

OPDC Place Review Group

Report of Formal Review meeting to discuss Canal Placemaking Strategy

Thursday 21 March 2019

Grand Junction Arms, Acton Lane, London NW10 7AD

Panel

Peter Bishop (chair)

Beth Kay

Robin Nicholson

Linda Thiel

Andrew Thornhill

Attendees

Jan Ackenhausen	Principal Urban Designer, OPDC
Jasper Den Boeft	Urban Design Officer, OPDC
Eleanor Fawcett	Head of Design, OPDC
Carol Sam	London Borough of Ealing
Gabrielle Weiss	Canal and River Trust
Alex Marsh	Greater London Authority
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Adela Paparisto	Frame Projects
Carlos Garcia Vasquez	University of Seville / Milan Polytechnic

Apologies / report copied to

Tom Cardis	Assistant Director of Planning, OPDC
Peter Farnham	Principal Planning Officer, OPDC
Ben Martin	Head of Development Management, OPDC
Anna Shamoon	Senior Engagement Officer, OPDC
Rob Krzyszowski	London Borough of Brent
Farrah Rossi	London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham
Kerstin Kane	London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Confidentiality

This is a pre-application review, and therefore confidential. As a public organisation the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), and in the case of an FOI request may be obliged to release project information submitted for review.

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1. Project name

Canal Placemaking Strategy

2. Presenting team

David Knight

DK-CM

3. Planning authority and statutory consultee views

Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC) has commissioned DK-CM to develop a placemaking strategy for the Grand Union Canal to feed into a future supplementary planning document, and to begin a process of engagement with local businesses. The strategy builds on work carried out for the draft Local Plan for Old Oak and Park Royal, which identifies the importance of the canal under three themes: as an ecological corridor; as an infrastructure corridor; and an inhabited place. DK-CM has been asked to consider how these themes can be developed, and has produced principles that have been shared with stakeholders to inform a strategy. The final strategy document will be launched in May 2019.

Carol Sam, Ealing Council, emphasised the importance of allowing local people to access the canal, and explained that Ealing supports initiatives to encourage behaviour change among canal users, to create greater respect for the canal.

Alex Marsh, Greater London Authority, noted the importance of an interface between the canal strategy and the masterplans for Old Oak and Park Royal that will guide the development taking place along its banks.

Gabrielle Weiss, Canals and Rivers Trust, noted the importance of ensuring development contributes to improving ecology along the canal. She pointed out that the strategy provides an important opportunity to set the tone for the treatment of the canal in the masterplans for the surrounding area and subsequent development. Analysis of a broader area beyond the OPDC boundaries is therefore important to show how the canal interacts with other routes and connections, and the differing levels of activity these will generate.

Kerstin Kane, Hammersmith and Fulham Council, was unable to attend the meeting but provided comments for the panel by email. She emphasised the council's view that nature reserves should be allowed to remain natural as far as possible; that new and existing views beyond the canal are important; that non-activated stretches with no lighting are needed to encourage biodiversity, perhaps through parallel routes; that not every junction between the canal and street network needs access and activation; and that floating rather than land-based facilities could be provided.



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4. Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel supports the methodology and approach taken by the design team to what it considers to be a very important and sensitive study. It asks the team to focus on the future character of the canal, the extent to which existing elements are preserved. A clear explanation is needed of the rationale for focusing on particular locations for improvements. There is potential for the strategy to inform design decisions for canalside sites, influencing the relationship of new buildings to the canal. As part of this process, the Old Oak Masterplan should be tested against the Canal Placemaking Strategy. Illustrating the vision for the canal in the context of planned development would also be valuable, to aid understanding of its future character. Improved access to the canal is very important, but the potential impact of increased activity on delicate wildlife and habitats, and the risk of conflict between different towpath users needs further thought. Spaces along the canal could be mapped at micro-level as the basis for understanding the potential for change, and for creating useable outdoor space. Habitat connectivity could be reinforced by filling gaps, for example with green walls and roofs. A strategy is needed for reducing polluting behaviour from boat dwellers, including improved facilities. The panel supports the use of boats rather than land-based buildings to enable new activities. Birchwood should be treated sensitively to avoid any development that could undermine its wild character. These comments are developed in more detail below.

Analysis approach

- The panel suggests that a wider section of the canal should be analysed to place the Old Oak and Park Royal strategy in context. For example, looking at the route from Paddington to Uxbridge would help to show how the strategy area fits into the broader character of the canal, including as part of an ecological corridor leading all the way out of the city from central London.
- It is difficult to visualise the future condition of the area after major redevelopment, so the panel suggests that three-dimensional drawings should be produced to show the canal in the context of the canalside development envisaged in the Old Oak Masterplan.
- The panel encourages the design team to explore precedent studies as a way of illustrating a vision for the way development can relate successfully to canal settings.

Scope of strategy

- The panel feels that the strategy should create a clearer view of the post-development character planned for the canal. The existing character of the canal is predominantly quiet and hidden, and it would be helpful to map how increased activity will change the character of different parts of the canal.



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- Clarity about the aspects of existing buildings, spaces and landscape that should be retained, will also play an important role in shaping the canal's future character.
- However, while preserving existing character is an important starting point, the panel also highlights that positive change can contribute to a richer, more successful place.
- The panel feels a stronger rationale is needed for choosing the case study project locations included in the strategy. It should be as clear as possible why they have been selected, and how they are different from other parts of the canal.

Relationship of canal to development

- The panel considers that the strategy should provide some parameters for future development along the canal. For example, buildings could be pulled back from the canal to create more space, or denser relationships created with buildings closer to the canal, choices that will fundamentally alter the nature of the place.
- The strategy should be tested against the Old Oak Masterplan, to ensure it can positively influence future development by improving the way it addresses the canal.
- Mapping of existing canalside spaces at a micro-level could form the basis for understanding the potential for change, and for creating useable outdoor space.
- This analysis could also be used, for example, to identify locations that might be successfully used in the evening.
- The panel supports the idea of creating useable spaces outside workplaces facing onto the canal. It suggests a set of potential interventions could be proposed, to be implemented when development comes forward. This could help ensure that developments take account of the wider canal picture, and of local needs of which they may be unaware.

Access and activities

- Increasing accessibility along the canal, is an important component of the Canal Placemaking Strategy. Early interventions could include installing accessible routes at nodes along the canal such as Mary Seacole Gardens.
- It is important that the feeling of safety and security is improved along the canal, if people are to be encouraged to make more use of it.
- Changing levels of activity could be supported by a lighting strategy that matches the different moods along route.



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- Analysis of the canal could include assessment of how seasonal changes will affect the way it is used, and what it will be like by day and by night.
- The panel supports the intention to encourage behaviour change with the aim of reducing conflict among canal users, particularly cyclists and pedestrians. **Surfacing designs and treatments could be used to manage cycling speeds.**
- Consideration should be given to how **public toilets** can be provided along the stretch of canal that will see increased use, with thought given to their long-term maintenance.
- The panel supports plans to host activities on boats as far as possible, rather than building permanent structures, using a model has been shown to work well on other parts of the canal.

Environment and ecology

- Because the canal towpath is narrow, the ecological corridor along the canal is vulnerable to the impact of increased future use. For example, further traffic risks damaging the hedgerow alongside the towpath.
- The panel encourages the design team to make proposals for improving ecological connectivity along the canal, identifying and filling gaps in the habitat corridor. Consideration should be given to creating habitats in locations such as the roofs of new developments.
- The **Network Rail-owned areas of land, that are unlikely to be redeveloped, should form as important part of the ecological strategy** as they can act as long-term wildlife sanctuaries.
- **Blank industrial façades overlooking the canal, such as the Willesden National Grid Substation,** could be used to create green walls and to add solar panels.
- The panel suggests considering the movement network in a broader area around the canal, to understand how traffic can be directed away from the canal where necessary, including alternative, parallel routes to reduce pressure on the towpath.
- **Diesel engines and coal and wood stoves on canal boats cause pollution, which damages air quality, and will impact on nearby buildings as** development progresses. Boat owners should be encouraged and enabled to change their behaviour, working with the Canals and Rivers Trust. This should include installing connections to help boats use electricity instead of running their engines for power. Renewable energy technologies such as solar panels, should also be encouraged.
- **More facilities are needed along the canal for boat dwellers to dispose of refuse and ash to help prevent littering and pollution.**



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- The panel strongly supports plans to improve water quality in the canal, which could transform the potential for more extensive use of the waterway.

Birchwood

- The panel feels that the wild character of Birchwood is very valuable and should be protected, with little or no development. Although there is potential to make use the wood for educational purposed, building in the wood should be avoided, and any facilities located on the edges.
- While coppicing could provide an educational tool, the panel does not consider firewood coppicing to be appropriate use for Birchwood.

Next steps

- The panel offers its continuing advice and support for the delivery phase of the strategy.

