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November 2009 Newsletter

October has been a fantastic month for NOGOE. The campaign gained a higher profile thanks to a media blitz; we've been featured on TV, on radio, in print and online. There have been numerous live and recorded interviews for the media by NOGOE members. And local entrepreneur, Mike Jones, appeared in BBC London's "Olympic Winners and Losers" series to oppose the use of the Park.

The Film: It all kicked off with the launch of "Saving Greenwich Park", our 15 minute documentary directed by Edward Hofman and narrated by Sophie Aldred of Dr Who fame. It was launched on itv's London Tonight, prior to being uploaded on YouTube and accessed via our website. We also filmed comedian Arthur Smith condemning the use of the Park. There will be a showing of these films on the big screen of Greenwich Picturehouse on Saturday 21 November, 10.30 – 11.30 am. We shall also be making copies of the DVD available in return for a donation of £5 to raise funds to fight the planning application. These can be obtained from Bob Sabo's newsagent shop at the bottom of Crooms Hill in Greenwich, or we can post it to you if you send a cheque to **NOGOE at 17 City Business Centre, Lower Road, London SE16 2XB.**

The "Ring Round the Park" event was also a great success given the wet and windy weather and no DLR. Several hundred turned up to form a symbolic ring around Le Notre's parterre, the location for the temporary Olympic stadium, which will close this popular area for 8 months. The event was widely publicised and reported in local, national and specialist media, the highlight of which was the TV report in BBC London News that evening.



Short videos of the event can be seen on this website:

<http://www.gardenvisit.com/blog/2009/10/11/mass-protest-against-greenwich-park-equestrian-event/>

The Survey: Gareth Bacon, a member of the London Assembly, published the results of his survey among local residents, which showed that **68% were opposed** to the Olympics in the Park. This came as no surprise to us from collecting protest signatures outside the Park.

The 13,000+ Protesters: We delivered 13,200 protest signatures in lovely boxes, designed by local illustrator, Don Gott, who also designed our wonderful "tree" logo. 5 sets were delivered: one to No 10 Downing Street, which included some biscuits for Gordon; one to Councillor Brighty prior to a Council meeting; one to Jenny Jones for presentation to the London Mayor; one to UNESCO; and one to the IOC.



Into Mayor Boris Johnson's box we put a Latin quatrain:

Eliadum nimius quondam Nero fautor equarum
delevit media Caesar in urbe nemus.
Mens ne sit nostris eadem dirae tot amoenis
exitio campis laudis avara nimis.

For those of us who are not classical scholars, here is a rough (very) translation:

Nero was an emperor, he wasn't very good,
He let Olympic horses in to trash a Roman wood.
Don't let greedy leaders, who want to make their mark
Cause ruin and destruction to beloved Greenwich Park.

A sample of the signatures were analysed and this showed that 25% were from SE10. The analysis also provided fresh insight into usership of the Park at weekends, where we obtained the bulk of our signatures. 80% were from SE1 to SE28 and Bromley postcodes; 10% from other London postcodes; and 10% from the rest of the country and abroad.

LOCOG "Consultation": Concessions have been made regarding Park closures: 4 weeks' total closure; Children's Playground and most of the Flower Gardens to be open except for 1 day. However there is no guarantee and changes could take place "for operational reasons". Importantly the cross country course still goes through sensitive areas of the Park with the tree roots, acid grasses, Roman archaeology, wildlife and conduits still at risk.

There was manipulation of information with statements, such as making light of the stadium as being "a bit of scaffolding" - this was contradicted by the architects of the stadium. Then it was said that the full Environmental Impact Assessment would be in the Appendix of the planning application, although the exhibit stated that the "EIA would inform the Environmental Statement which would form part of the planning application". There were inconsistencies such as admitting there was a Plan B and then denying it. They're clearly feeling the pressure.

HISTORICAL AND ECOLOGICAL IMPACT: There have been some very interesting articles written by journalists, with a little briefing from us. The Piloti column in Private Eye was pretty damning and Tim Richardson, a trustee of The Historic Garden Society, wrote in the Daily Telegraph an equally critical piece. The lecturer in Historic Garden Conservation at Greenwich University is concerned that the historic and natural fabric of the Park be protected, and the Ancient Tree Forum has indicated it will oppose the planning application.

RIDERS' PERSPECTIVE: A letter was sent to the riders' representatives alerting them to the problems of holding equestrian events in the Park. They have not replied but it is rumoured that top riders have been told to toe the line or risk non-selection for their teams. Many riders have written to NOGOE to support moving the events but they are reluctant to lobby their federation. However a prominent member of the British Horse Society is prepared to stand up and be counted. Hopefully others will join in.

NO CONTEST: This is a useful one page statement of our position. It can be downloaded from our website and copied for recruiting more supporters to make their opposition known to relevant authorities. This is a lead up to the next important stage in the campaign when LOCOG submit a planning application. More of this in our next Newsletter.

But we end with an **article written by a NOGOE member**, Teresa Sumption, which was published in the May issue of Historic Gardens Review. It is understated but powerful as a summary of our opposition case.

Greenwich Park was chosen as the site for various 2012 Equestrian Olympic events because it would provide a 'stunning backdrop' for TV coverage and is relatively close to the Olympic Village in east London. Is this oasis, visited and enjoyed by millions of visitors a year, is to be desecrated for the sake of saving the competitors a little travel time? Are thousands of families to be denied a safe place to play and picnic during the school summer holidays of 2012, because the Olympic authorities want the venues to be close together? Must the many disabled park users, for whom this is the only open space with fully accessible facilities, be forced to stay at home on sunny days, cut off from their green lifeline?

Equestrian events usually take place in country parks or racecourses. A small urban park is far from suitable, either for competitor or spectator, and certainly not when potential damage to the historic landscape is considered. The Jenkins Review (1995) states that events should 'protect the dignity and fabric of the park and its prime purpose as a public open space'. Nothing more than 'small-scale local events' should take place there.

Greenwich Park is a rectangle of approximately 180 acres (72.8ha) crossed by a steep escarpment. There are thousands of beautiful trees whose low spreading branches contribute to its magical atmosphere. It houses the Royal Observatory buildings, a deer park, a reservoir, tennis courts, a wildfowl lake, a children's boating pond and playground, cafés, a rose garden, and a herb garden. There are areas of acid grassland (rare in London), archaeological remains, and Saxon burial-mounds, a fine flower garden and arboretum.

In 2012 it will also have to contain a 23,000-seat stadium with an 80x100metre arena; stables for 220 horses and ancilliary structures for vets, farriers and grooms; catering and toilet facilities for competitors from around 75 nations, and for VIPs, the media, staff, officials and spectators – plus first aid and security search areas.

All this necessitates water and drainage facilities, and electricity for lighting, floodlighting, and public address systems. Warm-up areas and a practice gallop are required as well as space for a 5.7 kilometre cross-country course, which would run 10 metres wide through the tranquil flower garden and snake its way through the avenues of trees.

Across the Thames, near the boundary of the main Olympic site, mature trees have been felled because their spreading branches were thought to tempt intruders. How many trees would be lost in Greenwich Park for this reason?

It is difficult to obtain information from LOCOG (the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games) because it has been set up as a private company and not subject to the Freedom of Information Act. They state that all sensitive areas in the Park will be respected. Yet their current cross-country course map shows it passing through the acid grasslands, over the section known to contain Roman remains under the surface, and perilously close to the Saxon tumuli.

It is not just the horses and spectators that will be trampling over the ground. There will be TV machinery and other heavy vehicles causing compaction. The many old Sweet Chestnuts with their fragile, shallow roots, are at risk of being destroyed. How can this be allowed to happen? LOCOG's suggestion that the ground could be protected by matting, provides no reassurance.

We consider it to be reckless to set up a cross-country course in such a cramped space. The low tree canopy is lovely to behold – but would be lethal for riders. Where would spectators run to in the event of a horse going out of control? We are told that spectator

numbers would be 'severely restricted' and many would be confined to the main arena, watching the event on television screens. Equestrian sport and its competitors deserve better than this. And beautiful, fragile Greenwich Park needs our protection.