Appendix 1

London Assembly (Mayor's Question Time) – 13 October 2010

Transcript: Mayor's Oral Update

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As Members of the Assembly will know, we launched, this week, the vision for the Olympic Park in legacy and you will have seen that it consists partly of 11,000 new homes. 35% of those are going to be affordable new homes and 40% of those 11,000 new homes are going to be family homes. I think it is a stunning vision for that part of east London. I know that Members want to ask some questions about that a bit later on.

Also, of course, there was the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) Quarterly Management Report, about which I think Members wish to ask some questions. Amongst other things, that report indicated that burglary is well down. It is part of a continuing overall reduction in crime though, clearly, there are pressures now on budgets and we will have to fight to make sure that we get the settlement that London policing needs.

Members want to know about the reports of further progress on the Thames Estuary Airport in the papers, or non-progress or whatever it was. All I would say on that is that London is in need of more aviation capacity. That capacity cannot, in my view, be continually supplied at Heathrow. I think it is commonly agreed around this horseshoe [by Assembly Members] that you cannot have a third runway at Heathrow. There are all sorts of other things that you might be able to do; you could look at making greater use of other assets around the perimeter of London, and that is what we are continuing to do. Patently you cannot expect to build high speed rail to Brazil, Russia, India and China and you have got to think of the long term future of the United Kingdom's economy.

Members want to know about the industrial action being proposed by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) and the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA). Clearly, we hope, in all cases, to avoid such industrial action, and negotiations are ongoing. I would urge all parties to come to the table and do the deals that are out there to be done.

Other than that, there were some fantastic things unveiled. I would mention, in particular, the Fairlop Waters Country Park in Redbridge; a completely magnificent visionary new country park - and I am glad to see Roger [Roger Evans, Assembly Member] nodding - part funded by the London Development Agency (LDA). It has the most colossal artificial boulders for children to crawl over, which have not yet been graffitied, I am pleased to report. It is an absolutely beautiful scheme.

We announced last week that we are supporting 5,000 London kids to learn a musical instrument, in addition to keeping up our continual fight to make sure that we get the investment this city needs, not least in Crossrail, the Tube upgrades and other vital bits of infrastructure and investment that will create the prosperity in this city and in this country for decades to come.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Thank you, Mr Mayor. Before I call for supplementary questions can I remind Members that the supplementary questions need to be on matters relating to the update and could I also remind Members not to stray into other people's questions that are down on the order paper.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Thank you, and thank you, Mr Mayor, for the brief comments on the police quarterly report. The reason we raised this is because this quarterly report does seem to strike a different tone than other reports we have had before. You mentioned the issue of cuts. From this report we can see that there has been a recruitment freeze on officer recruitment. Your original budget last year had 455 officers being lost over three years. We see that, by next March, we will

already have a loss of 900 officers which, obviously, has implications for policing. Do you expect that to have an impact on front line policing?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): No, I do not, Joanne. I think you are right to raise the question and, clearly, these are very tough budgetary circumstances that we are in. I would just remind you that, currently, the Metropolitan Police Service has more warranted officers than at any time in the history of the force. That is number one.

The second thing is that, recently, what has been happening is, in fact, the service is slightly overstaffed in the sense that people have not been retiring at quite the rate that was expected or that they might have done and, therefore, given the pressures that the budget settlement places upon us, we have thought it prudent to have a recruitment freeze.

I am completely confident that we will be able - by making the case for London, by making the case for London policing, by sensible economies and by prudent reallocation of resources - to make sure that we have a police service that is able to continue to keep bringing crime down.

Joanne McCartney (AM): You see, it strikes me that if you had thought that then you would have reduced officer numbers in your budget last year and you were not banking on this number of officers, so there obviously is some risk there and those risks are spelt out in the paper.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I do not accept that. I understand why you say that.

Joanne McCartney (AM): From my own local borough I know that posts are not being filled at the moment and that rationalisation is taking place, as one would expect. There are serious risks there as well. Can you give a guarantee today that borough policing will remain at strength?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What I can certainly guarantee is that we will continue to work very hard to ensure that we have enough police out there on the front line to continue to bring down crime. That is really the judge and jury in this matter. There are going to be tough arguments ahead but I think, if you look at the fact that the Metropolitan Police Service is currently now at an all time high - as I said just now that they are seeing a slight overstaffing caused by people's unexpected reduction in the retirement rate - it is sensible, in the current circumstances, to go for a recruitment freeze, which is what we are going for.

Joanne McCartney (AM): I think you will find that the paper says that territorial policing is overstretched but others are not, so officers are being moved around to cover shortfalls elsewhere.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Which is sensible.

Joanne McCartney (AM): This 900 that will be lost by next March will impact on territorial policing as well.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let us see.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Are you committed to retaining Safer Neighbourhood Teams in boroughs?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes. We have got to be absolutely clear; Safer Neighbourhood Teams have been a fantastic success and I think they are one of the things that give people great confidence in policing across London. I am willing to listen to arguments from borough commanders and from local councils who say they might want more flexibility in the way that they are divided up. I think, on the whole, the Safer Neighbourhood Team per ward system is a good one and it should, in principle, be retained.

Joanne McCartney (AM): Chief officers at the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), for example, today have released statements to say that, if the budget cuts bite as we are expecting, they expect front line services to be affected and crime to rise. At the start you mentioned burglary and that burglary rates had fallen but the report that I have asked you about actually states that, last year, burglary rates fell, from a very high level, because of extra resources. It states that, this time, because they have to make a choice between various crimes to invest in with the budget cuts, they are expecting burglary to rise this year because they cannot put the resources into it. Is that something you accept?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think you are right to draw attention to the 9.4% fall in burglary and the fact that it is now --

Joanne McCartney (AM): Which is expected to rise by the end of the year.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): It is now at its lowest level since 1998. I think that is a credit to Operation Bumblebee and the Metropolitan Police Service. You say you are expecting it to rise again --

Joanne McCartney (AM): The police do. I am reading from the report.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Let us see what we can do to deploy that argument, which is a good argument, to prevent what I think would be damaging cuts in the Metropolitan Police Service funding. As you know Joanne, this is part of an argument that we are having with Government in which we are allied with you and with the police to make the point that London needs adequate support for police numbers.

Joanne McCartney (AM): We agree they are dangerous cuts. Thank you.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): I wanted to pick up the issue of the Tube strikes. We have heard that there might be some kind of peace deal, as it were, on the table from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS).

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): You think there is a peace deal do you?

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Is there any update you can provide for Londoners?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Glad tidings of great joy from Caroline Pidgeon. You think there is a peace deal. If you think there is a peace deal I am not going to contradict you, but I am going to wait with bated breath to see if, indeed --

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Can you update Londoners with anything? Any hint of what is going on?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- there is an outbreak of common sense. I hope there is, clearly, because this is something that everybody on both sides really wants to achieve if they possibly can. Certainly I think the vast majority of hardworking members of London Underground would like to see a resolution to this.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Any detail of what it might be?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): As you know, the offer that is on the table and the plan for the reform of the ticket offices - as I never tire of telling you - involves no compulsory redundancies, no loss of earnings, no station unstaffed and a commonsensical approach to the much greater 'Oysterisation' of our London Underground transport. I very much hope --

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): So that is a 'no' answer.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I very much hope, Caroline, that your confidence is vindicated by events.

Caroline Pidgeon (AM): Thank you very much.

Andrew Boff (AM): I very much welcome the iteration of the Olympic Masterplan and Margaret Ford [Baroness Ford, Chair, Olympic Park Legacy Company] and Andrew Altman [Chief Executive, Olympic Park Legacy Company] and all involved are to be congratulated in the vision that they have.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is high praise from you.

Andrew Boff (AM): I have not finished yet, Mr Mayor! It does lack detail and, whilst the statements are to be applauded, I have some concerns. The original legacy Masterplan had the intention of 42% of family housing and that has been reduced now to 40%. That 40% figure in itself is arrived at, I believe, by looking at the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). That SHMA, as it is called, uses the baseline of family housing - that 40% recommendation of family housing - as 4 bedrooms and above, and yet the definition of family housing for the Olympic Park is 3 bedrooms and above, so families are missing out on this.

I would also like you to confirm, Mr Mayor, whether or not all the family homes on the Olympic Park will be good quality family housing with a front door on to the street and a private back garden. Also, I would like some confirmation of how high the blocks will be. Will the blocks only contain one or two bedroom flats or will there be larger flats in these blocks and, if so, can we ensure that families are not forced into flats - as they have been on the athletes' village - on the fifth, sixth and seventh floor of these developments? I keep being told, Mr Mayor, that we were too late to save the athletes' village --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): That is right.

Andrew Boff (AM): We are not too late on this, so I would like an undertaking from yourself that the further developments on the Olympic Park really well live up to your aspiration in the document of being family friendly.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Andrew, first of all I want to thank you for all the work you put in and all the scrutiny you do of this because I think, actually, it has been thoroughly worthwhile and valuable from my point of view. What we have been able to do with the further iterations of the Olympic Park development is to come up with something that is absolutely fantastic. No, we will not be building high rise rabbit hutches and they will not be one or two bedroom flats. I think they will be four or five storeys high and perhaps two or three storeys high in the new terrace and squares that we are proposing. They will, of course, have the new space standards that we are insisting upon so they will not be tiny new rooms, these will be substantial new rooms, and they will be very, very high quality dwellings. I cannot give you the exact proportion that will have gardens front and back but it will be very significant.

What we are doing in this part of London is something really revolutionary, in my view, which is we are taking the best of London modern contemporary architecture and we are giving it back to London by installing it in an old fashioned London style. That is to say we are going back to the types of London development that were so popular and so successful in the Georgian era, but using high quality architecture and very, very high quality materials to create fantastic homes, with the biggest urban park in Europe around it.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you for that, Mr Mayor. I welcome that commitment from you. I would just remind you that architects' drawings never quite turn out as they are expected to!

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sometimes they can be better.

Andrew Boff (AM): Sometimes they can be better --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Sometimes.

Andrew Boff (AM): -- but, as I think you have heard me say before, there is this fashion with architects' drawings of sticking in lovely trees.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Yes, that is true.

Andrew Boff (AM): I actually think that all architects' drawings should have a burnt out car stuck in front of them and, if they still look good after than, then they might be worth developing!

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Some of them do. What you cannot conceal in an architect's drawing is a 20 storey high rise block, and those we have not got. Believe me, that would have been the fate of the Olympic Park. I think that this vision will be infinitely more attractive to a huge range of London communities, will deliver long term value and offers a much greater hope of transforming that area and regenerating east London in the way that we want to see.

Andrew Boff (AM): Mr Mayor, you have made that very strong declaration and thank you for that. Of course you will be aware that the Olympic Delivery Authority's (ODA) plans are to put planning applications for 20 storey tower blocks on the existing Olympic footprint.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is, as you know, a continuing issue about the London and Continental Railways (LCR) land and it is my passionate belief that this land should all be bundled together within the Olympic Park Legacy Company (OPLC) and then, eventually, within the Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC).

Andrew Boff (AM): And also covered by that declaration from you that we shall not have loads of tower blocks stuck on the Olympic site?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Hang on. There are sites by the Stratford Station which are more suitable for higher development; let us be clear. The Masterplan is fairly eloquent on that. It is clear what we are talking about low rise development and the terraces and the squares and the garden squares stretching out around the Olympic Park. In the case of the nexus of the transport links at Stratford itself, we do think - and I think most people would agree - there is scope to go a little bit higher.

Andrew Boff (AM): Thank you, Mr Mayor.

Jennette Arnold (Deputy Chair): Mr Mayor, taking you back to the line of inquiry opened by Joanne McCartney about policing, do you really appreciate the concerns that borough leaders and key people involved in policing at the local level have regarding the impact on any changes coming their way? Do you really appreciate the concerns that are out there? I say this because, regrettably, you were not able to meet the delegation from Waltham Forest who are with us this morning [in the public gallery].

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Hello. How are you?

Jennette Arnold (Deputy Chair): I can see the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Policing and two councillors there. Do you regret not being able to meet them to receive their presentation this morning because they have been trying?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am seldom far from Waltham Forest. I am delighted to welcome the delegation from Waltham Forest this morning. I see the distinguished Leader and councillors from Waltham Forest and I see that my friend, John [John Biggs, Assembly Member], has brought me a present from Waltham Forest which I am looking forward to receiving later on.

The answer to your question is I fully understand the concerns of local communities and of borough commanders and of council leaders. We want to make sure that we fight together to get the best possible settlement for London.

Jennette Arnold (Deputy Chair): There are some boroughs with some specific issues. Are you aware of that? I was at a prize-giving this morning before coming here and the request from there was, "Do not take our Safer Schools officers from us". That is something that I put to you. Do you really appreciate that there are some boroughs where the usual top slicing way of allocation is not appropriate? Do you appreciate that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think this is a question that Tony Arbour [Assembly Member] is going to come to later on. I do, in general, completely understand that specific boroughs will have particular issues. In Waltham Forest there is an issue around gang crime and around knife crime. We all know that.

Jennette Arnold (Deputy Chair): It is an Olympic borough.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There are some hopeful signs there across the board but it is a difficult and ongoing problem and I certainly understand the need for flexibility in dealing with it.

Murad Qureshi (AM): Can I come back to the Thames Estuary Airport. Can you tell me, Mr Mayor, when will Sir David King's [Thames Estuary Airport Steering Group] report on the Thames Estuary Airport be published and when will Assembly Members like myself have a copy of it?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I see no reason why the report should not be published in due course. I will have to consult with Professor King about that but, in the fullness of time, all will be revealed.

Murad Qureshi (AM): OK. Were you, Mr Mayor, at the briefing that Sir David King gave the Chancellor and what did the Chancellor think of the plan?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am afraid I was not at that briefing so I cannot advise you about that.

Murad Qureshi (AM): He has kept you out of the loop then. I hear subsequently in *The Times* that Daniel Moylan, Deputy Chair of Transport for London (TfL), has been asked to do further investigation on this. When did TfL get an aviation arm and what kind of resources can we expect it to have in future?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think it is pretty obvious to anybody who studies west London - or, indeed, the impact of high speed rail on the whole of London or London's transport problems generally - that TfL has a general duty to move people around this city expeditiously. The location of our major hub international airport slap bang in the middle of the west London suburbs, as it currently is, has huge impact on transport in that area. I think it is absolutely reasonable for TfL to look at the implications of --

Murad Qureshi (AM): Surface transport, yes.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- that decision and to think about long term alternatives. I think it is completely the right thing for Transport for London. It is actually why you need a strategic body in London to be able to make that kind of long term analysis.

Jenny Jones (AM): I would like to take you back to the issue of housing on the Olympic Park and ask you if you have considered, or if there has been discussion, of having a community land trust for that?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Thank you, Jenny. I should have mentioned that and there is, as you know, considerable enthusiasm for that idea, particularly with me and with Margaret Ford. We are making a study of that and a report has been commissioned and will report back in spring of 2011, so you will get further detail on that.

Jenny Jones (AM): Thank you.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, on the matter of very rapidly worsening industrial relations at the Fire Authority, why are you failing to show leadership by personally engaging with the FBU, or are you actually spoiling a fight with the FBU and, therefore, a substantial number of firefighters?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): There is, Navin, as you know because you lately served on the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA), a long term discussion that has been going on for five years now about shift patterns. As I understand it, a ballot is being held currently to go for a strike. I do not propose to embroil myself in the details over those discussions but I hope very much that commonsense will prevail.

Navin Shah (AM): Let me put to you some hard facts. In the last recent ballot of the firefighters some 76% actually participated in the ballot, so that was a huge turnout. Of that, 96% voted in favour of industrial action. You can see the strength of feeling within the firefighters. Surely it is any leader's responsibility - and this is where the buck stops - to try to avert what would be a very, very damaging strike. Should you therefore not take every effort to engage and to talk - there is nothing to lose in talking - with the FBU to diffuse the situation? The situation is extremely volatile. If you think that the RMT strike was OK, wait if this one comes on. Therefore, are you not shirking away from your responsibility by totally dismissing any calls to engage personally and show some leadership to avert the strike and defuse what will be a very damaging situation for Londoners? In the end, it is their safety during a strike that is important.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I think Londoners will notice the nakedly political undertone and threat contained in that question --

Navin Shah (AM): There is not. I beg to differ. I challenge that.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): -- and your comment on the RMT strike and the idea that it is all going to get worse and worse and worse. I do not think that is necessarily true. I think that commonsense will prevail. As Caroline [Pidgeon] was saying earlier on, I think there is a good deal to be done. I think it would be a mistake to try to second guess negotiators who are getting on with their job and it would be a mistake for me to embroil myself now in the technicalities of a dispute about shift patterns which has been going on for five years and which I very much hope can be resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Navin Shah (AM): Mr Mayor, from my experience of working on the ground and at LFEPA the negotiations are extremely sticky to say the least, but there is time to intervene and --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Navin, I respect you and I admire the way you are trying to drag me into this. I can understand why you are trying to do it and I love you for it but I am not going to do it! Good luck to you --

Navin Shah (AM): I do not need to be loved, Mr Mayor. Londoners need to be loved. If you want to express that love for Londoners intervene and avert the damage that a strike will cause.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Finally, to be somewhat upbeat on policing, Mr Mayor, would you not agree that the difficult economic climate that we all find ourselves in does, indeed, provide opportunities for progressive and positive borough commanders and borough leaders to work to improve the service for residents by utilising the new flexibility, be it around Safer Neighbourhood Teams or be it round deployment?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): What a characteristically optimistic and well balanced and reasonable question, Steve! I do think you are right. There are going to be difficulties --

John Biggs (AM): Not political.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Not remotely political. I did not detect any political message at all there. It is something you could easily support. Come on.

I think there are going to be difficult times ahead financially but, in these circumstances, if everybody works together there are also, of course, opportunities to be seized.

Steve O'Connell (AM): Also, Mr Mayor, would you not agree that, with this new flexibility, it is down to borough commanders and boroughs to grasp and do what they can, rather than coming along requesting directly to you to cover this position and that position? A borough that I represent - and I am also the Cabinet Member for Community Safety so I have some experience - is going out to purchase 25 extra police to jointly task them with the borough commander. Coupling that with flexibility around shift patterns and around single patrolling, and I have told my residents that, at the end of two or three years, my residents in places like the north of Croydon are likelier to see more presence on their streets, due to this flexibility. I see an upbeat side to this, Mr Mayor, and, hopefully, you can agree that this would be the positive way forward in these difficult times.

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): I am sure that Chris Robbins [Leader of Waltham Forest Council] from Waltham Forest and everybody here will listen to your wise words and think that there are opportunities. The key thing is, notwithstanding the opportunities that this presents, we have got to work together to make sure that we get the financial settlement we need because, with that, I am afraid we will not be able to guarantee the policing that we want.

Dee Doocey (Chair): John Biggs, you have got a point of order?

John Biggs (AM): The point of order, Chair, is that I think the public should be aware that the person who asked that question is the Chair of the very Committee that is responsible for delivering the answer to the question. It just seems pretty outrageous that that is a planted question, Chair, from someone who is paid --

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Not by me.

John Biggs (AM): --£30,000 a year by the Mayor to do that job.

Dee Doocey (Chair): That is not a point of order.

John Biggs (AM): Stuffed his mouth with gold.

Dee Doocey (Chair): Mr O'Connell's membership is declared in the normal way and, therefore, there is no secret to the fact that Mr O'Connell is a member of the MPA, so that is totally wrong. Brian Coleman is the final speaker in this section.

Brian Coleman (AM): I will be brief. Mr Mayor, are you not pleased that LFEPA's strategy in the current industrial dispute was agreed by all 16 members, including Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green members, who were present at the Authority meeting in July 2010, and would you not agree that this all-party approach to dealing with this dispute does, indeed, add weight to LFEPA's arguments?

Boris Johnson (Mayor of London): Absolutely right. I cannot believe for a second that the distinguished Member, Navin Shah, was actually on that panel when they took that decision, was he? You are joking! I find it incredible that he should come to this session this morning and argue in the way, therefore, that he has. There you go. You live and learn.

Navin Shah (AM): My questioning was not about how the members right across the political parties at LFEPA were dealing with the situation. The question was about your lack of leadership and that is where the buck stops and that is what it was about.

Dee Doocey (Chair): We are now moving on to priority questions.

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