

# NOGOE (No to Greenwich Olympic Equestrian Events)

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## NOGOE NEWSLETTER - FEBRUARY 2010

This last month has been dominated by the reactions to LOCOG's planning application which, under scrutiny, is UNBELIEVABLE in terms of the negative impact. If you haven't sent a letter of objection, it is not too late, as you can do so right up to the planning meeting in March. It will count, this is not the done deal that the establishment would have us believe. Councillor Alex Grant has stood down from chairing and being involved in this Planning Board as he works part-time for Nick Raynsford MP, but he has assured us that, by law, Councillors have to act independently. So we shall see.

Committed NOGOE activists have been busy collecting objection letters. A bit of snow was not going to deter them.



Their efforts were rewarded and they collected 1000 signatures, which were delivered to the planning office. The total number of objections has not yet been released by the Council, whose planning office is buckling under the strain of dealing with a record number from home and abroad. NOGOE estimates that some **2000** objections must have been sent in. More of this later.

## **Public Meeting**

Many of you will have attended the successful meeting at John Roan school on 17 January. It was touching to hear how passionately opposed to these events some people were.

John Hine, NOGOE Coordinator, chaired the meeting and had this to say, “ We were delighted to see a packed hall (more than 200 people) for our meeting. The meeting was open to everyone and, contrary to what LOCOG may say, it was clear from questions and comments that the overwhelming majority of local residents are against the use of Greenwich Park for the Olympics”

Maps and key points from the Environment Statement were on display. The risk of damage to this World Heritage Site was the major concern and the audience was shocked by the enormity of the temporary stadium, the fact of having to level the ground for it; and the loss of this popular focal point of the Park in front of Queens House for 2 years. Also on display was a mock up of what 2.7 metre fencing and lighting around the perimeter would look like.



Apart from a local councillor who talked about the pride of having the biggest event in the world here in Greenwich, a local architect who asked to consider an image of happy smiling children and the benefit for young people, and a lady who referred to educational benefits, the overwhelming majority of public questions and statements referred to the negative impact these Games would have.

Particular areas of concern which were commented on included:

- The unlawful use of Circus Field on Blackheath
- A mother who felt there would be no alternative place for her children to play during Park closures
- It just being a PR event for an elitist sport with no benefit to local people
- A tourist spoke for other tourists in expressing her horror that such an event could be entertained
- Cutting of grass roots budgets for local sports clubs
- Olympic lanes in the Blackwall Tunnel would lead to traffic congestion in the whole of SE London
- The crowd congestion at local railway stations
- No map of the cross country course in relation to the trees
- The LOCOG survey which over-estimated the level of local support

## **Growth of the Campaign**

From modest beginnings NOGOE has grown into a major opposition group:

## SUPPORT IN NUMBERS

**13,500 protest signatures delivered to authorities**  
**5,000 plus on Save GP and other Facebook groups**  
**3,500 signed Downing Street e-petition**  
**660 members on supporters database at home and abroad**

## PLANNING OBJECTIONS

NOGOE has delivered a blistering attack on LOCOG's Planning Application, summarised below. Surprisingly there were also strong comments made by previously supportive local societies:

- **Blackheath Society:** has opposed the Olympics planning application for Greenwich Park, saying it is neither specific nor complete on many important issues, and is contradictory in some areas.
- **Westcombe Society:** objected on the basis of insufficient information with particular concerns about the height of the arena.
- **Greenwich Society:** commented on the absence of crucial information and had major concerns about the cross-country describing the course as a "cat's cradle" of visually obtrusive obstacles throughout most of the Park. A formidable list of concerns were tabled on: design and access, arena construction, legacy, test event, grassland management, spectator management, Olympic Route Network (lane closures), re-instatement, Blackheath Circus Field, and public transport.
- **Friends of Greenwich Park:** critical of the lack of information on stadium construction, perimeter fencing, archaeology, ecology and grass management.

It was gratifying to learn about the strong objections made by independent expert organisations:

- **The Garden History Society:** in its role as Statutory Consultee, advises that the temporary development proposed would have a significantly adverse impact on the internationally significant designed landscape of Greenwich Park. Concludes that the proposed development conflicts with national and local planning policy, and that consent for the applications should therefore be refused.
- **ICOMOS-UK** (advisors to Unesco): there was no satisfactory evidence that the proposals will not impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of this World Heritage Site.
- **Rescue**, the British Archaeological Society: can't be considered legal, reasonable or appropriate for a significant heritage landscape to be put under serious threat of irreparable damage.
- **Society for Protection of Urban Green Spaces:** criticised the damage to the ecosystem, reduction in arboriculture and depletion of urban green space
- **Environmental group** wishing to be unnamed expressed key concerns about the potential adverse impacts on the acid grasslands, bats, birds, invertebrates and other species

NOGOE embarked on an aggressive media campaign to publicise the destructive elements in the planning application with this brief:

### HOODWINKED.

#### HOW LOCOG MISLED THE ESTABLISHMENT OVER GREENWICH PARK OLYMPICS

**"We will not damage the Park". "We will return the Park to its pre Games condition".**

This is what LOCOG has been saying all along. And everyone, except NOGOE, believed them. Local MP, Nick Raynsford stated publicly that he would not have supported this choice of venue if he felt that there would be any long term damage. How did he know before any Environmental Assessments were conducted? Greenwich Council Leader, Chris Roberts, added his conviction that no damage would be done and so did Royal Parks. They all trusted LOCOG to deliver on its promises. NOGOE's protests were denounced as spreading misinformation or scaremongering. However it would appear now that NOGOE has **underestimated the impact.**

With the submission of the Planning Application, the truth is out. LOCOG admit: there **will** be damage. Moreover what's remarkable is the degree of risk that would be taken with heritage features to the extent that they would be unlikely to deliver on the second promise as well. It says in the Environment Statement: **Some heritage features could suffer permanent loss or partial loss. As a last resort some heritage features will be "preserv[ed] by record".**

Risk of accidents from construction work would also be likely from 42,000 vehicle movements, including 6,400 lorry movements, cranes, bulldozers, JCBs - all this in a fragile World Heritage Site rich in archaeology that is only inches below the ground, waiting to be discovered: **like, for example, the new find of what might be the remains of a Tudor building**. There is also a public safety issue concerning the underground conduits, which could collapse if provoked by the construction work, spectator movements and the race itself.

Even Park closures would be worse than expected: the focal point of the Park, the area where the plan is to build a 23,000 seat stadium after ground levelling, would be out of bounds for **2 years**. The 6 km cross country track, winding its way round the Park, would be fenced off for **2.5 years**, and some parts, for reinstatement of acid grassland, closed for **5 years**.

All four local societies have expressed severe concerns; two have objected. Moreover many independent experts in various fields have made their concerns known to the Planning Board. Some have objected; some have advised that permission should not be given; some have suggested placing binding conditions on permission being granted; **all** have remarked on the lack of crucial information regarding the trees, the archaeology, the wildlife, spectator movements, transport assessments and the construction of a temporary stadium. **One of the statutory consultees, a government body, would place such strict conditions on permission being granted that LOCOG would find it difficult to comply with them.**

NOGOE has carried out considerable research to produce a robust objection to the planning application. Our comprehensive case appears in documents which can be read on our website:  
<http://www.nogoe2012.com/planning-app.html>

John Hine, NOGOE Coordinator says, "The risks to a leading World Heritage site are disproportionate. The disruption to the lives of local residents and the inconvenience to the millions who visit the Park every year is unreasonable. There are perfectly satisfactory alternative venues where the Games could be hosted without the massive damage and inconvenience that the Olympic authorities would inflict on Greenwich".

## **SUMMARY OF NOGOE'S SUBMISSION**

This substantial letter of objection covered:

- the prospect of long term or permanent damage to grassland and trees and the habitat they provide for wildlife;
- implications on regular Park users and tourists of closures of significant parts of the Park from spring 2010 to 2015;
- effect on traffic and public transport;
- effect on local trade;
- lack of legacy;
- lack of sustainability from erection and dismantling of facilities;
- legal obstacles (illegality of closing the Park and erecting an enclosure on Blackheath)

The letter criticised the lack of information on:

- construction of the field of play;
- method of irrigation for the cross country track;
- removal and restoration of acid grasses;
- absence of proper wildlife surveys;
- the mitigation methods to protect the archaeology;
- the absence of a tree survey and measures to protect tree roots.

There were several annexes covering specialist areas:

## **ARCHAEOLOGY**

The Romano-Celtic temple site was made a Scheduled Ancient Monument the day after the planning application was lodged. Remains are close to the surface and LOCOG is intending to make a feature of

this area by siting a triple jump, a spectator stand and a camera position close by.

The Park is rich in archaeological potential and the positioning of new sites is unknown. The chance of new material appearing at any time is high and there would be no protection from the horses nor the 50,000-75,000 spectators. The sudden appearance of a new find, of unknown provenance but the likelihood of it being part of a Tudor building can't be discounted, underlines the case against putting the archaeology at risk.

The paper concludes that it can't be right to put cultural heritage at risk to accommodate a temporary venue for a sporting event. World Heritage Sites are designated for Outstanding Universal Value, and local authorities should place great weight on the need to protect them for future generations.

**CONDUITS** (An expert opinion submitted by Dr Per von Scheibner).

There are two types: ancient (Medieval and Tudor) and more recent ( Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh) - both work satisfactorily when maintained, otherwise the conduit wall can collapse. Over time inspection shafts were replaced by less satisfactory ones, but both the known and unknown ones are hidden from view, so one can't tell whether they pose a danger to the public. To locate all these shafts would require a 2 ft grid of boreholes around the Park.

The presence of construction machinery, 75 horses jumping over the ground and 75000 spectators present significant risks of a) collapse of conduits because of voids forming; and b) giving way of the capping of inspection shafts. Such an accident should not be provoked. Once weakened failure of a subterranean structure may occur during or after the event.

## **ECOLOGY**

**Acid grassland** is a scarce and declining habitat in the UK, and the Park comprises the majority seen in Greenwich Borough. LOCOG's plan is for the grasses to be removed, stored and restored over a 3-year programme. However available research suggests that:

- stored topsoil deteriorates;
- there is decrease in viability of buried seeds;
- there is immediate loss of organic carbon levels;
- beneficial root-dwelling fungi die off .

So LOCOG is suggesting an untested method, yet maintain that they would return the Park to pre-Games state.

**Stag Beetles** are a protected species and, as no survey has been carried out, their whereabouts are not known. LOCOG has an obligation (subject to criminal penalties) to ensure they are preserved. Colonies could be interfered with, and mortality occur due to artificial lighting in the Park.

**Bats.** LOCOG failed to carry out an adequate survey. Moreover they would need a European Protected Species Licence from Natural England. The Licence can't be applied for until planning permission has been obtained, and development work can't start until the Licence is obtained.

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS**

- Greenwich Park is *not* the most cost-effective venue and, of the alternatives considered, Windsor is the most obvious cost-effective venue.
- The holding of the Olympic equestrian events in Greenwich Park would not have a positive net economic benefit to Greenwich but, to the contrary, would result in severe short-term economic damage to Greenwich town and deliver no long-term economic benefits.
- Modern Pentathlon requirements are modest, are not tied to the equestrian stadium and can be efficiently catered for elsewhere in the Borough.
- From LOCOG's figures, holding the Equestrian events in Greenwich would result in the loss of a

number of existing jobs, while generating few, if any, construction job vacancies within the Borough and provide no more than 200 temporary paid jobs for local people on arena days.

- The post-event demolition of the facilities proposed for Greenwich Park will leave no social or economic legacy for the people of the Borough.
- Moving the Equestrian events elsewhere would, in contrast, create a net economic benefit to Greenwich during 2012.

### **SPECTATOR EXPERIENCE**

NOGOE has calculated that, owing to the small size of the Park compared to say, Badminton, each spectator watching the cross-county would have an area of less than 2 metres square. For this and other reasons it is unlikely that spectators would have a enjoyable experience

### **COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSALS BY LOCAL RESIDENTS ( a small selection)**

My partner and I both work in the City and could have chosen to live anywhere in London, but we chose to live here because of the Park. It is a part of our day-to-day family life. My partner walks through the entire park every weekend. We use the playground and Maritime Museum frequently, and when we have visitors from overseas, we always take them to the Park. Closures in the Park will negate our entire reason for living here, as well as depriving everyone of one of the most beautiful spots in London.  
AJ, SE10

In Greenwich, many families with children live in small houses with either no gardens, or small ones at best. They need this park to let their children run around and play. Also, many adults use this park for keeping fit. Closing the park for such lengthy periods robs all these people from their outdoor activities. How can you justify this for an Olympic event? Because the poorest people live in very cramped conditions, closing the park will hurt them most. I find it especially appalling that this will be done to organize an elite sport like equestrian sports.  
PJdS, SE10

My wife suffers from a debilitating cancer and we very much rely upon using the gated entrance to the park at the bottom of King William Walk. Given that, according to the plans, this part of the park will be closed for a significant period of time, it will make our lives very difficult. My wife will struggle to take our children out to get the exercise that they need in the park they should be fully entitled to use.  
JS, SE10

It is foolish to deny the very deep and emotional attachments regular visitors to Greenwich Park hold; just spend a few hours there during any weekend when families are enjoying recreational time together, to note how much enjoyment is had.

And, read the many inscriptions on the park-benches to learn of past enjoyment.

This park is not *just* a recreational space, or one of special heritage, or one within which the Greenwich Meridian passes through, or one that possibly affords the best view of London from, it is far more than all of that: it is held in the hearts of its regular visitors as a place of special and unique beauty, whereby the toils and strife of their everyday lives are soothed and placated.

JS, SE3 (Westcombe Ward)

### **THE NEXT NEWSLETTER WILL REPORT ON THE COUNCIL'S DECISION AND WHERE WE GO FROM THERE, BUT FINALLY:**

We end this issue with an apology and a letter.

In the January Newsletter we reproduced a short article which stated that: Rowland Byass, lecturer in Historic Garden Conservation at Greenwich University, thinks that the Park is not a suitable site. Rowland has contacted us to say that this statement was taken out of context. We apologise and set out his comment in full: "While the Park is not a suitable site for the Olympics, if the Games are to go ahead there there ought to be some kind of payback in the form of a legacy project for the Park".

This letter, sent to the Planning Department by way of objection, is from someone who knows about the reality of tunnels caving in:

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to protest on health and safety grounds about the proposed use of Greenwich Park for the 2012 Olympic Games. Beside the many objections to this proposal which have no doubt already been rehearsed to you at great length, I would like to add my own personal cautionary anecdote.

Some years ago, my family lived in Point Hill, SE10. We returned home one evening to find that our entire front garden had vanished into a deep hole. If anyone had happened to be standing on the spot at the time of the sudden collapse, they would certainly have been injured, and possibly killed. The hole was the size of a small room, and about twelve foot deep. The council were so concerned that they immediately despatched a man in caving gear to evacuate the property before it too vanished. The hole was of such a size that, until it was filled in, our house became something of a local tourist attraction.

Fortunately, when the house was built, the District Surveyor had anticipated possible problems with underground water and conduits in the area and had insisted on these houses being built on reinforced concrete piles and ringbeams. His foresight meant that the house was saved.

It later transpired that the garden had covered a Tudor brick conduit. I understand that Greenwich Park is riddled with similar tunnels, and I am merely writing to make sure that you realise the gravity of the risk they pose to competitors and spectators alike. Our garden collapsed entirely of its own accord, without any additional stress from galloping horses, lorries or milling crowds.

I am no surveyor, but it seems to me that to hold such a huge event on top of these ancient and fragile tunnels is to court disaster. The Olympics are meant to be a showcase for the country and the capital, and I understand that Greenwich has been chosen partly because it will provide strong television pictures. If the scenes from our front garden a few years ago were to be repeated, I can guarantee that they would make the evening news the world over, and that the 2012 Olympic Games would be remembered for all the wrong reasons.

I sincerely trust that sanity will prevail and the equestrian events will be held at a more suitable venue. If the worst happens and the Games do come to Greenwich, we can only hope that this fragile subterranean network will somehow stand up to the stress.