



OPDC Baseline report

March 2022

Summary

This report summarises research into perceptions and experiences of the OPDC area, focusing on the canal and Willesden Junction station. This will be used as a baseline to assess the impact of a series of projects funded from two rounds of the Mayor of London's Good Growth Fund. This funding totalled £750,004 from round 1 and £1.2m from round 2.

The evaluation flows from a set of indicators taken from a theory of change that was developed with OPDC officers in early 2021. These will be revisited in future evaluations. The indicators also include two Good Growth Fund objectives focusing on resident satisfaction with the area and perceptions of the OPDC stretch of the Grand Union canal.

Our research depicts an area with several notable assets. Characterised by its industrial heritage and multicultural community, there is much to celebrate in the social fabric of the Old Oak and Park Royal area. Its proximity to central London and good transport links are valued by its residents and visiting workforce. The Grand Union canal is used and enjoyed by participants both recreationally, and as a route to work.

This baseline report summarises data on a number of indicators within the evaluation framework. These will be revisited after the interventions are complete in 2022.



Words used by people interviewed to describe different locations in the OPDC area

The OPDC area faces several challenges. It is felt to lack a cohesive identity compared to neighbouring areas. Amenities and cultural provision are lacking, with most participants feeling that there is 'nothing to do' locally. Environmental problems including traffic pollution, litter, and poor wayfinding have created an often unpleasant environment for residents, pedestrians and cyclists.

The full set of indicators - for the baseline and for a second round of research after projects are completed - is on page 11. The baseline data is outlined in full in the Appendix.

Key findings of the baseline

Resident satisfaction with local area

- The area's transport links are highly valued by participants
- The OPDC area currently lacks a strong local identity of its own and is felt to be falling behind other parts of north west London
- The area is dominated by main roads, pedestrians and cyclists can feel alienated by this
- There are perceptions of high levels of social problems including anti social behaviour
- Amenity provision, cultural facilities, and maintenance in the area are felt to be poor
- Recent signs of change around the station, such as planting, are being noticed and appreciated

Perception of Grand Union canal

- The canal is valued for its natural beauty and industrial heritage
- Conflict between pedestrians and cyclists is frequent
- Littering and anti social behaviour are significant issues
- The towpath ramp is felt to be dangerous and inaccessible
- The Harlesden Canalside is the best-liked stretch of the canal within the OPDC area, it is felt to be more welcoming than other parts
- The restaurant and pub bring visitors to the area

Use of the public realm

- There are few opportunities to spend time during the day at the canal, apart from walking, running or cycling, and it is often avoided at night
- Green spaces and places to socialise are felt to be sorely lacking in the area

- Several participants mentioned that they would like to see more public arts and culture

Litter and blight

- Some areas are felt to have a major problem with litter, including the Station Road and Harrow Road entrances to the station and along the canal
- Canal clean-up volunteer groups have recently been formed, and efforts are being made to diversify their members

Safety

- Views on safety are mixed, with some characterising the area as fairly safe and others less so
- Some areas, such as Harlesden High Street, are perceived as being especially dangerous because of drug dealing and other anti social behaviour
- The link pathway from the station to Harrow Road is perceived by some as unattractive, dangerous, and inaccessible

Local heritage and identity

- Harlesden and Park Royal are felt by most participants to lack a strong identity of their own, and is characterised as an ‘in-between place’
- The placement of Willesden Junction in Harlesden adds to boundary confusion
- Participants value the industrial and cultural heritage of the area, but feel that not enough is done to celebrate it

Civic engagement

- Some participants are taking part in OPDC consultation groups and events, as well as community projects such as urban gardening. These experiences are generally reported as positive
- Two participants reported struggling to find local interest and social groups to get involved with

Wayfinding and legibility

- The predominance of traffic-heavy roads makes navigation difficult and unpleasant for pedestrians and cyclists
- Several participants mentioned poor road maintenance and narrow, cluttered pavements
- Wayfinding inside and around the station is difficult, and the station experiences bottlenecks during rush hour.

1. Introduction

Social Life was asked by Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC) to understand the impact of a set of projects supported by the Mayor of London's Good Growth Fund. These form part of 'In the Making', a series of projects which aim to improve public spaces, celebrate the area's heritage, and offer opportunities for people to participate. These early activation projects enable OPDC to take the first steps in the regeneration of the Old Oak and Park Royal area.

The funding agreement with GLA commits OPDC to collect evidence about the environmental, social and economic impact of the interventions and to evaluate the performance of the projects once delivery is complete. The projects have specific individual goals as well as contributing to the three headline goals of the In the Making programme:

- Delivering everyday improvements and opportunities for local people
- Growing initiatives for a successful place
- Celebrating and promoting what makes Old Oak and Park Royal special.

Social Life has been commissioned to evaluate the impact of these interventions. The aim will be to gather data to assess whether outcomes and outputs agreed with GLA as part of the Good Growth Funding, as well as internal OPDC outcomes and targets, have been met, within a broader evaluation of the overall environmental, social and economic impact of the different interventions.

The approach to this work was guided by the development of a theory of change in early 2021. This was based on a review of relevant documents, interviews with key OPDC staff, and a workshop bringing together people within OPDC.

About the projects

The projects we are evaluating include small-scale improvements to Willesden Junction Station, creative wayfinding in the area, the creation of a new ramp onto the towpath at Old Oak Lane, volunteering opportunities to promote biodiversity along the canal, and landscaping interventions at Harlesden canalside.

Willesden Junction Station

Public realm improvements at Willesden Junction Station will make the space feel more welcoming and safe, and help promote the character and identity of the surrounding area.

Creative wayfinding

A series of creative wayfinding interventions will improve the navigation experience for cyclists and pedestrians, and enhance the public realm. These will celebrate and reveal the culture of Old Oak and Park Royal, encouraging an improved sense of identity and local pride.

Old Oak Lane Towpath Ramp

A new ramp is being built at the entrance to the canal by Old Oak Lane, along with improvements to the landscaping. This is aimed at improving accessibility to the canal, and increasing greenery and wildlife.

Volunteering

Volunteering opportunities are being created along the canal, to clean up the towpath and promote biodiversity. These are being delivered in partnership with the Canal & River Trust.

Harlesden Canalside

Improvements to the public space along the Grand Union Canal between Acton Lane bridge and Steele Road, including a canal garden, seating, facilities for local community groups, new moorings and boater facilities.

2. Approach

Developing the theory of change

A “theory of change” was developed for the early activation projects. A theory of change provides a framework to align activities, outputs and outcomes and to explore whether activities are meeting their intended aims. A theory of change identifies desired long-term goals and then works back from these to identify all the conditions (outcomes) that must be in place for the goals to occur. Nesta describes a theory of change: “A *Theory of Change is like creating a roadmap that describes the steps by which you plan to achieve your goal. It helps you to see whether your work is contributing towards achieving the impact you want to create, and if there is another way that you need to consider as well.*”¹

Theories of change are commonly used in the public and third sectors to develop programmes and initiatives; to understand how activities deliver specific outcomes; and to evaluate programmes, to assess how effectively outcomes are being delivered.

Theories of change are used less often in place based programmes than in programmes targeting a particular group or issues - such as a project promoting healthy eating, or a youth programme. The complexity and multiple factors that affect places, and that can affect the success of place based working, make development of place based theories of change complex. However, many placed based programmes have lacked an understanding of the way that activities, and the intention of the programme, align. Lankelly Trust’s review of placed based approaches concluded .

*“The literature stresses the importance of clarity from the outset about the rationale behind place based approaches, its purpose and what place based means. It also highlights the need for an approach that can be holistic but also focused....place based approaches have been hampered by the absence of a clearly articulated rationale for working in place - a ‘theory of place’ - and/or a lack of clarity about the motivation or starting point for choosing to work in place .. This can lead to: a mismatch between aims and design/delivery; confusion in the community with which you choose to work; commissioning evaluation processes that do not provide the desired learning”.*²

Social Life uses place-focused theories of change in a simplified form to help evaluation and understanding of impact. However these have limitations: change, especially in complex place based initiatives, is rarely linear and any theory cannot anticipate all the changes that can affect a local area, a theory of change should not limit actions or learning and adjusting activities. In evaluation, it is also important to understand the

¹ <https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/diy-learn-module-of-the-month-theory-of-change/>

² Lankelly Trust, Historical Review of Place Based Approaches <https://lankellychase.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Historical-review-of-place-based-approaches.pdf>

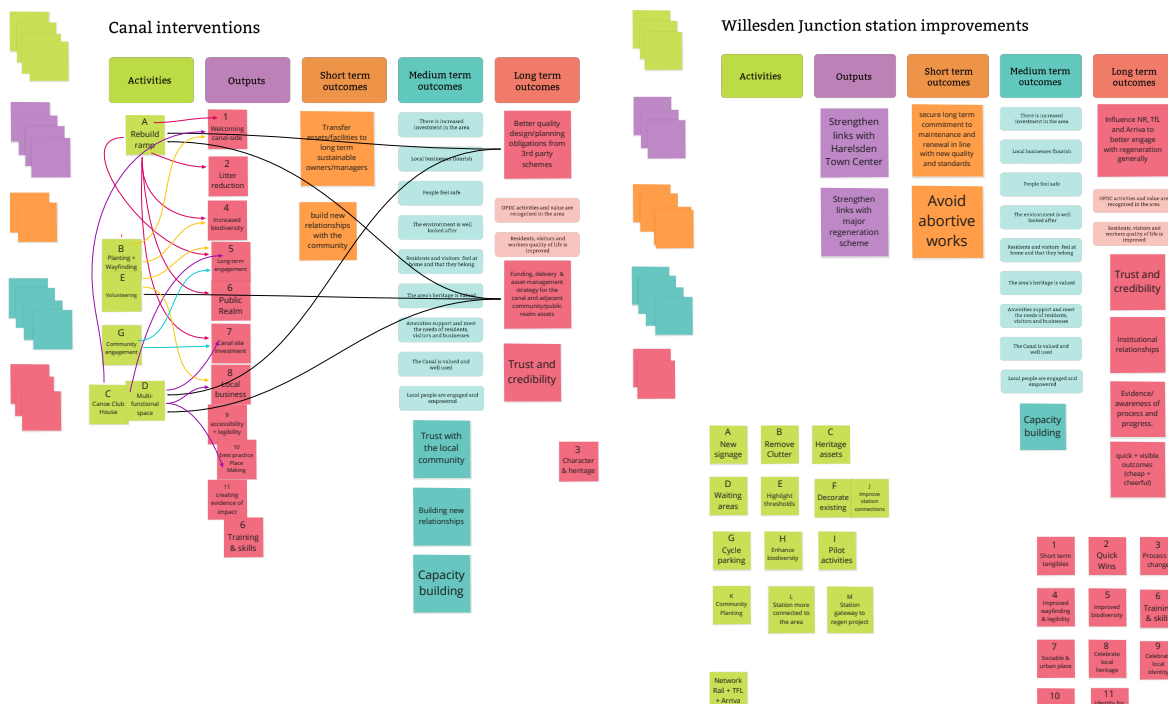
unintended consequences of interventions that may alongside those that fall into the theory of change.

Applying this approach to the OPDC area

The process used to develop the theory of change started with a review of documents and interviews with a small number of stakeholders in the OPDC to build a better understanding of the context of the specific projects and the wider In the Making programme. While the different reports reviewed described broadly consistent aims and objectives of the different initiatives, the language used and the emphasis placed on different elements varied noticeably.

From this we developed a list of “activities” and “intentions” for the Good Growth Projects; for the canal interventions; Willesden Junction station improvements and Creative Wayfinding. We took a place focused approach, grouping together activities in a location as this is the way that residents, visitors and people working in the area experience change.

An online workshop was convened with OPDC staff to discuss the theory of change, taking the activities and intentions that we had synthesised as a starting point.

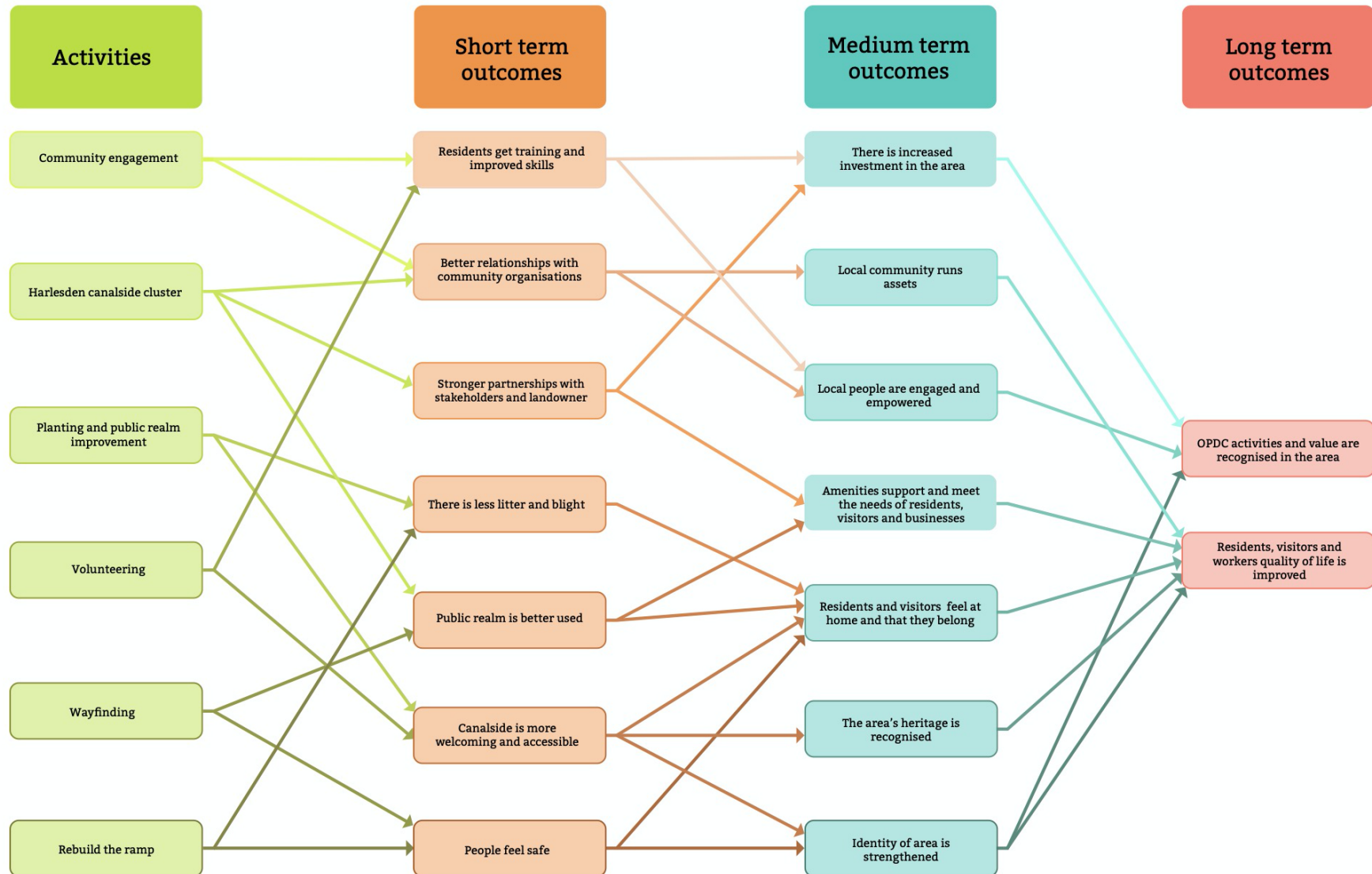


Two of the Miro boards from the workshop

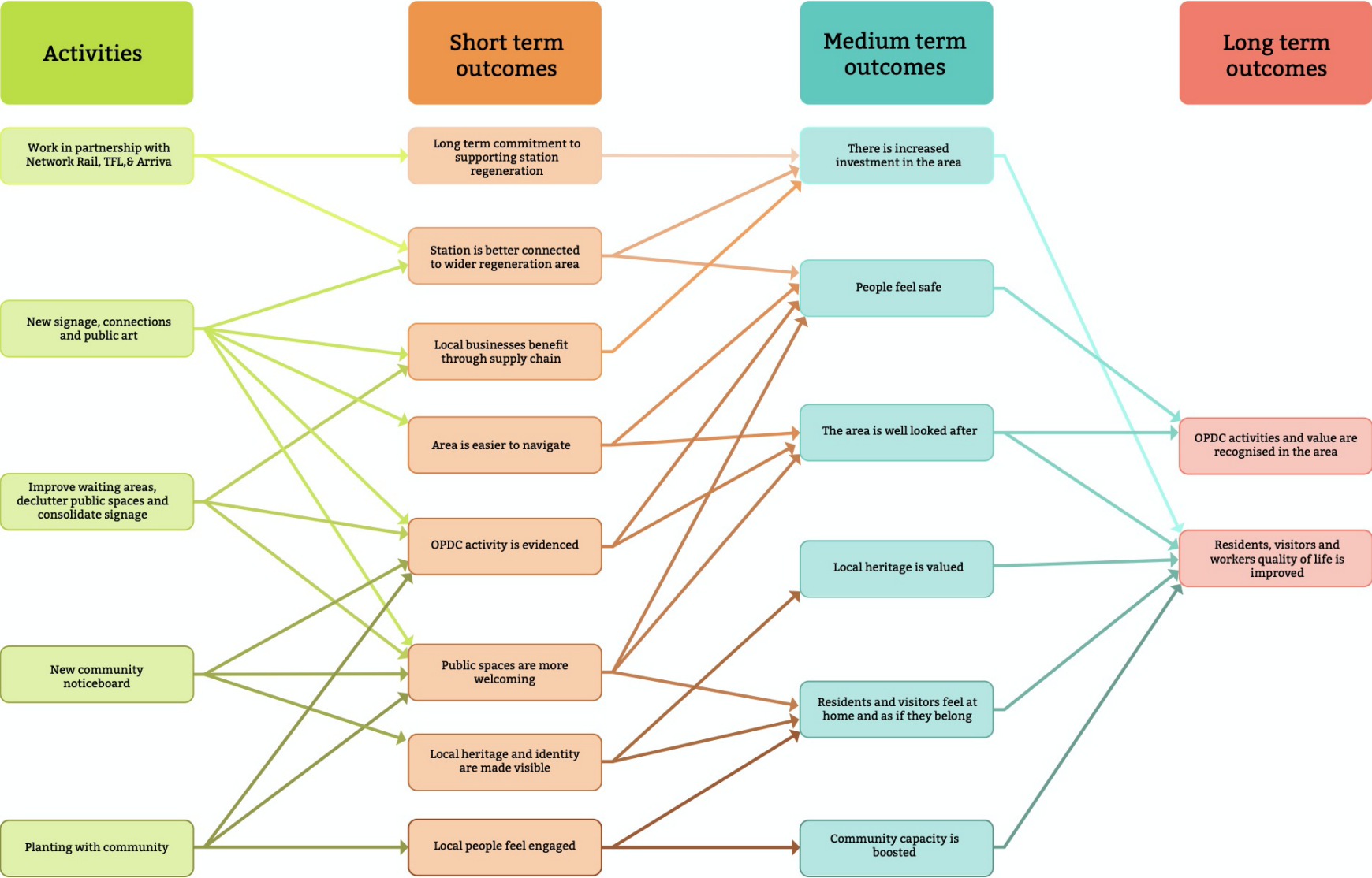
We refined the theory of change, taking proportionality into account: asking how much these focused and relatively small scale interventions can be expected to achieve. These projects sit within wider OPDC efforts to create exemplar placemaking practice and boost business in the area, however when viewed on their own it will be difficult to identify a particular impact on some of the broader and more ambitious aspirations for the programme.

The theories of change

Canal interventions



Willesden Junction station improvements



Outcomes

OPDC agreed a set of outcomes and outputs for round 1 and round 2 of Good Growth funding. Those that focus on activities will be collected by OPDC or partner agencies, while those that focus on perceptions will be incorporated within this evaluation framework. These perceptions indicators include:

- satisfaction with the area for different groups
- visitor satisfaction
- perception of improvement of canal
- perception of improvement of area for business
- increase in footfall.

The evaluation strategy

The evaluation includes a first baseline round of research in summer 2021, and a second round of research in 2022.

Data gathering approaches for the first round were based on in-depth interviews with residents.

For the second round a mixture of methods will be used to explore perceptions and experiences in more depth, including:

- Street interviews with residents: Our approach is to go to where potential participants are to be found in their everyday lives, this could be around the station, the more crowded parts of the canal path or in residential areas.
- Interviews with key stakeholders: including residents' groups, community organisations, boaters groups, cyclists groups, the Canal and River Trust, the adjacent London boroughs, Network Rail, TfL and Arriva.
- Interviews with businesses and traders: including shops near Willesden Junction, businesses on the OPDC site, restaurants and cafes near the canal.
- Observation: to understand how well spaces are supporting community life and being used by different people within the community.
- Interviews with project participants (round 2 only): we will talk to volunteers and other project participants to understand their experience

The evaluation strategy is structured around the short-term outcomes in the theory of change, as over a year it will be difficult to gather information on longer term impact. Where data illustrates any longer-term impacts, these will be captured and reported.

The table below shows how outcomes in the theory of change relate to data gathering outcomes.

Indicator framework

OUTCOME	Long term or medium term outcome	Location (canal, station, BOTH)	Round 1		Round 2					Notes
			Indepth interviews	Observations	Street interviews	Stakeholder interviews	Trader interviews	Interviews with project participants	Observation	
There is increased investment in the area	Long term outcome	CANAL & STATION								
Stronger partnerships with stakeholders and landowners	Medium term outcome	CANAL				x				For institutional stakeholders
Local businesses benefit through supply chain	Medium term outcome	STATION					x			
Partners have long term commitment to supporting station regeneration	Medium term outcome	STATION				x				For institutional stakeholders
Local community runs assets	Long term outcome	CANAL								
Better relationships with community organisations	Medium term outcome	CANAL				x				For community stakeholders
Local people are engaged and empowered	Long term outcome	CANAL								
Residents get training and improved skills	Medium term outcome	CANAL						x		
Amenities support and meet the needs of residents, visitors and businesses	Long term outcome	CANAL								
Public realm is better used	Medium term outcome	CANAL & STATION	x	x	x	x	x		x	
Residents and visitors feel at home and that they belong	Long term outcome	CANAL & STATION								
Public spaces are more welcoming	Medium term outcome	STATION	x	x	x	x	x		x	
There is less litter and blight	Medium term outcome	CANAL	x	x	x	x	x		x	Residential areas included
The area's heritage is recognised	Long term outcome	CANAL								
Local heritage and identity are made visible	Medium term outcome	STATION	x		x	x				
Canalside is more welcoming and accessible	Medium term outcome	CANAL	x		x	x				
The identity of the area is strengthened	Long term outcome	CANAL								
People feel safe	Medium term outcome	CANAL	x		x	x	x		x	
People feel safe	Long term outcome	STATION								
Station is better connected to wider regeneration area	Medium term outcome	STATION				x			x	
The area is well looked after	Long term outcome	STATION								
Area is easier to navigate	Medium term outcome	STATION	x						x	
OPDC activity is evidenced	Medium term outcome	STATION			x	x	x		x	
Community capacity is boosted	Long term outcome	STATION								
Local people feel engaged	Medium term outcome	STATION	x		x	x				
GOOD GROWTH FUD OUTCOMES										
Residents' satisfaction with local area		CANAL & STATION	x		x	x	x			
Visitors satisfaction with local area		CANAL & STATION	x		x	x	x			
Perception of canal		CANAL & STATION	x		x	x	x			
Perception of area as a place to do business		CANAL & STATION			x	x	x			

The baseline research

The baseline research was informed by information collected by OPDC, along with qualitative insights from walking interviews through the area, to document perceptions and experiences of people who live or work locally. Some observations were also carried out to understand how people were using different locations.

Bringing these sources of information together helped us triangulate findings and build a more robust and detailed picture of local life.

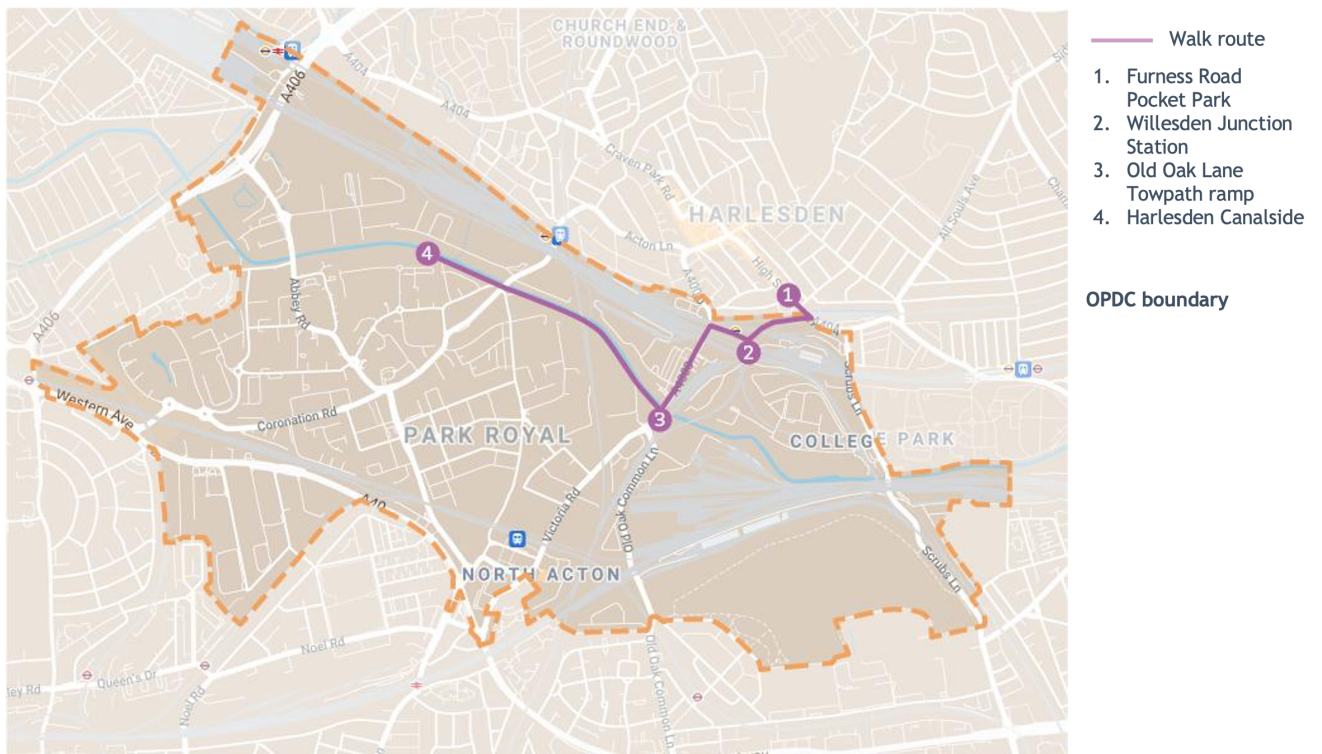
Walking interviews

We carried out 9 walking interviews to explore in detail people's feelings about the area, as well as their perceptions of three locations where significant 'In the Making' project interventions will happen:

- Willesden Junction Station
- Old Oak Lane Towpath Ramp
- Harlesden Canalside

The interviews were conducted from August to November 2021.

A pre-established route started at the Harrow Road entrance to Willesden Junction Station, looped past the underground and overground platforms, and exited at the Station Approach entrance. Participants then walked along Old Oak Lane, past the 'Island Triangle' railway cottages to a stop at the Old Oak Lane Towpath Ramp. From here, the route followed the canal westwards to a final stop at the Harlesden Canalside.



The interviews were semi-structured. Participants were asked for their thoughts on the area, its heritage and identity, as well as their perceptions and experiences of the specific locations.

Who we spoke to

Participants were recruited through OPDC's network of local stakeholders, social media and through OPDC's newsletter.

- **John, 65+, White British.** A local resident of 15 years, John is a retired railway engineer, passionate about railway architecture and urban nature.
- **Ben, 30-44, White British.** Moved into the area recently and works in the Park Royal. Ben uses the canal as both a pedestrian and a cyclist.
- **Rani, 25-29, Indian British.** Rani works with the canal, she is also a regular user and committed to keeping the canal path free of litter.
- **Laith, 30-44, Arab British.** Recently moved to the area with his young family. Laith is eager to be involved in community activities.
- **Robin, 45-64, White British.** Robin has lived in the area all his life and has a keen sense of the changes that have happened over the years and how they have affected residents.
- **Glenn, 65+, White British.** A long time local resident, Glenn is involved in a range of community groups and local organisations and is a volunteer in local greening projects.
- **Peter, 65+, White British.** Peter has lived in the area since the 1970s. He is involved in community groups who explore the area's past and present.
- **Celine, 30-44, White Other.** Celine lives in Harlesden with her young family. She is involved in local groups and is passionate about improving air quality in the area.
- **Isabelle, 30-44, White Other.** Isabelle spent most of her childhood in the area and moved back recently. She is involved in volunteer efforts to clean up the canal.

Observations

We carried out a series of three two-hour observations at Harlesden Canalside and Old Oak Lane Towpath Ramp in the Autumn. We noted who was using these locations and how.

We also documented the condition of Willesden Junction Station and the stretch of the canal between Old Oak Lane and Harlesden Canalside on one day in September.

Data review

We reviewed a number of data sources, collected by OPDC through earlier engagement and consultation activities.

Data sources reviewed

Name	Details	Date	Who gave their views?
Towpath ramp engagement	Online consultation into residents views on the existing Old Oak Lane towpath ramp and the proposal for a new ramp.	2020	55 respondents
Listening to the Grand Union Canal	Regular canal users shared their views and experiences of the Grand Union canal through interviews and a boat trip.	2019	20 canal users, including boaters, local workers and residents.
Harlesden Canalside Engagement Summary Findings	A range of engagement methods, including interviews and online events, were used to gather views and ideas for the Harlesden Canalside.	2020	112 people were engaged, including local businesses, the boating community and residents groups.
Public realm consultation: Willesden Junction Station	Online consultation on the proposals for improvements at Willesden Junction Station.	2019	65 respondents
Willemson Junction Station Survey	Online survey focused on usage of the station and feelings about proposed improvements.	2019	70 respondents
Awareness and Perceptions of the Old Oak and Park Royal Development and Regeneration Project	Survey of residents and businesses conducted face-to-face. Captures area satisfaction, local priorities, as well as perceptions and awareness of OPDC.	2018	507 residents 100 businesses

Old Oak Lane Towpath Ramp



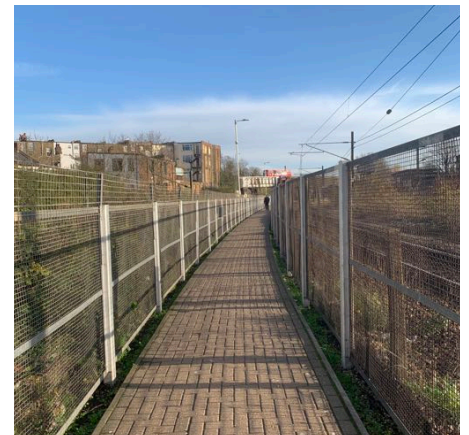
“The seating area by the Towpath needs improvement and the littering. There should be more lighting, to make the area feel safer.”



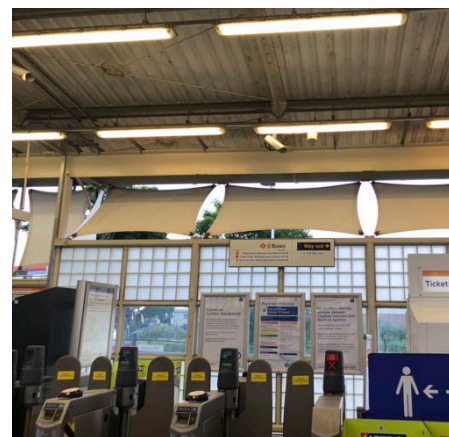
Harrow Road Station Entrance



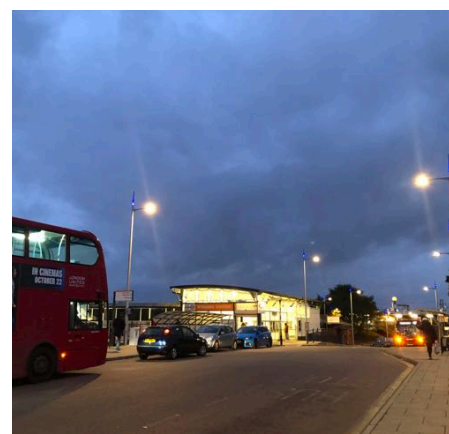
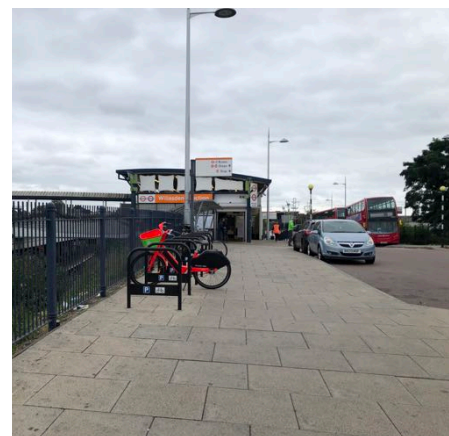
“The big problem is the steps. It’s mothers with buggies and children that don’t realise they have steps to contend with and there are quite a lot of them.”



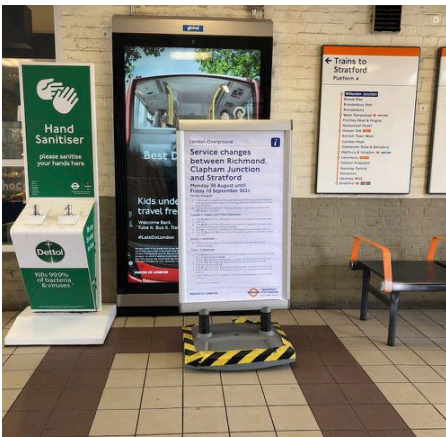
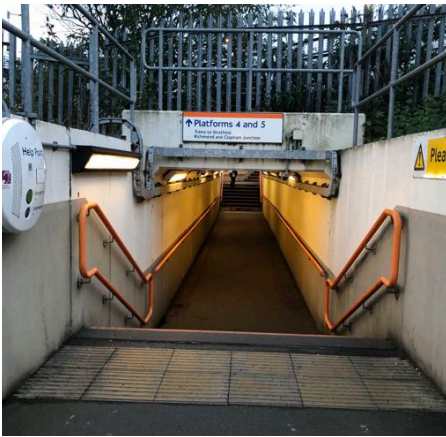
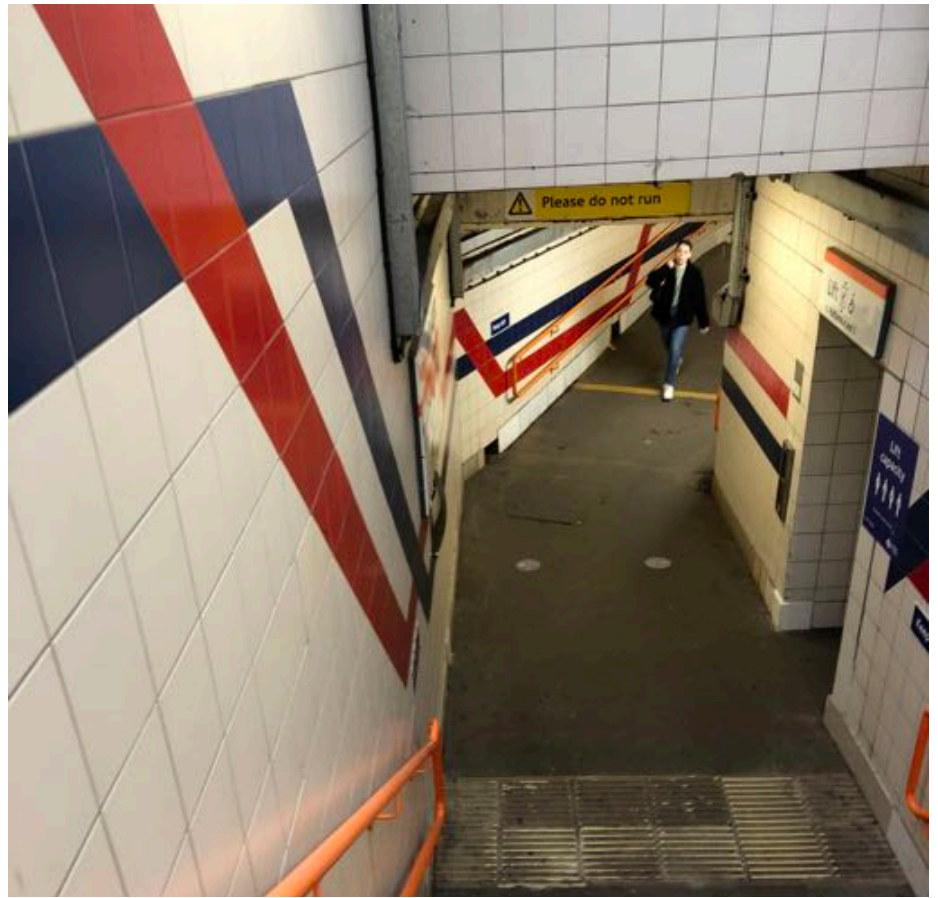
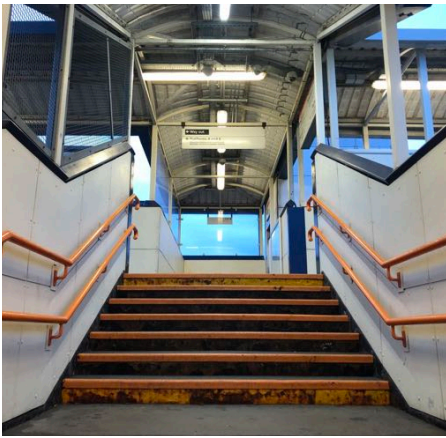
Station Approach Entrance



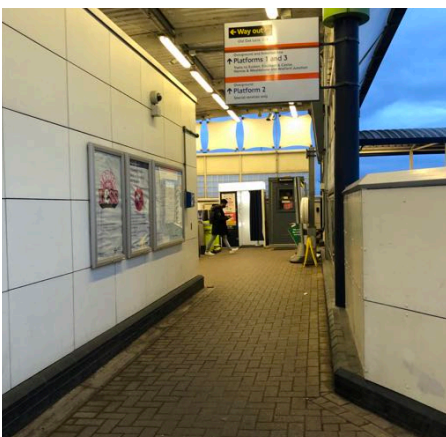
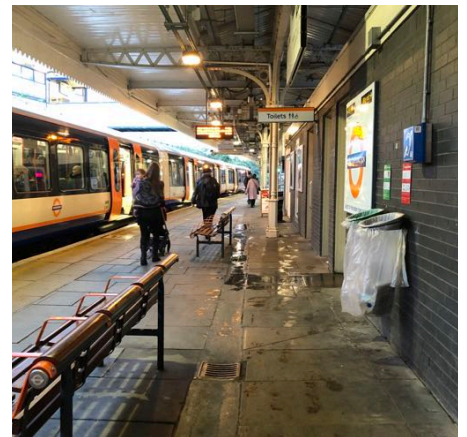
“So this entrance is much more inviting. It’s got a friendlier feel about it. Like everything it could be nicer. It’s more familiar, you know what you might find, it’s like other stations as well.”



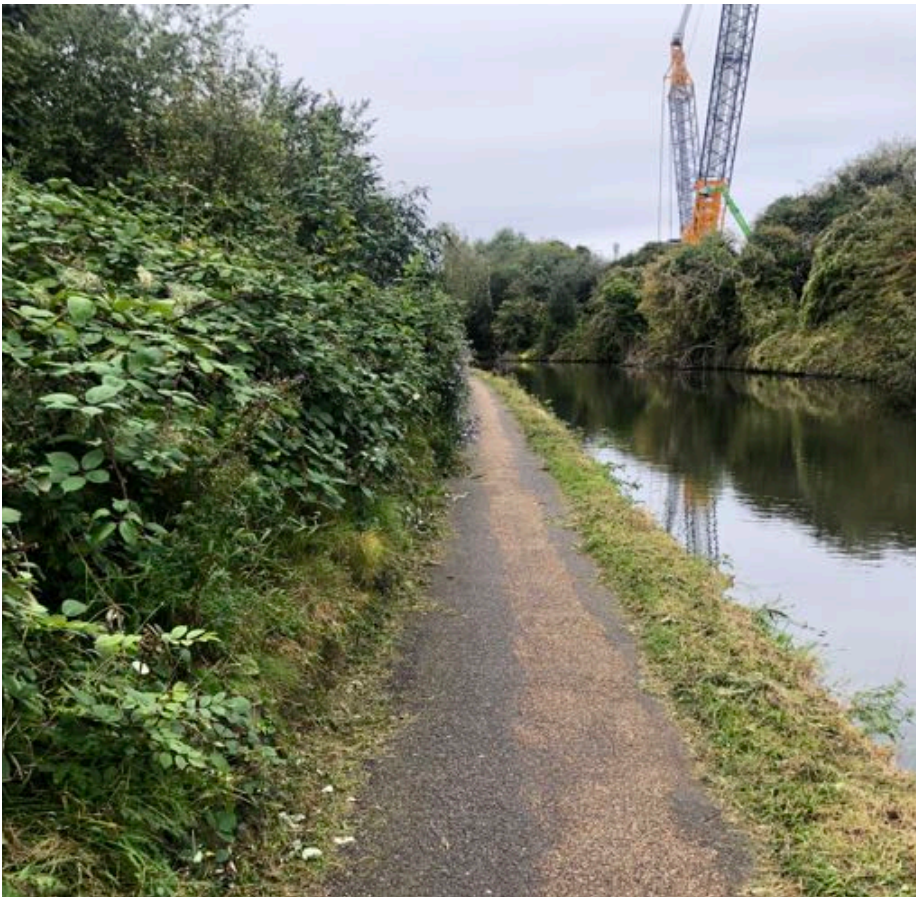
Main station and platforms



“Because it’s such a big station, there’s so many platforms and so many different routes and tunnels, it can get confusing for some people.”



Grand Union Canal



“There are areas that need cleaning up, especially those sort of next to industrial buildings. And there’s this general problem of litter by the canal”



Harlesden Canal Side



“More activities will bring more people on to the canal, using the towpath. There are good sides to this as well as bad sides. There will be more litter on the canal.”



3. Observations and insights

The insights and results of the research are summarised in this section. First by location, then by theme.

3.1. Locations

1 Grand Union Canal

- During quiet times, participants describe the canal as **peaceful and idyllic**. While several use it out of necessity, or as a healthy way of getting to work, others visit it recreationally. The canal is used for walking, cycling, canoeing, observing wildlife, and taking photographs of the surrounding area. During the summer, workers from nearby businesses come down here at lunchtime.³

“I really like the fact that if you were taking a picture and asked people where it is, I think very few people would actually guess that we’re in this part of London. Where we are feels quite protected. Kind of tucked away.”

- The canal’s **feeling of seclusion** is highly valued by its users, who feel as though they are ‘getting out of London’ when they use it at quieter points. Participants also like the abundance of wildlife in the area, such as ducks and birds. Other users appreciate its **industrial heritage and character**, which can be seen in the warehouses lining the canal.⁴ Its **‘wildness’ and ‘imperfect quality’** is an asset, and participants are keen to see that any cosmetic and safety improvements to the canal are balanced with the preservation of its natural beauty and industrial history.

“Ducks with lots of babies - that’s lovely. And you wouldn’t realise how close you are to the centre of urban development everywhere. Lovely.”

- All participants described **friction between different canal users** due to the narrow width of the towpath. Pedestrians and cyclists fight for space at busy times, causing dangerous situations. Participants describe avoiding the towpath at rush hour, and exercising extra caution at blind corners. It is felt that cyclists need to be encouraged to slow down and give right of way to pedestrians. One participant suggested various interventions, such as a sign that measures cyclists’ current speed, or a segregated bike path. These findings were strongly confirmed by other public consultations, which revealed feelings of animosity towards **inconsiderate cycling behaviour** and a sense that bikes were taking priority over other users⁵.

“People don’t want to come down the canal because of the bikes.”

³ “Listening to the Grand Union Canal” (2019)

⁴ “Listening to the Grand Union Canal” (2019)

⁵ “Towpath engagement survey responses” (2020), “Listening to the Grand Union Canal” (2019)

“The biggest problem is the conflict between cyclists and pedestrians. This section is horrible, especially during rush hour from about 4 o’clock. It’s so bad. Cyclists don’t ring their bell.”

- Several other issues relating to safety were raised. **Lighting conditions are poor** at night, especially in the winter. Our interview with an employee of the Canal River Trust showed that they are in the early stages of assessing the effect that better lighting would have on wildlife. The **path is also somewhat uneven**, with loose rubble and stones presenting a tripping or skidding hazard. Sometimes it gets muddy and slippery to walk on.
- Some interviewees described the canal as **run-down**. They pointed out litter along the path, overgrown grass and hedgerows, and graffiti along the walls. There were concerns about the quality of the water, which attracts litter and sometimes appears polluted. Public consultation has confirmed these as persistent and widespread concerns among Grand Union canal users.⁶ For the last four months, the Canal and River Trust has been running volunteer clean-up events with good attendance, though they tend to attract an elderly white male audience. Efforts are being made to encourage a **greater diversity of people** to get involved in the care of the canal. Some volunteers are discouraged by the tide of litter that repopulates the canal within a few days of them being there.

“The canal side is great, with the exception of the rubbish and some of the graffiti, some graffiti is artistic and good, some is just total rubbish and should be got rid of because it just brings the area down, it makes it look as if it’s not friendly and that is a shame.”

- At night this section of **the canal attracts antisocial behaviour**. Groups of drunk people hang around the benches, sometimes getting into fights or harassing passers-by. This causes users to feel intimidated and avoid using the canal, women especially. This situation is exacerbated by the **poor lighting conditions**, and several respondents mentioned feeling worried that people are ‘hiding’ in the dark spaces and hedgerows.

“I think the main priority, especially now with what’s been happening in the news lately, is that women don’t feel safe at the moment and to a certain extent neither do men. So I think we need to improve the lighting to make sure it’s safe for people that choose to use this route.”

- Currently there are **few places to stop and enjoy the canal** between Scrubs Lane and the North Circular, and several participants expressed a wish to bring their families here for a picnic, or sit on a bench and read a book. Participants were also enthusiastic about participating in **future events on the canal**, such as paddle-boarding, mural painting, and urban gardening.
- Boat users are often perceived to have **conflicting interests** and needs to other users. Attracting more pedestrians to the area or encouraging people to hang out on the canal can increase noise,

⁶ “Towpath engagement survey responses” (2020)

litter, and negative interactions (such as passers-by peering into windows) for boat residents.

- People notice and appreciate signs of care but some have **ambivalent feelings about development in general**. New amenities like benches can bring anxieties about who will use them; while users are happy to see a new resting-spot, they worry that a bench will attract drug dealers and anti-social behaviour. One participant contrasted ‘screaming’ advertising hoardings with ‘friendlier’ signs of community-led change. Other consultation documents have confirmed **local worries about over-development** of the canal, such as on some stretches of waterway in East London.⁷

“There are lots of buddleias on the canal. Some prettifying. Some care and attention in little places, just like the planters that we have seen. On the street trees make such a lot of difference. The problem is that people see an empty space and fill it with advertising hoardings. I’m not going to get political and talk about late capitalism, but actually I get pretty sick of advertisements that scream at me when they could be something rather more friendly.”

2 Towpath Ramp

- Participants’ feelings about the negative aspects of the canal are echoed by the towpath ramp. Users notice graffiti on the walls, litter piled up on the side of the path, and overgrown nettles. These environmental issues were confirmed by our site visits. There is also a **general sense of danger**, especially at night when the bench is often used for drinking.

“There’s graffiti everywhere. It doesn’t feel safe. You definitely wouldn’t come here at night. There’s garbage everywhere. I don’t know if that’s being cleared up. The canal is beautiful, but this entrance area is awful. It could do with planting, and care taken.”

- The ramp is **steep and narrow**, with a blind corner that increases the likelihood of collisions. It is impractical for users with wheelchairs or heavier bikes that need more space and can’t be carried up the adjacent stairs.

“When you are using a cargo bike, it’s a bit different because you need a bit more space, and if you have stairs what are you going to do? You are not going to carry the cargo bike up and down the stairs.”

- Most participants feel that the **entrance to the ramp is unclear**, and that people who are unfamiliar with the area would probably miss it.
- Renovations to the ramp were noted to be a source of tension with boat residents, some of whom think that the money could be better used elsewhere. For instance, they would like to see a closer bin compound and a stop point for maintenance.

⁷ “Listening to the Grand Union Canal” (2019)

3 Harlesden Canalside

- Harlesden canalside is the one of the best-liked sections of the canal between Scrubs Lane and the North Circular, with positive comments from all interviewees. Participants feel as though it ‘opens up,’ and people are encouraged to come together and relax. Beit el Zaytoun restaurant and the Grand Junction Arms pub contribute to this **feeling of sociability**, both having core groups of regulars as well as inviting new people to the area. It is felt to be a lot safer and more welcoming than the towpath ramp.

“This area is more inviting with the restaurants which have people moving around and their lights on at night, so it’s safer to use. This area seems better than the Towpath as an entry/exit to the canal.”

- Some users find it hard to know how to enter the canal from this point, with **poor signage** above. However once they reach the canal there is a wayfinding sign, one of the few we came across on our walks, which is felt to be useful.

“The entrance is not very good at all. I arrived here and had to ask fellow cyclists how to access this section of the canal. Someone explained to me, even sent me a photo, but in the end I didn’t find my way. I’m not sure I would have even tried to come here with my cargo bike. Although I’ve been to the pub, I just had no idea where to access the canal.”

- Participants were enthusiastic about changes to the canalside, especially those that support the canoeing club and other water activities. However, as with the rest of the canal, participants are keen to **preserve the sense of peace** in the area. Concerns were raised about the canalside becoming a space for drinking and littering, or a ‘**theme park**’ buzzing with people.

“What’s planned for the Harlesden canalside site, the pontoon, will be great for the canal. It’s going to support the Sharks canoeing club, giving them safer access to the water. People will be more engaged, and will bring a varied crowd to the canal. If it’s open to the public as well that might bring in some maintenance issues. If people are using the pontoon as a gathering and drinking point there are issues of litter and safety.”

“I discovered this area recently. I think anything that can make the canal more family friendly would be good. I didn’t really want it to turn into this busy socialising place, a theme park. It’s quiet, that’s the thing that’s nice about this area.”

“You couldn’t do much without damaging the tree line, and that’s important to me.”

- While boaters are felt to have a **strong community spirit**, other local groups would value new ways to connect with one another. Businesses hope that canalside development will improve connections between them as they take ownership over the new

space,⁸ while residents look forward to **socialising opportunities** in the form of activities and exercise groups.⁹

- Again, the needs of boat users were a point of concern since changes to the canalside may prevent them from mooring there.

Willesden Junction Station

4 Harrow Road Entrance

- The enclosed footpath leading to the Harrow Road entrance is a useful cut-through for residents. However, improvements could be made to improve the experience for users as it is a **'long walk.'** The enclosure feels like a **'dark alleyway'** and is perceived to be unsafe by over half of our respondents, though no-one reported any dangerous incidents. Though cameras are installed, they are suspected to be fake and are **'fooling no-one.'** The path is sometimes strewn with litter and attracts rats. For new users of the path, it can feel as though one is on a **'road to nowhere.'** Participants would like to see better lighting along the length of the path, improved signage to reassure users that they are at the right entrance, and public artwork to add interest to the journey.

"Is it a good entry point? Yes, because I think it's a useful entrance, but as I said, I think that the environment for the entry from the route could be improved. It is a long walk."

"This is my first complaint, this bloody path. I know that it would be mega bucks to do anything about it because it is so grim. It would be so nice if we could just have this wider and more open. There are rats. It says something about the area."

"I've never felt unsafe or heard any reports of other people. I think if 1 person got mugged there they would have to do something about it, because people would abandon it, and walking around is a pain."

- The steps down to the pathway are considered an **accessibility issue**, and multiple respondents recalled having to help mothers with buggies there. For wheelchair users it presents even more of a problem, as many don't realise that there are steps coming and have to go all the way back around to reach the entrance.
- Public consultation confirmed these findings, with many people commenting that they feel unsafe along the pathway due to begging, and several people mentioning **litter and rats**. Additionally, some found the chain link fence to be **oppressive** and suggested that the greenery needed to be tidied up. The steps down to the path were considered an accessibility issue.¹⁰
- The entrance itself is thought to be run down by several participants. They pointed out signs of wear and tear on the steps,

⁸ "Listening to the Grand Union Canal" (2019)

⁹ "Harlesden Canalside: Engagement summary findings report" (2021)

¹⁰ "Harlesden Canalside: Engagement summary findings report" (2021)

and said that the area was often covered in litter. One participant campaigned for three years to get extra bins in the area. Others pointed out the dirty mosaics on the side walls. Overall, this entrance is felt ‘not to be a very good introduction to the area.’

“It’s very unprepossessing. It doesn’t make any kind of statement. And somebody who is new to the area has no idea what they’re going to find.”

“This can be quite a crowded spot, knee deep in rubbish. It took us three years to get this extra little bin.”

5 Station Approach Entrance

- Most participants reported preferring this entrance to Harrow Road, even if it is less convenient for their journey. They like the nearby bus stand, the car drop-off area, the train times boards, the relative spaciousness, and the ‘sailing ship’ design. One respondent also praised its ‘intimacy’ and **human-centred design**, with a TfL worker stationed in the reception area. This amounts to a ‘friendly’ and ‘familiar’ feeling to the entrance.

“I think it’s fine. It feels like a weird word to use about a station, but it feels a bit intimate. It feels like it’s not a big station and you’re gonna get swallowed up. The fact that you have someone there behind the glass window, [when you come in you can see them] It feels human size basically.”

“So this entrance is much more inviting. It’s got a friendlier feel about it. Like everything it could be nicer. But it’s more familiar, you know what you might find, it’s like other stations as well. I feel like it’s separate from the rest of the station.”

- Participants feel that this entrance is **safer** than Harrow Road because it is **busier** and the bus stand nearby creates some informal surveillance.

“Definitely feels safer for people when you are coming out at night, you feel like it’s more controlled.”

“This entrance is much better compared to Harrow Road. There is more activity going on with the buses and the busy road next to it. This entrance feels safer because of the activity, at the Harrow entrance I feel lonely. People are most likely to use this entrance if they can, especially at night. As a male I would feel more reassured using this entrance. Females would choose this entrance over the other.”

- As with Harrow Road, litter was identified as a problem by some, a finding confirmed by a public consultation. Increased safety, better lighting, and a bigger bus shelter were also raised as priorities.¹¹ One participant in our study mentioned that the entrance can get very hot during summer, and that the main road makes it noisy.

“I think this part can really be improved, because this doesn’t have any shaded areas, for example. So if it’s really sunny, really hot, which

¹¹ “Willesden Junction Survey” (2019)

obviously gets more and more nowadays, you have no protection. It's also quite noisy, it's a busy road and you have buses going down, going up. It feels like you're really exposed. It could be leading you into the station in a nicer way."

- In the station consultation with 65 station users, 90% of respondents agreed with plans for planters, benches, a community notice board, and public artwork at this entrance.

6 Main station and platforms

- Many respondents described finding the station **confusing and hard to navigate**, a perception they say is widespread in the area. Though participants have grown used to it over the years, at peak times they can still mistakenly find themselves on the wrong platform. They speculate that it might be even harder for the elderly or disabled to navigate. One participant, who takes part in the planting at the station, says she is often asked for help by lost passengers that get **confused** between its upper and lower levels.

"This station has many platforms and tunnels, which will confuse people who are not familiar with the station. However it's difficult to change things around as it is an old station TFL has inherited. There's a limitation to what changes can be made. For younger users it may be easy to navigate with the existing signs as they can be "savvy." For the elderly or disabled people it may be difficult with the signs, stairs and bridges."

"This station is so confusing and confused. It's what's called the 'bewildering junction.'"

- The aesthetics of the station were described as a bit **run down**, in need of a lick of paint. It is not perceived as particularly warm or inviting, but several respondents noted its **sturdy seating, sheltered platforms, and decent cafe**. Additions like the planters are being noticed and appreciated.

"I guess it doesn't feel very united, it's a mish-mash of things that are here and there. It feels like it's a bit all over the place. It's hard to navigate your way around the station. It's a purely functional station, I mean it's not aesthetically pleasing or inviting necessarily. The planting is a really nice idea."

- At peak times the space can get **extremely crowded**, causing **bottlenecks**. Sometimes tempers flare and fights break out.
- One respondent told us that he has used the lift only once and **'would not want to repeat the experience.'**

3.2. Themes

Several themes emerged from conversations and engagement findings that were common to the different locations. These included thoughts about amenities, local identity, heritage, wayfinding and safety.

Amenities

- The transport links seem to be one of the most highly valued aspects of the area. However, most participants in this research voiced strongly negative feelings about provision in the area. They told us that there is ‘**nothing to do,**’ with deficiencies particularly acute around facilities for children, places to socialise, and green spaces with outdoor seating.

“There isn’t any money, like facilities for residents. You know, I’ve got a young family, there’s no parks, no swing. There’s nothing really to do to keep them busy around here. It’s just you go in your house and that’s it. There’s nothing else to do.”

- Several participants expressed doubt that the plans for regeneration do enough to increase provision of community facilities like schools, doctors, shops, and libraries.

“The area lacks basic facilities and I don’t think the plans for development actually improve that much. It’s just bringing a lot more people in.”

Local identity

- Participants felt that both Old Oak and Park Royal lack a strong identity of their own. Both are felt to be ‘**in between places,**’ falling behind other north west London destinations like Kensal Rise and Queens Park. They suffer from a lack of ‘**care and attention,**’ evidenced by a lack of amenities and placemaking as well as cosmetic issues. Moreover, Willesden Junction station’s placement in Harlesden creates confusion about the boundaries between the two locations, with many people failing to realise when they are in Harlesden.

“A bit more local information would be good. What’s going on in the area, advertising local businesses. There is nothing about the businesses in Harlesden. I found that quite confusing, it’s called Willesden Junction but it’s actually right next to Harlesden. Willesden is a mile or two away. So you don’t really know that this is Harlesden.”

“One of the confusing things with this station and with this area is that it’s on the edge of three boroughs. Ealing, Brent and Hammersmith and Fulham and because it’s on the edge as a fencer it gets neglected, because the boroughs look after their cool areas and so this has been neglected in the past. It’s been kind of left behind in my opinion”

- Several respondents described the area as ‘**multicultural,**’ mentioning its large Eastern European, Irish, and Afro Caribbean communities. However, they felt that this multicultural identity has received little interest or investment.

“It’s fair to say that there are large immigrant communities in Harlesden and around Willesden and it feels like they’re kind of forgotten a bit. There could be a real celebration of culture, etc, within the community. I’m sure there are, sort of quietly, you know gatherings, but I mean publicly in terms of murals or public artwork, I just feel like it could be a more inspiring environment for young people to grow up in.”

- Two participants moved into the area recently and are eager to integrate with other residents and contribute to neighbourhood activities. However, they have struggled to find evidence of ‘community spirit,’ such as neighbours socialising or local groups.

“I’m always willing to share my opinions or get involved. I’m part of the shareholders meetings and stuff for my local area, just where I actually live, but there isn’t really much else going on.”

- A few interviewees identified a **lack of investment** in culture, a finding confirmed by previous research. Only 50% of respondents to a 2017 survey¹² were satisfied with the cultural offering in Old Oak and Park Royal, lower than the London average of 87%. However, Brent received substantial investment as the 2020 London Borough of Culture, which may have improved cultural provision on the Harlesden side of the area.

Participants speculated that the built environment contributes to a **lack of community cohesion**. Harlesden is felt to lack a **proper centre** with amenities and social facilities. The pockets of Victorian and Edwardian terraced houses are felt to be pleasant, however other areas are perceived as dangerous and run down, separating communities. The streets are experienced as **cluttered and lacking space** for pedestrians, discouraging hanging out and chatting. Participants mentioned that there are few green spaces, limiting spaces to congregate.

“Harlesden is a dump and that’s why I’m so keen on this thing, because I think it will help open it up and regenerate. I live on the nice side of Harlesden, I joke and call it ‘Harlesden Garden Suburb,’ and if we were to go up Station Road there are lovely streets with lovely houses. A lot of Victorian, Edwardian, perfectly decent stock with decent people living there. It will be five minutes before you reach an area with an obvious drug problem. A symptom of poverty. I really, really hope that this regeneration will help to do something about that, by giving Harlesden a decent hinterland.”

- Finally, the predominance of traffic-choked arterial roads creates an ‘unfriendly’ feeling to the area, discouraging people from exploring the neighbourhood.

“It’s not for walkers, you’ve got lorries, white vans all over the place. That is not so friendly ... there’s no overall community and there’s no overall organisation and planning, to make the area one that you want to work and live in.”

¹² “Awareness and perceptions of the Old Oak and Park Royal Development and Regeneration project” (2017)

Local heritage

- The area has a **strong industrial past and present**, which forms the bedrock of its heritage. In 2016 manufacturing accounted for 13% of employment in the OPDC area, compared to just 2.4% of London as a whole.¹³ The large industrial zones still present throughout the area are viewed by some as **ugly and nondescript**, while others value them for their contribution to the area and their **'edgy' appearance**. There was some debate among participants about how to make the best of this heritage in the future, with some keen to preserve local manufacturing, while one suggested that the warehouses could be taken over by artists and designers.
- Participants feel as though **not enough is made of the area's heritage**. In terms of formal placemaking, little information or public celebration of local history is seen to exist. At a grassroots level Old Oak and Park Royal lack a local history society, though neighbouring Willesden has one.
- Cultural heritage is just as important as the area's industrial and architectural legacies. Participants praised the area's multiculturalism, but had a somewhat uneven understanding of its demographic make-up. Several were keen to see greater public representation of the area's Afro Caribbean communities, but did not mention the large Brazilian population. Community consultation around Willesden Junction station revealed a perception of the area as **diverse, colourful, and warm**; a place where lots of different cultural groups coexist.¹⁴ These responses were given in response to a commission for public art around Willesden Junction station, demonstrating a local desire for **more artistic celebration** of the area's diverse cultures.

"But I think the heritage is in the people that live there, because they come from all over the world, and particularly the Caribbean of course, and the stories to hear and tell. and I think that it's really important, to honour an area you have to honour its citizens and residence as well as its physical buildings."

"I think there is a strong Afro Caribbean community in Harlesden. I definitely feel like that could be shared, the history of. That could definitely be celebrated, with the heritage on display within the community."

- A few participants noted the challenge of **balancing different elements** when an area is undergoing change. For example, the warehouses are valued as continuing evidence of industry in Harlesden, but sometimes detract from the **natural beauty of the canal**. They hope to see a **fruitful balance** between residential, industrial, and natural uses of the area as development continues.

"I don't know what you do with the warehouses. There are a lot around here, because it's near the North Circular, warehouses have to go"

¹³ "Socio-economic baseline: Old Oak and Park Royal" (2016)

¹⁴ "Willesden Junction Survey" (2019)

somewhere, and in front of them are these willow trees that are nice and mature. But how do we landscape the canal so the edgy bits aren't so ugly? I don't want to take away the ugliness because that's part of the heritage of the industrial heritage and a lot of it is ugly. It represents work and industry and commerce and wealth creation, so I don't mind that. It's just getting the balance right."

Wayfinding and navigating

- All participants characterised the area as **dominated by traffic**, polluted, and **unfriendly to pedestrians**. Traffic-heavy main roads disrupt the experience of navigating by bike or foot and create a feeling of 'alienation.' The predominance of traffic contrasts with low car ownership rates among residents, in line with the London average of 54%.¹⁵ Tube, train, and bus remain the most popular ways of getting to work in the OPDC area¹⁶ and around half of residents do not own a car.¹⁷ Despite this, however, provision for non-car users is felt to be lacking.

"It's not pedestrian friendly. Harlesden is dominated by cars, and is very polluted. And there's not much space here for pedestrians and cyclists. And there's no cycle storage, whether we are talking about cycle racks or more substantial storage. So you do feel a little bit alienated when you are a cyclist and pedestrian in Harlesden. A lot of people actually don't own a car, the majority of people in Harlesden do not own a car. But still cars are very dominant."

- Most participants find Harlesden and Old Oak **difficult to navigate**, and think that newcomers would struggle even more. This was especially true of cyclists, who find the cycle network signage hard to follow.

"If you're not familiar with Harlesden, I don't think it's that easy. I think the signage can always be improved. Especially again, if you're a cyclist. The signage is so poor, I was trying to cycle to Euston road, and supposedly there is some kind of London network, I couldn't really understand what they were talking about."

- Pedestrians generally find Old Oak and Park Royal **unpleasant and hostile** to walk through, describing narrow pavements cluttered with stalls and poorly-maintained streets.

"The whole area is a hostile environment."

"If we walked around the industrial areas, if we walked around the roads you know your life's in your own hands there. The pavements are in really bad condition."

¹⁵ TFL 2011/2. Available at <https://content.tfl.gov.uk/technical-note-12-how-many-cars-are-there-in-london.pdf>

¹⁶ Taken from CDRC map of commuting methods, based on aggregated 2011 Census data. Available at <https://maps.cdrc.ac.uk/#/geodemographics/imde2019/default/BTTTTFT/10/-0.1500/51.5200/>

¹⁷ Car ownership ranges from 64% in Ealing, to 57% in Brent and 45% in Hammersmith and Fulham. The Old Oak and Park Royal average is likely to fall somewhere within this range. Data aggregated from the 2011 Census, available at <https://www.racfoundation.org/data/car-van-ownership-rates-by-local-authority-england-wales-data>

“There are lots of shops, which have stalls on the pavement, and then the space left for pedestrians is very, very reduced as a result. So you don't really want to hang around too much.”

- One participant has noticed an **increase in large vehicle traffic** servicing HS2 and other construction work. They think that the maintenance of the roads has fallen behind and the roads are now in a much worse condition. They also noted that the temporary traffic lights are still there, causing delays.

“The condition of Victoria Road is appalling now because you get all the massive lorries coming up and down for HS2, but they're churning up the road and nobody fixes it. Local residents are left with no choice but to use Victoria Road in its terrible and unsafe condition.”

Safety

- Our respondents voiced **mixed feelings about the safety of the area**. While some, mainly older men, felt that the area was relatively safe, others perceived the area to be more dangerous.

“I think I feel reasonably safe. I used to live more in the area, in Hanger Lane. My daughter lived with me at the time and she did not feel safe going into Harlesden, and she didn't feel safe in the area at all. I was quite surprised. She only told me recently that again, it's an area that was industrial, had become residential, but lots of lonely walking, for a young lady was risky, worrying.”

- Some areas are felt to be **more dangerous than others**. Concerns were frequently mentioned about the route from Willesden Junction station to the canal. Consultation on the station revealed that many people feel unsafe walking down the Harrow Road link path due to the presence of beggars.¹⁸ One participant told us that ‘her side’ of Harlesden (at the far end of Cravens Park Road, and along Harlesden high street) was especially dangerous, with problems associated with drug dealing and prostitution. They were also concerned about drug users on the streets as their behaviour can be unpredictable.

“No, I don't feel particularly safe in the area. Round the station and walking from the station to the canal at night. I think most of the area I don't feel safe walking around, unless I'm on a main road.”

“Yes there is a divide, my side of Harlesden against the rest. We had such a problem with drug dealing and prostitution. It's back to drugs again because it's obvious, but I'm sure it's not the only thing. But it puts a damper on an area where you're a bit worried to let your kids out, you don't know who is around. You have to be careful when walking down Harlesden high street. There are lots of eccentric people, but you just have to look out for the ones that are off their heads because they are unpredictable. I know it's a symptom and I don't believe in the war on drugs, it's the wrong war, but it says something about an area.”

¹⁸ “Willessden Junction Survey” (2019)

Attitudes to OPDC

- Over half of our respondents reported feeling **positive about the future of the area** and OPDC's plans. They described it as **'something to look forward to,'** particularly the prospect of the area developing more of an identity and providing more spaces for culture.
- However, many respondents voiced **anxieties about the negative impact of regeneration.** They reported that long standing pubs and shops are closing and fear they will be replaced by **unaffordable options.** Some were concerned about the capacity of health, social, and educational infrastructure to support the influx of new residents. One participant suggested that some residents fear the changes are out of their control, especially people on lower incomes.

"Now the pub here is about to close. Not sure what is going to happen to it. I just hope it doesn't become some gastro pub that becomes out of reach for local people. That's the problem with gentrification, you attract people in, but then what's there for people that already live here who don't have a lot of disposable income but like to enjoy themselves just like anybody else."

"It just seems to be, we don't give a damn about people who haven't got much money, we don't give a damn about the general public. So there is this concern amongst the community that the changes have got to be community friendly. I think that's all over London and there are places where I think that's happening where the community has more control."

- Aside from taking part in our research, several interviewees have also been involved with other OPDC forums and events. Of these, around half were positive about the process so far. One participant reported having to **'keep pushing at every meeting,'** but felt that ultimately his experience was being listened to. Another told us that she valued OPDC's efforts to get the community involved, and their focus on social projects. However, a number of respondents felt sceptical that the development was really **'for the community,'** suggesting that it is more of an **'appeasement process.'**

"They're funding other types of projects, like social projects. They are a Development Corporation in the end, but they are trying to ask the local people what they think about it, which is good."

"OPDC started off trying to involve the community. I think they still wear that hat a bit, but you wonder sometimes whether that's continuing. You've got people from outside the community, running the community, coming in with lots of whiz bang ideas, and then only lasting two or three years and going to another job. Sorry, build your empire elsewhere mate!"

"There's no thought process. The thing is it's true that they try to involve us and they try to ask our opinion, but I feel that all this is just an appeasement exercise because they never take any notice of what we say. They never implement anything, they never try to improve anything."

- One respondent mentioned that the different stakeholders in the area do not seem to have a clear division of ownership, and appear **not to be working together well.**

“It’s a problem with different stakeholders, the problem is ownership - Network Rail, Transport for London, Arrive, and OPCD - and they don't sign well together but that's an issue that needs to be recognised and dealt with.”

4. Conclusions

This baseline research offers insight into how the built environment and social life of Old Oak and Park Royal are experienced by the people who live in and use the area. Based on analysis of existing evidence from consultation and engagement exercises, site observations, and in-depth interviews with residents, we have established baselines for key indicators that underpin the theory of change developed for the programme. Future research in 2022 will revisit these indicators to track the impact of ODPC activity on the area.

The baseline show that, while the area is valued for its multiculturalism, transport links, and the natural beauty of the canal, it suffers from poor cultural and amenity provision and is sometimes perceived as dangerous and hard to navigate. As development progresses it will be vital to retain the assets highlighted by our participants, and balance this with change. Priorities for the future include celebrating the multicultural identity of the area, making cosmetic improvements, and creating new community facilities.

The next stage of the research, scheduled for mid-2022, will enable us to develop these themes. Further site observations and in-depth interviews will allow us to understand how OPDC interventions are affecting the built environment of Old Oak and Park Royal. In addition, we will carry out interviews with local stakeholders and businesses which will give insight into the social ecosystem of the area and how it is responding to the development process. This data will also allow us to comment on the views of key groups missing from this first round of research: the perceptions of visitors, of stakeholders and the benefits felt by local businesses.

Appendix: Baseline findings, by indicator

Indicator: from Good Growth Funding Agreement	Intended outcome	Baseline research findings
Resident satisfaction with local area	Resident satisfaction with the area increases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The area’s transport links are highly valued by participants • The OPDC area currently lacks a strong local identity of its own and is felt to be falling behind other parts of north west London • The area is dominated by main roads, creating a feeling of alienation among pedestrians and cyclists • Several participants characterised the area as having high levels of social problems such as anti-social behaviour • Amenity provision, cultural facilities, and general maintenance in the area are felt to be poor • Recent signs of change around the station, such as planting projects, are being noticed and appreciated
Perception of Grand Union canal	Perceptions of the canal are improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The canal is valued for its natural beauty and industrial heritage • Conflict between pedestrians and cyclists is a major problem for all participants • Littering and anti-social behaviour are significant issues • The towpath ramp is felt to be dangerous and inaccessible
Indicator: from Theory of Change	Intended outcome	Baseline research findings
Canal is welcoming and accessible	The canalside is made more accessible and welcoming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harlesden canalside is the best-liked stretch of the OPDC area canal, and felt to be more welcoming than other parts • The restaurant and pub bring visitors to the area • Some participants identified problems with wayfinding from the street
Use of the public realm	People are encouraged to make	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The canal offers few opportunities for dwelling during the day and is often avoided at night

	use of public spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green spaces and places to socialise are felt to be sorely lacking in the area
Public spaces are welcoming and accessible	Public spaces are felt to be more welcoming and accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants feel that the area is ‘lacking in care and attention’ • Several participants mentioned that they would like to see more public arts and culture
Litter and blight	Litter and blight are decreased	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some areas are felt to have a major problem with litter, including the Station Road and Harrow Road entrances to the station and along the canal • Canal clean-up volunteer groups have recently been formed, and efforts are being made to diversify their members • Some participants mentioned litter and safety concerns at Station Road and Harrow Road entrances
Local heritage and identity	Local heritage and identity are made more visible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harlesden and Park Royal are felt by most participants to lack a strong identity of their own, and is characterised as an ‘in-between place’ • The location of Willesden Junction in Harlesden adds to boundary confusion • Participants value the industrial and cultural heritage of the area, but feel that not enough is done to celebrate it.
Safety	People feel safe in the local area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views on safety are mixed, with some characterising the area as fairly safe and others less so • Some areas, such as Harlesden High Street, are perceived as being especially dangerous because of drug dealing and other anti-social behaviour • The canal is perceived as dangerous due to space conflicts between pedestrians and cyclists • The link pathway from the station to Harrow Road is perceived by some as unattractive, dangerous, and inaccessible.

Civic engagement	Local people feel engaged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some participants are taking part in OPDC consultation groups and events, as well as community projects such as urban gardening. These experiences are generally reported as positive • Two participants reported struggling to find local interest and social groups to get involved with.
Wayfinding and legibility	The area is easier to navigate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The predominance of traffic-heavy roads makes navigation difficult and unpleasant for pedestrians and cyclists • Several participants mentioned poor road maintenance and narrow, cluttered pavements • Wayfinding inside and around the station is difficult, and the station experiences bottlenecks during rush hour.
Perceptions of OPDC	OPDC activity is evidenced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Around half of respondents reported feeling positive about the coming changes and the prospect of new investment in the area • Participants that are involved in OPDC consultation generally feel listened to, though some describe feeling frustrated or sceptical about the process • Concerns were raised about the possible negative effects of regeneration, such as the displacement of residents and gentrification of neighbourhoods.

Social Life is an independent research organisation created by the Young Foundation in 2012, to become a specialist centre of research and innovation about the social life of communities. Our work is about understanding how peoples' day-to-day experience of local places is shaped by the built environment - housing, public spaces, parks and local high streets - and how change, through regeneration, new development or small improvements to public spaces, affects the social fabric, opportunities and wellbeing of local areas.

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