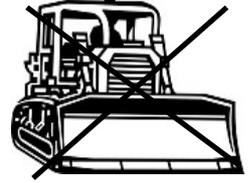




# KEEP OSTERLEY GREEN!

For the protection of our green spaces & appropriate sustainable development

Newsletter No.8, 18<sup>th</sup> December 2015



## Hounslow Planning Committee Ignores its Planning Duties

On 3<sup>rd</sup> December the Hounslow Planning Committee approved plans for a Nishkam school for 1400 children on the White Lodge site in Osterley.

A local resident who attended, chatted to the Nishkam supporters prior to the event. He asked them how they thought the evening would go. Assuming that he had come to support the school they said to him “It will be passed. It's a done deal.”

From the beginning of our campaign we opposed the cynicism according to which “there's nothing you can do” or “it's a done deal”. We argued that planning guidelines mean something and that it was up to us to show that (1) building this school would be a direct violation of both planning guidelines and planning law and that (2) there was overwhelming local opposition to the application.

### The Planning Committee was a disgrace

The main Nishkam/Educational Funding Agency presentation was based on telling the Committee how wonderful Nishkam schools are and what a great thing the “Sikh ethos” is. The references to planning arguments consisted of generalised claims and avoided our specific criticisms.

In the Q&A session that followed, answers provided by the Nishkam/EFA team proved to be either evasive or just plain wrong. The first question was about the percentage of non-Sikhs attending Nishkam schools. The answer given was that 40% of the children attending a Nishkam primary school in Wolverhampton were non-Sikh. Why did they answer in terms of a start-up primary school in Wolverhampton (it still has only four classroom teachers) instead of the current temporary school in Wood Lane (85% Sikh) or even the Nishkam secondary school in Birmingham (95% Sikh)?

But that was the least of the problems with the Q&A. On the crucial question of the validity of the EFA sequential site assessment, a question was asked about KOG's claim that other sites, some were mentioned, would have been possible. The reply was given in purely general terms: “every site was looked at for size, capacity and restraint” but “without having the list in front of me”, a response to our detailed questions was clearly not going to be

### How not to make a planning decision

“I look at this as a decision for residents, for I say this to my comrades today, **make a decision on a school being opened in our borough. That's really the nut and bolt of it.**

“Yes, of course there's objections. **There were other sites available.** There would have been other objectors sitting here today. That's the truth of it. We heard from the applicant today who, in my opinion, has really gone above and beyond what is necessary of them. They've tried to meet every objection, they've tried to justify everything that they possibly can to please everybody. Nobody's ever going to be pleased in this situation.” (Emphasis added)

Councillor Puneet Grewal at the Planning Committee meeting 3<sup>rd</sup> December

*(Note the assumption that the need for school places takes precedence over planning considerations)*

forthcoming. Any decent inquiry into the planning problems would clearly have focussed precisely on such specifics rather than generalities but the Committee Chairman felt no motivation to push things in that direction (more on the role of the chair below).

These two answers give a good idea of the tone of the meeting, which we can only say was a civic and ethical disgrace.

### The KOG team

We are confident that anyone reviewing the proceedings of the meeting would conclude that the Keep Osterley Green team was on top of the planning arguments and was able to deal with every question, giving precise answers and indicating the evidence for any claims made. You can hear what we said and how we responded to questions by going to the KOG website where the various parts of the meeting are all available in audio files.

Councillor Grewal asked why we thought Park and Stride arrangements would encourage car use (she

said that she had looked into it in “quite some depth” and found it to be a sufficient solution). We were able to respond not only with specifics about the arrangements: of three original Park & Stride sites only one remains; that these arrangements encourage car use is not only obvious but is the stated view of Transport for London. Councillor Grewal's “in depth” examination seems not to have included actually reading the papers for the meeting. Subsequently in one of the few clear answers given by officer Rob Heslop it was made clear that the local authority agrees that Park & Stride encourages car usage.

Our Q&A session continued in the same vein with our team showing an extremely thorough grasp of all the relevant issues. (You can hear it for yourself on our website).

### The officers and public interest

However, the worst was still to come. The low point of the evening was the presentation of the issues to the Committee by the planning officers. Senior officer Marilyn Smith read a statement for 27 minutes in a way that repeated a document that had been sent to councillors a week earlier.

Apart from the serial inaccuracies and omissions of Marilyn Smith's presentation, worse was to come in the Q&A session for the officers. In this session councillors put questions to the officers but on many key issues had responses which amounted to a clear refusal to answer.

Thus, for example Councillor Louki asked if the council monitored travel plans and what it did to enforce them. Officer Rob Heslop mumbled barely audibly that it did monitor them. Cllr Louki pointed out that the travel plan for the current temporary Nishkam school is demonstrably not working and

asked for a response on this. The officer said that the situation was being monitored but that he did not have any information on it with him! This exchange went on for about six minutes and ended with Cllr Louki saying that it was clear that he was not going to get any answers.

This stonewalling of councillors who tried in any way to probe into aspects of the application was typical of the whole session (again you can hear it on our website).

### Where do we go from here?

The final stage of the planning process lies with the London Mayor who must approve or reject the application. If the Mayor were to approve the application then we would question that decision too. We are very confident in the validity of our planning case against the decision of Hounslow Council. The strength of our case has been confirmed by barristers, solicitors and planning consultants. After the perverse decision of 3<sup>rd</sup> December, the support of the local residents has been overwhelming. Therefore we are currently working with our barristers to prepare a case for a judicial review.

After a decision like that of 3<sup>rd</sup> December it is certainly going to be harder to convince people that it is worth trying to participate as residents in decisions to be made by the Council. But the simple fact is that the response to bad politics should not be to shun politics altogether. That leaves it in the hands of the people who cause the problems. Rather we have to insist on decent, open and honest politics (wherever we are on the political spectrum) and to work for that in every way that we can. Organisations like KOG are a significant part of that effort. There are similar groups across Hounslow which are already establishing contact and this is something to which we must contribute.

## Send Us Your Emails

Producing, printing and distributing these our Newsletters is a labour intensive and costly exercise. We want to continue to keep you informed as to what we are trying to do on your behalf and to receive your comments, criticisms and suggestions about what we do. The most cost effective way is by email.

**STAY INFORMED ABOUT KOG.** We have several hundred supporters' emails. But we know that the list is very incomplete. **If you want to stay in contact then please send us an email saying “I want to receive KOG information” and give us your name and address.** We promise not pass your information on to any third party.

## Wycombe House Club

What can we say? Wycombe House has been a hub for our activities. It has generously provided a meeting place and has helped in many other ways - a real community asset.

Despite its good work and facilities the club needs your support if it is to continue to exist.

### IT IS A CASE OF USE IT OR LOSE IT!

Please consider joining the club. You don't have to be an active sports person. Hold meetings there, go for a drink with friends. Use it as a social/community club.

Contact details for the club secretary:  
email: [kevin.grindrod@btinternet.com](mailto:kevin.grindrod@btinternet.com)