

Up The Palace...or Up The Garden Path?

by Mike Warwick of the Crystal Palace Community Association



Those responding to the suggestion 'Lets go up the Palace' as quoted in Don Madgwick's article in The Palace Magazine November issue, "...as often uttered in Victorian times..." would have strolled through leafy lanes between fields and farms, in what was then the countryside.

Those responding today to hearing this "...again throughout South London...if Ray Hall has his way..." would travel through the congestion and air pollution of roads and streets grid-locked with traffic, in an area of dense occupation, with, railway stations, schools, super-markets, housing estates, office blocks, petrol stations and a burgeoning population now measured in millions, unlike the ten thousands of the Victorian era.

As emotive as the "opportunity to rebuild the Palace" may seem, closer scrutiny of what is proposed exposes it as anything but a rebuild of the original Crystal Palace, as a pastiche of Paxton's masterpiece, incorporating some original design and material features, and as a blatantly commercial development where "interested operators include: a 4 rising to 5 star hotel with conference, exhibition and spa/gym facility, entertainment, and educational and business incubation provision in partnership with

relevant universities, further education colleges and schools."

Although "A New Crystal Palace Charitable Trust is proposed that could enter into a long lease with the London Borough of Bromley as the owners of Crystal Palace Park and that trust would then commission, build and own the Crystal Palace" it is also stated that New Crystal Palace Ltd, specifically set up to contract with the New Crystal Palace Charitable Trust "...would take a lease on a significant proportion of the volume that would be shaped within the structure of the New Crystal Palace. and "That company would then in turn contract with operators of leisure, sports, entertainment, business start-up and community facility."

It is extremely doubtful that these commercial arrangements would satisfy "...the legacy of the people of South London latent in the name 'Crystal Palace' and that the proposed construction "...would make a lot of people's dreams come true." concerning "...one of the most beautiful and loved buildings in the world."

Ray Hall's scheme was not, as claimed, excluded from (LDA) public consultation, but was, together with other proposals for the Park, presented at a Crystal Palace Park Dialogue

Special Main Group Meeting on Saturday 25th November 2006 by no less than Ray Hall himself, whilst the LDA could hardly have disregarded Ken Livingstone's commitment to preserving London's open spaces, by including Ray Hall's proposal for massive commercial development, in its publicly funded £67 million Park Master Plan.

To describe the new Crystal Palace, as, "...a very large conservatory in a park setting" and in the context of "...within the framework of a business plan geared to the economic viability of the new Crystal Palace", will persuade few and concern many.

To solicit support, included as "...possible contents..." are museums for Crystal Palace, Sport and an Edwardian fun-fair and a "...butterfly museum..." which if to be dead specimens of butterflies mounted on cards in display cases, would be poor substitute for a proposed purpose built house for beautiful living butterflies in their natural environment.

The November feature 'rebuild the palace?' makes the critical reference "...In any case after the longest and one of the most expensive consultations in England, it is crucial questions like this (rebuild the palace?)

feature: rebuild the palace? CPCA view

should be decided by the public and not second guessed by LDA grantees, and compounding the misrepresentation, "...that the rebuild option should have been included in the consultation and its exclusion has denied the public an opportunity to consider an important option."

What was crucial to Ray Hall's 'important option' and what would have enabled robust consideration of it, was that a planning application was submitted to Bromley Council together with and supported by the results of Environmental Impact Assessment.

The "Enthusiastic Support", further qualified to "...enthusiastic personal support, from Cllr Stephen Carr, leader of Bromley Council...senior councillors and officers... and "...the leader of Croydon Council Cllr Mike Fisher and his colleagues...also invited...", was not a formal decision or declaration of support, made as it was

in the absence of any planning application and Environmental Impact Assessment.

It is highly likely that Bromley would exercise caution in this respect following the successful application by CPCA member Diane Barker to the European Courts concerning failure by Bromley to require Environmental Impact Assessment of the proposed cinema multiplex, following which The House of Lords, in endorsing the European ruling, made an order for substantial costs against Bromley Council.

What is intriguing is that a few people so resolutely opposed to the abortive multiplex are now giving their support to a proposal likely to provoke the same undesirable and damaging environmental consequences and minimal contribution to the local economy..

We are told "Operators have been short listed and will now be chosen

for their commercial and management skills and for their ability to partner with other community organisations" when it is unfortunate that such ability does not outweigh "...reasons of commercial confidentiality..." in the withholding of their identity, which does not instil trust and conflicts with claim of "...socially responsible commerce servicing a strong charitable arm..." and Ray Hall's modest goal of "...enabling the regeneration of not only Crystal Palace Park but the whole of South London.

Though Mr Madgwick predictably seeks common ground in objection to sale of parkland for housing that will bring only a one-off payment and the possibility of legal challenge, he or is naive to imagine that the "...universal unpopularity..." of this will not extend to the construction of a massive commercial development in Crystal Palace Public Park.