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Olympic Park sustainability policy

Thank you for coming to our meeting on 23 June to discuss your plans for the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and its environmental sustainability. The Environment Committee welcomes your statement that environmental sustainability is a top priority, and the aspirations you outlined for the Park and its environs as a sustainable community.

In this letter, the Committee outlines some particular areas which it hopes to see covered in your forthcoming consultation on your sustainability policy.

Development works

The targets set by the ODA for the constructions process (for example the use of recycled materials, delivery of construction materials by rail or water) were ahead of the industry standards at the time so, five years on, it would be very disappointing if the OPLC were unable to maintain these.

In fact, the ODA exceeded some of its targets, and is providing a learning legacy so that its practices can now become available for the industry as a whole. Therefore, to continue the London Olympic tradition of raising sustainability standards, the Committee would welcome consultation on how these standards of sustainable construction and development can be increased and developed, from 2013 and in the subsequent phases of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park development. It is to be hoped that environmental standards will continue to improve across the construction industry, but it would be disappointing if the Olympic Park did not maintain its position as a sustainability leader.

Two particular areas for improvement within the target framework established by the ODA would be to increase water transport and the re-use, rather than down-cycling, of building materials. Within more general targets for sustainable transport and materials recycling, the ODA's performance on these aspects was disappointing.

Building standards and energy use on the Park in legacy

Similarly, the Committee heard that the OPLC's current plans are to deliver homes to national standards – Code for Sustainable Homes level 4 in the first phase, and level 6 ('zero-carbon') from

2016. Just complying with minimum standards has not been the approach on the Olympic site hitherto, which has sought to exceed the standards of its time; Code for Sustainable Homes level 4 is already achieved by the Athletes Village.

You spoke at the Committee's meeting about the need to explore value for money with developers. The Committee would urge you to consider that the Olympic Park, with its profile and reputation, and its infrastructure and scale, is in an excellent position to be at the leading edge of the market for low-carbon sustainable homes, rather than a housing development like any other.

In discussion you did acknowledge that statutory standards were minimums and that aspirations could go higher. Therefore, the Committee would wish to see in your consultation (and in any procurement processes being undertaken before your environmental policies are finalised) work towards stretching the carbon performance of the homes and other developments beyond the minimum standards applicable at the time.

In addition to carbon performance for homes, the Committee would like to see the principle of leading environmental performance extended to other aspects of development sustainability that could only be touched on at the meeting, such as water and waste management, telecommunications, transport and food. In order to give meaning to the phrase "blue print for sustainable living", the Committee would like to see standards set out for these aspects and some analysis of how they will add up to sustainable lifestyles for the people living and working on the Olympic Park.

As well as new builds, this can also apply to the transformation and leasing of existing buildings on the Park.

Habitat and biodiversity

The Committee joins the Commission for a Sustainable London 2012 in welcoming your commitment to the habitat and open space targets in the Olympic Park Biodiversity Action Plan. We also emphasise the need for habitat quality and good maintenance and management, through full delivery of the Biodiversity Action Plan. It was good to hear the priority that you place on these issues and we look forward to seeing this reflected in your environmental policies and delivered on the ground by the contractors.

The Committee also discussed the roles of partners, especially in the third sector, and the local communities on and around the Park, as well as the place of the Park's habitats in the context of neighbouring habitats in the area. Comprehensive coverage of these points in your consultation process would be a useful element of engaging partners and the community.

Energy generation on the Park in legacy

Given the current position regarding renewable energy generation on the site, the Committee welcomes your work with Cofely and Tower Hamlets on lower-carbon energy generation, including waste gasification, organic waste digestion and hydrogen from water. In your consultation on environmental policies, the Committee would like to see some real detail on the plans to be implemented, or the options being explored (including, if Cofely is unable to deliver rapid carbon improvements, options beyond the energy centre). The sustainability legacy has always been a key commitment of the whole Games project and the 20% renewable energy target is an important element of this legacy and therefore of the OPLC's environmental policies.

Soil and groundwater

Given concerns about potential soil and groundwater contamination, and the briefing you have provided to the Committee since the meeting, it would be appropriate to address concerns about the site's condition in your consultation, and particularly to address food growing on the site and what may be done, whether by the OPLC or potential developers, to facilitate this use.

Conclusion

The Committee was pleased to hear the nature and the range of the OPLC's environmental aspirations for the Park. We will look for these aspirations to be strongly reflected in the forthcoming consultation and the resulting environmental policies and implementation plans. The Committee is keen for the principle of the One Planet Olympics to be left as a legacy, not just in the structures remaining from Games time, but in the culture and practice of the development and management of the Park for decades to come.

There are some aspects which cut across the environmental themes mentioned above. Many aspects of the environmental policy will benefit from consideration of the Park within its context and of how the sustainability features of the Park can begin to benefit and inspire improvement in neighbouring areas. Also, it will be important to address how the OPLC's sustainability aspirations will move from policy to practice – how they will be embodied organisationally, managed, monitored and reported, resourced, and driven down the supply chain.

Yours sincerely,

Murad Qureshi AM

Chair of the Environment Committee