

OWGRA Public Meeting 6th December 2016

A short report

OWGRA organised the meeting as part of a re-launch of the organisation to make it genuinely representative of all concerned residents. A lot of effort went into its organisation and it was widely publicised.

About 110 people registered their attendance and another 20 attended without registering. The Council leader was clearly impressed by the size of the turnout. Obtaining such a turnout for (1) a school yet to be applied for and (2) the council's general views of local planning issues was exceptional.

The meeting was held from 6.30 to 9.00 in Isleworth & Syon School which generously offered its main hall.

MP Ruth Cadbury was expected to attend but was held up by a train cancellation. Ward Councillors Sheila O'Reilly and Tony Louki were present along with representatives from neighbouring residents' associations.

The Bolder Academy presentation ran from 6.30 to just after 7.00 and was opened by Euan Ferguson, Headteacher of Isleworth & Syon school. Various members of the Bolder team spoke about different aspects of the project (town planning, transport, building design). The design presentation gave a lot of detailed information – arguably too much given the time available. The town planner spoke of the importance of sustainable development and the problem of building on Metropolitan Open Land. He didn't dwell on the sustainability of two large schools being placed along Syon Lane. The transport presentation was very general and was largely restricted to telling us that they were aware of the problems and were determined to solve them. Audience questions showed that many residents were unconvinced that the traffic problems were being adequately addressed.

Current progress on local planning issues. The session was opened by **Steve Curran**, *Council Leader*. He expressed his surprise and pleasure at the large attendance. He spoke of the large amount of development in the borough and pointed out that its population is now 275,000 (“and they're the ones we know about”). To indicate the vigilance of the council w.r.t. non-approved development he talked of the council's active opposition to 'beds in sheds'. Also LBH had received a national award for its work on enforcement against “criminal landlords”.

Mr Curran said that the Council was meeting its housing targets and that nearly all developments met

the 40% affordable housing requirement. He added that the Council was doing all it could to get extra finance from the London Mayor and from central government. At the same time he recognised the unsatisfactory nature of the outcome in that his own children could not afford to rent in Hounslow.

The overload on public transport was recognised and Mr Curran explained that the Council was doing what it could to improve the transport infrastructure.

Second up was Alan Hesketh, *Interim Head of Regeneration, Spatial Planning, Economic Development and Environmental Strategy*. The large attendance meant that his 40 handouts were insufficient. His purpose was to update the meeting with progress on the Great West Corridor plan.

Mr Hesketh's handout summarised responses so far to plans for the West of the borough and the Great West Area (all the responses are available on line). Respondents that they like the open character of the area and its low-level housing. They disliked high-density development along the A4, noise and air pollution from traffic. They understood the need for employment development and wanted improved transport including for cycling. They want to protect and enhance the heritage aspects of the Great West Corridor and also development of the community infrastructure to support further developments.

Finally Marilyn Smith, *Head of Development Management*, who outlined the planning process and dealt with major developments in Osterley. She said Mr Hesketh's team deals with the long-term (5-year and 20-year plans). Her team deals with current applications. She said that not all developments need planning permission. Permitted developments include the conversion of offices into homes and small residential modifications (see [Residential Extension Guidelines](#)). Such developments are beyond the reach of local planning.

The planning team works within the *National Policy Planning Framework*, the *London Plan* and the *Hounslow Local Plan*. Then they have to consider various *material considerations*. The latter includes traffic, scale and appearance, provision of schooling and employment, impact on town centres air quality and noise. Planning decisions are then a judgement based on all these factors. Sometimes this means considering exceptional circumstances in which the benefit of a proposed development is considered to outweigh the harm it causes and which would normally lead to its refusal. She said that the

Nishkam school approval was an example of such a judgement.

The special protection for Conservation areas (there are two, one in Osterley and one in Spring Grove) was touched on.

Ms Smith also outlined the processes for consultation and consideration of applications. She pointed out that objections can only be considered if they are based on planning considerations rather than personal inconvenience. She said that all the information needed was available on the Council website.

Finally, some details were given about (1) the temporary car park for *Sky* on the former *Shell* garage at Gillette Corner and (2) a *National Trust* application for cycle paths in Osterley Park. She suggested that OWGRA could ask for a presentation by the developer of the proposed residential block on the *Shell* site to establish direct contact.

Question time. After the presentation 45 minutes were left for questioning. Questions were fielded on (1) traffic (especially in Syon Lane) including gridlock, several contributions on this, (2) cycle paths/lanes, (3) conservation areas, (4) delay in the consultation process

over the Great West Corridor, (5) the “study area” for traffic issues, (6) Brentford Library, (6) Osterley Library, (7) tight financial situation for LBH, (8) using S106 to keep facilities like libraries open, (9) pressure on health services, (10) problems with neighbours extension and lack of response from Council, (11) adequacy of social/affordable housing provision, (12) keeping residents informed, (13) height of the proposed *Shell* garage development, (14) need for improved train services, (15) pollution levels, (16) opposing Heathrow expansion, (17) no left turn at Thornbury Rd, (18) need more police response to local crime wave, (19) enforcing the 20 mph speed limit, (20) traffic plan for Bolder.

Reflections on the meeting. The meeting was deemed to be a success in terms of turnout and organisation. Probably future meetings would benefit from requiring the speakers to address rather more well-defined problems. Also it might be useful to provide other presentations than official ones in order to see the problems from different angles.

OWGRA is most grateful to Isleworth & Syon School for the use of its hall and kind assistance.