

NOOKS and CORNERS

As the Olympic Games approach and the cost of this gratuitous nightmare for London rises, the mayor, to his credit, has said that: "Too much attention is being paid to the will of international sports federations and not enough to the people of London."

However, while Boris Johnson claims that £20m can be saved by moving shooting from a temporary venue in Woolwich to Barking and rhythmic gymnastics from a temporary venue in Greenwich to Wembley, he does not challenge the desirability of an even greater and more expensive example of bad planning and arrogance: the proposal to site Olympic equestrian events in Greenwich Park.

Lying between Blackheath and Wren's glorious Royal Naval Hospital by the Thames and containing the Royal Observatory, Greenwich Park is a much used amenity affording magnificent views – as painted by Turner – and is part of a World Heritage Site. In this comparatively confined space, never used for equestrian events before, the London Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) plans to hold a cross country race as well as show jumping and dressage. A 23,000-seat, temporary stadium will go up at the bottom of the main avenue in front of Inigo Jones's celebrated Queen's House. Training areas, stabling (for some 250 horses) and "Event Compounds" will sit on the lawns between the Queen's House and the Royal Naval Hospital (now Greenwich University) and in front of the National Maritime Museum, while the cross-country route will weave between the ancient trees and go through the flower garden with its lake. (LOCOG has failed to indicate where veterinary and hospitality services, etc, will go). To achieve all this, the lower half of the park (closest to Greenwich's historic centre) will close to the public from March or April 2012 for six to eight months and the whole park will shut in July for several weeks during the school holidays when it is busiest.

A principal argument for the 2012 Olympics has always been that there will be a "legacy" for London, but in Greenwich there the only legacy will be damage and debt. LOCOG claims that when this wretched event is over, the temporary stadium and other structures can be removed and all trace of drains, water and power services expunged. But the park, with its historic architectural background, is beautiful and fragile; and for this reason English Heritage initially opposed the plan – until it was brought into line.

The four local amenity societies were also feeble in their opposition so, last year, NOGOE – "No to Greenwich Olympic Equestrian Events" – was founded to protect the park. NOGOE observes that Greenwich was only chosen because it is close to the main Olympic site across the Thames and that there are other sites near London more suitable for

equestrian events such as Windsor Great Park as well as well-used venues like Burchley and Badminton. It also points out that "there was no public consultation" about bringing the equestrian Olympics to Greenwich, "no economic assessment in comparison with other venues, no understanding of the Park's fragility and role in the community, and no concern for the urban context in which local people live, work and run small businesses a few yards from the Park".

NOGOE has petitioned the Treasury and politicians that some £30m-£50m might be saved by holding equestrian events elsewhere because of the environmental, social and congestion costs (the National Maritime Museum and nearby businesses will lose revenue while the park is closed). Environmental costs are hard to quantify, but as some of the ground will have to be levelled and services dug into the ground, the cost of clearing up is likely to be high. In a debate in the House of Lords in June, Lord

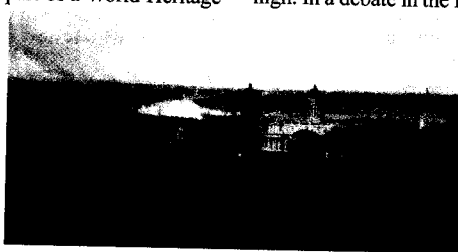
Lucas observed that: "Legacy is one of the foundation stones of the Olympic movement. Why, then, does LOCOG persist in putting the shooting at Woolwich and the horse riding at Greenwich? These two venues will cost in excess of £100m. Both will be utterly destroyed immediately after the

Games, leaving no legacy of any description. Alternative venues outside London would cost tens of millions of pounds less and would leave permanent legacies for both sports." LOCOG should think again.

MORE good news (see last Eye) – first from Oxford, where the city council has voted against Oxford Brookes University's controversial plan to overdevelop its Headington Hill campus, overruling the earlier decision of its planning committee (Eye 1238).

Furthermore, the legal challenge by SAVE Britain's Heritage to Gravesend council's decision to allow the demolition of the former church in Gravesend used as a Sikh gurdwara has been successful (Eye 1244): the council must think again.

This follows the welcome news (see Eye 1242) that Camden council has turned down the planning application by the British Museum for an overweening development of the north-western part of its site by Rogers Stirk Harbour & Partners. But, for reasons which remain inscrutable, the Museum is sticking with Milord Rogers' grossly insensitive firm and Graham Stirk now hopes to overcome objections by half burying his wretched new building in the ground and still proposes to replace the important replica Georgian houses in Montague Place with an eruption of steel and glass. I hope Camden council remains resolute.



Greenwich Park, as depicted by Turner (1809)