

NOGOE

No to Greenwich Olympic Equestrian Events
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17th May 2010

The Rt. Hon. Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Culture Olympics Media & Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London
SW1Y 5DH

Dear Secretary of State,

2012 Olympics: Greenwich Park

There are many issues that will be weighing on your mind as you take up office. One which does, however, need your early attention is the Olympian equestrian events in Greenwich Park. We notice from press statements that you have already begun to consider in general terms the impact of Olympic expenditure, including the guarantee of LOCOG's losses, on the Government's budgetary plans. But Greenwich needs your particular attention for the reasons explained below.

You will, I am sure, already be aware of the previous Administration's deeply flawed decision to approve the inclusion of Greenwich Park in the Olympic bid. Last year, we had the opportunity in to go over with Hugh Robertson the many reasons why the choice of Greenwich Park for these events was wrong, and were very grateful for his patience and attention. The two detailed papers that we left with him (also distributed widely at the time, including to your Department) included an estimation of the financial savings to be made through locating the events to another venue with many facilities already in place. We propose to write to you further on this aspect shortly. Subsequently, LOCOG's plans for staging the equestrian events were pushed through the planning permission process before Greenwich Council, which (although we have no wish to make deeper imputations) was publicly committed to the project in advance.

The crucial point is however that, planning permission or no, the Olympic events cannot be held in Greenwich Park without your formal permission as Secretary of State. That results from the status of the Park as a Royal Park, from your statutory powers of management over it, and from the terms of the Park Regulations. We cannot seriously regard what has been represented to us as the previous Administration's "decision" as a valid permission in that sense

To take only the most obvious examples, it was at the time entirely unclear:- for how long closure of the Park would be required; how much of the Park would need to be closed; what sort of works would be required for the construction of the courses and the viewing stands; what risks that would entail to the ecology, archaeology, history or amenity of the Park; what security arrangements would be necessary; and many more besides. A dramatic illustration of the sheer scale of these cumulative problems as they have since emerged is the fact that even Greenwich Council's grant of planning permission has had to be subjected to 42 formal conditions, the effect of many of which is to postpone the real consent until the promoters have finally come up with the necessary detail and it has been assessed as being adequate to the needs of the case.

Above and beyond that, though, is the fact that whatever "decision" was purportedly taken in 2004, it was done without even a pretence at public consultation, and by definition could not have taken into account the risks or degree of disruption that would be caused, or the consequential loss of amenity either immediately or in the longer term, because none of that was known. Nor could it (again by definition) have taken into account the powerful groundswell of opposition from the users of the Park, both locally and visitors from the UK and abroad, as the true implications began to emerge,

all of which have been vividly highlighted since our campaign began: almost 4,000 signatures on a petition to 10 Downing Street.; over 13,000 signatures from Park users to a protest statement, gathered mainly at weekends at the gates to the Park; over 2,000 written formal objections to Greenwich Council on the application for planning permission.

It accordingly seems to us obvious that, if the prior “decision”, were now to be maintained, that would be open to legal challenge. As we understand it, no formal agreement has yet been concluded over the use of any of the Royal Parks. We therefore submit a formal request for you to reverse or reconsider your predecessor’s approval in principle for the holding of these events in Greenwich Park. The cardinal issues in that respect include the following:-

- the ready availability of more suitable alternative venues (notably Windsor Great Park)
- the very much greater economic cost of Greenwich by comparison with the alternatives
- the fact that the current financial arrangements (as we understand them) are designed to ensure that no net financial benefit will accrue to Greenwich Park – or the Royal Parks in general – out of this extensive grant of exclusive use to a commercial operator
- the doubtful compatibility of the events with the status of the Greenwich World Heritage Site
- the severe loss of amenity, and the inability to exclude the risk of harm that (if it occurred) would be irreversible
- the doubts that subsist as to whether the closure of the Park for an extended period is within your legal powers at all.

If, as we would hope, you are favourably disposed to our request, we would ask for the opportunity to make representations to you before you arrive at a fresh decision on the matter. We look forward to an early reply.

Yours sincerely,

John Hine

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Coordinators

CC Hugh Robertson Esq MP