

**Frank Lissimore, 27 January 2010 - 09:23 AM:**

Much speculation has been circulating about the relationship between the Crystal Palace and Norwood Chamber of Commerce and the scheme for a New Crystal Palace being promoted by Ray Hall. As vice chair of the Chamber I feel I owe it to the community and Chamber members to set the record straight.

As many will know, I have been a partner for over 20 years in a local solicitors' firm, and have been a member of the Chamber for most of those years. The Chamber has always been an active part of the Crystal Palace scene, but it is only recently that it has attracted more widespread membership from businesses in the area. Since joining forces with the front fine retailers - the Crystal Palace Triangle Traders - the Chamber has gone from strength to strength, with over 60 people at some recent meetings.

It would be wrong to think that the Chamber is simply a front for the promoters of the New Crystal Palace, or is being led by the nose, as has been suggested. As successful business people, Chamber members do have minds of their own, and debate is free and open at all meetings. Far from blindly supporting the New Crystal Palace because it was the brainchild of some of our members, it was the Triangle Traders' support for the scheme that prompted the Chamber to approach Ray Hall and invite him to become Chair in the first place.

If you looked only at Virtual Norwood you might think that the Chamber does nothing but discuss the New Crystal Palace. Nothing could be further from the truth. The scheme has been discussed at length in only one meeting, at which Ray Hall very properly withdrew when it came to a vote. The Chamber members have given their support in principle, but the detail has not yet been discussed. We spend a far greater part of our time on other concerns of the local community, among them the one-way system, the future of 25 Church Road, the hardships due to ever-increasing business rates and rents, and the possible benefits of more co-ordination between the activities of other community and charitable organisations in the area.

One major problem facing businesses and residents here is that Crystal Palace sits on the corner of five London boroughs, for whom joined-up thinking is not usually on the agenda. Overcoming this has been one of the Chamber's main focuses. This is not to minimise the efforts made by Croydon in funding the Town Centre Manager, but her time was limited and could not be devoted entirely to cross-borough issues, and her function was purely to represent businesses, not the whole community including the residents, which requires the active cooperation of councillors and officials from the different boroughs.

For the first time I can remember, the local councils are coming together to discuss the future of Crystal Palace. This is largely due to the efforts of the Chair and the management committee with the enthusiastic backing of the members. More amazing is that those councils have recognised that the Chamber needs funding to be fully effective, and they are providing it. It is because the Chamber is now seen as a representative and credible business force that the new Croydon Economic Development Company (replacing Croydon Enterprise) believe they can work with the Chamber and have agreed to help fund it. This funding has absolutely nothing to do with support for the New Crystal Palace project. It has everything to do with giving the Chamber the tools for the job of promoting the wellbeing of the Crystal Palace business community, with the aim of creating better shops and services for residents.

Anyone sharing our interests is very welcome to apply to join the Chamber. As our constitution says,

"Members of the Chamber are retailers, wholesalers, traders, manufacturers, workers, self-employed, merchants and professionals carrying on business in Crystal Palace and Norwood, and others who in the opinion of the Committee represent or contribute to the commercial interests of the area."

The Chamber is a well respected and long established organisation that has always represented the interests of local businesses. Ray Hall's scheme has only taken up a small amount of the Chamber's time in the context of all our other activities. In his time as Chair, Ray has won the respect of members for the tireless effort he puts in on a daily basis for the Chamber and the good of the district centre and surrounding area. A lot of this is intangible, building links with key figures in the local business, political and wider community, in effect putting Crystal Palace back on the map.

Ray told the management committee some months ago that he would not be standing for re-election next year. I very much hope that although he will have stood down from his formal role he will continue to wave the flag for our business community and our belief that Crystal Palace is truly the heart of south London.

Finally, let me say on behalf of the committee of the Chamber that:

- The current state of the top site of the Crystal Palace Park is not something to be proud of.
- We have a great legacy in Crystal Palace and the opportunity to make something very special here.
- There is no intention to impose something on the community which does not command broad support.
- The New Crystal Palace ideas are broad-brush. The Chamber members have given their support in principle to taking them forward, but have not had the opportunity to comment on any more detailed proposals.
- If as a result of further discussion it emerges that something different or on a smaller scale is seen as appropriate to commemorate the Crystal Palace and serve the interests of the local business and wider community, then the Chamber will happily work with that.

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Doing nothing on the top site is not an option. The aim is to try and find an idea which works for the majority of people. Let's take this forward in constructive dialogue with business and residents working together.

Frank Lissimore  
Vice Chair  
Crystal Palace and Norwood Chamber of Commerce



Crystal Palace Community Association

CPCA



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15<sup>th</sup> February 2010

Dear Mr Lissimore

In your 27 Jan. 2010 statement on Virtual Norwood, you address speculation concerning ***“...the relationship between the Crystal Palace and Norwood Chamber of Commerce and a scheme for a New Crystal Palace being presented by Ray Hall.”*** and your debt to the community and Chamber members, as Vice- Chair, to ***“...set the record straight.”***

Whilst this sentiment is commendable, your initiative does little towards it, even compounding the contentiousness of the Ray Hall proposal in repeatedly describing it as for the New Crystal Palace when what is actually proposed is a hotel, conference and leisure complex on grade II\* registered public parkland on the site of Paxton's masterpiece.

Public awareness of this is increasing and Ray Hall's scheme is known as Multiplex II, when should it become more than commercial speculation, opposition may reach the epidemic proportions of earlier years, which included successful application to The Lords and European Court of Rights.

The CPCA as a community association has broad membership including those living and working in the area, retailers, restaurateurs, and others sharing a common concern for the future of Crystal Palace and its environs.

Although you say it would be wrong to think ***“...that the Chamber is simply a front for the promoters of the New Crystal Palace or is being led by the nose...”*** such deep suspicion is inevitable when the promoter of a contentious scheme who does not live or trade in the area is made Chair of Crystal Palace and Norwood Chamber of Commerce.

Moreover, many would conclude from Ray Hall's stated intention not to stand for election to Chair next year, that having used the Chamber as a vehicle for the promotion of his scheme, he has achieved his purpose.

Writing as "*your friend and your Chair*" Ray Hall stated that "*...at Chamber and at a project - a New Crystal Palace in a transformed Crystal Palace Park - our membership, without me present, voted 100% in support.*" Surprisingly, despite this claim to the contrary, you say the Chamber has given only support in principle for the Ray Hall scheme and has not considered it in detail, and that in any case it is '*broad-brushed*'. Equally surprising is your confirmation that the Chamber was prompted to approach Ray Hall to become Chairman by Triangle Traders, which is a small group of local shopkeepers, some of whom are closely associated with him.

The CPCA recognises free speech as the essence of democracy, but will not subscribe to a website that enables persons to make defamatory and otherwise harmful statements about named others, whilst hiding behind anonymity. The CPCA considers this practice cowardly and despicable.

'The New Crystal Palace' is promoted as unique in design and location to commemorate Paxton's glass creation, and to regenerate and revitalise the area, and more modestly, the whole of South London. Yet, purpose designed for Crystal Palace or not, such a scheme was first proposed by Ray Hall for Blackheath, where the perceptive community and Council would have absolutely nothing to do with it. In the light of this, your assurance that there is no intention to impose something on the community, which does not command broad support, is most welcome.

Your claim that the Chamber spends the far greater part of its time on "*...other concerns of the local community...*" is implausible, as with no community representation the Chamber could not know what community concerns were, and the refusal of attendance to the CPCA and others is not conducive to the "*...possible benefits of more co-operation between the activities of other community and charitable organisations in the area.*" and your welcome aspiration for "*...constructive dialogue with business and residents working together.*" and "*Anyone sharing our interests is very welcome to apply to join the Chamber.*"

The reasoning in your wish that Ray Hall will "*...continue to wave the flag for our business community...*" is obscure, as the CPCA believe that the proposed hotel, conference and leisure complex with its shopping malls, hairdressers, restaurants, cafes, boutiques and other retail outlets will accelerate the decline of the Crystal Palace area, and is, in fact, precisely the very last thing it needs which, clearly, is recognised by the vast majority.

London is fortunate in having many beautiful parks, public gardens and spaces. There is, currently, no call for something to be done with Hampstead Heath, Holland Park, Dulwich Park, and Battersea and Mile-End Parks. Some have received grants for makeovers, with the result that many more people visit them, with multiple benefits. With the current climatic threat of global warming, atmospheric pollution, increasing levels of population and of asthma sufferers, the CPCA believes parks are vital not only to the well-being, but to the very survival of the nation.

Despite your claim, “*doing nothing on the top-site is not an option*”, what would be preferable is for it and the rest of the park to be re-planted with trees, grass, plants, flowers and shrubs, for public enjoyment, recreation, and relaxation, as public parks were intended, hence the name. Permanent buildings are no longer necessary for fairs, exhibitions, circuses, concerts, skating-rinks, markets and other events to be held in parks, as with modern materials and construction methods, a few weeks after an event attended by 100,000, only some patches of bare earth remain where temporary buildings stood, as seen each summer in Hyde and other London parks.

Whilst the CPCA remains diametrically opposed to luxury residential and commercial development in Crystal Palace Park, it supports restoration and preservation of parkland and other historic features, which made it famous.

Mike Warwick