

Plans for the equestrian event of the London 2012 Games have been a target for controversy from the moment of their inception. Despite strong local – and royal – opposition – LOCOG have gained approval for the horse riding events and modern pentathlon to be hosted in Greenwich Park. Unsurprisingly, this move has angered many local residents who view the beautifully maintained Park as a hub of local and social activity. The proposal to build a 23,000-seat arena and four-mile cross-country course in Greenwich Park may have gained approval, but public resistance is expected to be maintained throughout the development life cycle of the facilities.

Royal Disapproval

Royal voices have now waded in on the debate, with Princess Anne's former husband Mark Phillips vocal in his disdain for the plans to stage the Olympic equestrian events in Greenwich Park. Phillips is actually a retired Olympic horse riding champion who remains popular and influential in the horse riding world, and he retains a great passion for the sport. He believes nonetheless that the cost of the equestrian even would give organisers 'sleepless nights'. Captain Phillips wrote: "Even an enthusiast like me is a little perturbed that the original £6 million budget for the equestrian games has reportedly soared to over £40 million."

His concerns about Greenwich appear to voice those of his daughter Zara Phillips, herself a champion. Zara believes that Windsor or Burghley would be preferable as venues, and questioned the legacy that would be created at Greenwich.

Many others share these royal objections – for example, the *No to Greenwich Olympic Equestrian Events* campaign group that sent an open letter to the Princess Royal (who herself is also a horseriding champion!). Objections are based on the proposal to build a 23,000 seat arena and a 4mile cross country course that would both crucially force the closure of the much loved and valued Greenwich Park for almost a year. Worse still, it risks potential damage to a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and, finally, offers no lasting legacy for the sport in this location.



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Despite these objections, Greenwich still retains the backing of the British Equestrian Federation, and remains the venue chosen for the horse riding events. According to a KPMG Government funded report, it would be more expensive to use alternatives such as Badminton or Hickstead, because they would require a satellite accommodation complex.

LOCOG Defends Their Position amongst Royal Concerns

LOCOG insist that Captain Phillips is incorrect in his valuation of the equestrian event as costing £40m. Phillips nevertheless continues: "Much has been

made of the horse sports finally being able to be centre stage at the Olympic Games but at what price? Isn't cost one of the things that we are continually being berated about? I hope the lack of physical legacy doesn't come back to haunt the equestrian world in future." He also indicated that importing tonnes of soil for the events would not be possible as the local roads would be unable to support such weight.



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LOCOG can counter these concerns, as they are clear that the equestrian event will carry a meaningful legacy, most specifically in the form of introduction of the sport to a new audience, and via the development of a new £200,000 riding school at Shooters Hill.

They have also dealt with the aforementioned transport concerns by voicing their decision to re-route the transporting of the soil to Greenwich via the (already crowded) A2 road into Blackheath. No doubt residents of Blackheath – faced with closure of the local Greenwich park, threatened UNESCO sites, and now rumbling lorries full of soil along their already overcrowded roads - will be rather upset about this! But it might lead to a longer

lasting legacy, particularly with the Shooter's Hill riding school, which will eventually prove to be of real and lasting value to Greenwich, Blackheath and their surrounding areas.

START THE DISCUSSION

- This case study raises the interesting question of who the Games are for. If the local community is very unhappy with the Games coming to the local area, should their concerns be respected, or should LOCOG go ahead with the plans for the greater good of a successful Olympic and Paralympic Games?
- Research the demographics of the average participant in equestrian sport. What do you notice about this, and how do you think it impacts our success in the sport?
- Do you think that the Shooter's Hill equestrian school will do anything to change this perception/reality of the social demographic that tends to make up the majority of participants in the sport?

FIND OUT MORE

British Equestrian Federation

<http://www.bef.co.uk/>

Equestrian – Dressage (London 2012 Games website)

<http://www.london2012.com/games/olympic-sports/equestrian-dressage.php>

CREDITS

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