the most important ones, you have explained your position that OPDC does not intend to share work on the masterplan until later this year. Separately I have written to Doug Wilson asking that the Corporation's decision not to release a copy of the OPDC HIF bid to be internally reviewed, given the public interest case for release of this documentation prior to the conclusion of the Local Plan examination.

I have read the replies given by the Mayor to AM Andrew Boff, to questions about the HIF bid. But these give no more information than the very limited amount already published. By OPDC.

Those community organisations which attended and gave evidence at the EIP hearings are assuming that the public will learn at least something more of OPDC plans and proposals for Old Oak North, when the further information sought from by the Inspector is published as part of the EIP Library.

On the remaining 'perception's in my original list, several are matters on which the Inspector will make judgements as part of his Examination, and we wait to hear what he has to say.

I understand that OPDC is still considering the recruitment of a postholder who can act as co-ordinator on the many problems arising from HS2 works, the construction work at Oaklands, and transport and highways issues along Old Oak Common Lane and Old Oak Lane. With the responsibilities divided between LB Ealing, HS2 and OPDC, local residents are finding it hard to get any action that could help to avoid or mitigate worsening impacts on their daily lives.

Discussions on such a post date back to the concerns raised by residents with Fiona Fletcher-Smith, during her review of the Corporation in mid 2016. It seems a long time since the resultant recommendation in her report to the Mayor later that year, and we do not understand why such a post cannot be established and recruited as part of the current OPDC restructure?

Paragraph 5.6 of the Fiona Fletcher-Smith report said *Although there are currently about 1,500 residents in the area, this is set to rise and the development and railway building timetables mean existing residents will be living with the impact of this construction activity – noise, dust and congestion – for a considerable period. The Board only has one, unsupported resident/community representative and some of these residents are difficult to reach.*

There remain local concerns that the OPDC Board members added last October lack knowledge of the local area and insight into the views of local residents. We continue to feel that a place should be added for a Board member who has credibility in representing local views, and who would have some officer support (as per Recommendation 5E of the Fletcher-Smith report).

A restored place of a community representative could be achieved via a position that is filled by someone nominated and subsequently elected via the majority vote of a ballot of all the recognised local organisations and community groups on the OPDC register held by your Community Engagement team. This is a system which works perfectly well in bodies such as the Westway Trust in North Kensington, and is one that is not difficult or expensive to administer.

It would avoid further argument on whether current Board members are carrying out any meaningful form of community engagement. Such role does not appear to have been included formally in the specification for their posts on the Board, and which involves many an evening or weekend meeting. It would also provide a Board position that would have significant credibility in representing the views of residents and community organisations. resident views

I hope that you will feel able to at least put such a proposition to the Board.

Yours sincerely,

Henry Peterson  
Chair St Quintin and Woodlands Neighbourhood Forum  
0207 460 1743

cc Andrew Slaughter MP,  
Assembly Members Navin Shah, Andrew Boff, Nicky Gavron, Tony Devenish  
Cllr Kate Crawford, East Acton ward councillor  
David Lunts, OPDC Interim Chief Executive Officer  
Mark Walker, Chair Old Oak Neighbourhood Forum