



Response to the MDC consultation on the Opportunity Area Planning Framework

Introduction

The Park Royal Business Group (PRBG) is pleased to submit this response to the consultation on the Opportunity Area Planning Framework proposed by the Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC) on Old Oak and Park Royal. Under the auspices of West London Business, Chamber of Commerce for West London, the Park Royal Business Group represents the business community of Park Royal. The Group provides a collective lobbying voice for the 2,000 businesses on the estate and promotes the area as a business location and investment destination. Through events and dedicated communications PRBG has engaged directly with over 1,200 Park Royal businesses and this response has been made available to that number for comment.

Overview

PRBG broadly supports the Planning Framework, in that it promises massive improvements to Old Oak, in terms of development and prosperity. Potentially, it offers great possibilities for Park Royal too, in upgrading the infrastructure, public realm and business facilities, as well as creating more jobs.

Our main concerns centre on the Framework's intention to use Park Royal to accommodate displaced employment from Old Oak, and the extended timescales for action.

Park Royal must not become a dumping ground for businesses relocated out of Old Oak. With Park Royal today already overcrowded, congested and lacking in business and industrial accommodation, it is difficult to imagine where any "displaced employment from Old Oak" might be re-allocated. "Intensification" may well be the answer but this will inevitably mean growing upwards and the detail will be all-important.

Meanwhile, for Park Royal businesses time is of the essence. As one of the largest industrial estates in Europe, it has survived, and its businesses continued operating, DESPITE rather than BECAUSE OF the infrastructure. It is — without exaggeration — at a tipping point and is on the verge of terminal decline. A number of Park Royal's leading businesses are considering relocation, because their growth is restricted by lack of space and crumbling infrastructure. Incoming investors are deterred by the conditions and by the uncertainties of the future.

In this case, the MDC offers a unique opportunity to reverse this gradual deterioration, but it will only succeed if urgent action is taken to improve roads, transport, energy supply, broadband connectivity and public realm. We recognise these issues are identified in the Framework, but they will need to be addressed as a priority and to a radically speeded up timeline than outlined in the planning.

Improvements to Park Royal need to be made as soon as possible, and certainly before the long term regeneration of Old Oak takes place.

Land Use

PRBG is pleased to see that Park Royal's status as a "Strategic Industrial Location" or "SIL" is fully protected. It is essential that all industrial land is preserved, despite the pressures for more housing, as there is no excess or brownfield capacity. In addition, it is vitally important that any residential development in progress or to be allowed takes account of the potential impact on adjacent industrial undertakings, in the form of post development complaints about noise, smell etc.

Given the lack of spare land capacity, it is obvious that the accommodation of overflow employment from Old Oak and the creation of "10,000" new jobs on Park Royal will necessitate intensification in the form of more multi-level buildings. This in itself is acceptable, but the implications for more transport capacity, access and parking, need to be taken into consideration. How will all these additional people and transport movements be catered for?

The MDC has the opportunity, in assuming planning powers, to reform planning procedures within the estate. Businesses are of the opinion that zoning regulations should be more flexible within the estate, particularly relating to the classification of sites within industrial zones. Current regulations are too rigid and too slow in allowing businesses to adapt or expand their accommodation and facilities. For example, businesses' own land assembly or alteration should be made easier.

Infrastructure

The Planning Framework recognises the critical importance of improving the transport systems, both around and within Park Royal. The PRBG urges the MDC to work closely with TfL and with the Highways Dept. to make sure that any disruption caused to the A40, North Circular and other main approach roads is kept to a minimum while Old Oak is being developed and that links with Park Royal are maximised. These roads are already at saturation point and additional congestion will bring them to a halt.

We strongly support the idea of creating continuous, free-flowing routes on major through roads that intersect the estate. We also support the rationalisation of crossroads and junctions, such as the one proposed for the Asda corner.

The PRGB needs to be fully involved in the formulation of a business-friendly transport plan, which is being produced by the GLA and TfL. This plan needs to encompass a total transport view, including, importantly, freight, as well as roads, rail, cycling and walking.

As for energy supplies and broadband connectivity, the Planning Framework recognises the acute deficiencies in both. It is very important, however, that the MDC acts with urgency to pressure relevant electricity and gas suppliers, as well as broadband providers to improve the situation on Park Royal. This is particularly acute for the food industries – heavy users of energy.

The Framework focuses on Electricity and Gas provision for Old Oak, but attention is needed on Park Royal as well. The GLA Energy Masterplan needs to take this into account, but in the short time, the MDC must take immediate action.

Heart of Park Royal

The PRBG supports the idea of creating a “Heart of Park Royal” as a vibrant town centre, with retail, leisure, health and entertainment facilities. There is a serious issue around lack of space, but building up may be the answer. We urge that flexible, affordable office space, suitable for start-ups and SMEs, be built into the detailed planning. We also think that businesses should be consulted over the types of amenities which are needed to create a viable and attractive “Heart”, which can be used for business meetings and networking.

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