

PRESS RELEASE, 26/4/24:

## Committee highly critical of Government, in report on Holocaust Memorial

Today the [Holocaust Memorial Bill Select Committee](#) has published its Special Report on the Holocaust Memorial Bill, having heard petitions from a range of people and organisations directly affected by the proposal to build a Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in Victoria Tower Gardens. These included: **Baroness Ruth Deech**, on behalf of a number of Holocaust survivors and educators; **London Parks and Gardens**; the **Thorney Island Society & Residents of Westminster**; the **Buxton Family & Thomas Fowell Buxton Society**.

While the petitioners are naturally disappointed that the Committee has decided not to amend the Bill, it is clear from the Report that the Committee felt the Instruction from the House left them with a very limited remit that blocked amendments to the Bill, and that their task was made more difficult by omissions in the Government's procedures and contradictions between the Commons' Instruction, the Minister's statements in Parliament and the Government's statements to the Committee.

We are, however, very pleased that the Committee has drawn attention to so many important areas of concern in relation to the proposed Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre:

- On the issue of site selection, they said: "A full consultation at the site selection stage would have lent more legitimacy to the final site decision, and it is quite possible that the Government would have found out about the London County Council (Improvements) Act 1900 at an earlier stage. It seems odd that the views of the property consultants were not sought, and a full appraisal and consultation not carried out."

- On the issue of cost they said: "It seems to us that the true cost of this project has not been established. We note that it is not unusual for the costs of major projects to increase with time, due to unforeseen building issues, the ambition of the project, and increases in inflation. The longer that building works go on, the more expensive this project will become. On this basis, we urge the Government to consider how ongoing costs are likely to be paid for and whether it offers appropriate use of public money."

- On the issue of security they said: "Clear proposals should be published which show what steps the Government intends to take around the security of any memorial and learning centre. Such considerations ought to be undertaken expeditiously before any planning application is progressed."

- On the issue of precedent for the lifting of protections on parks they said: "We would strongly advise future administrations to ensure that people who would be directly and specially affected by such legislative changes in the future are provided with the right to be heard on relevant legislation."

- On the issue of double standards they said: " The invitation to impact the planning process seems not to have been extended to the petitioners.... Yet, for the Committee, the Promoter attempted to find ways that we as the Committee could impact the planning process."

The Committee has, in effect, concluded that petitioners' concerns are valid. When the Bill goes to the Lords' Select Committee we will continue to expand on these points made in our Petitions that the Committee has taken up, and we will of course challenge the proposal through the planning process.

Baroness Ruth Deech: *"Everyone involved must be relieved that the serious concerns relating to this project have at last been brought to the attention of the Government. Important risks to security and uncertain funding must be addressed and the deprivation of public access to the riverside mitigated."*

Spokesperson for the London Parks and Gardens Trustee Board: *"This report exposes the shambles that this government has made of what should be the most solemn cause. It highlights the lack of legitimacy which looms over this plan to build over a public park and heaps criticism on Ministers' handling of procedural matters. MPs note with concern that the costs of this project remain entirely unknown and that the failure to address security concerns about this site will require further delay. We continue to urge parliament to fulfil their noble intent in a more fitting location and to protect this precious park."*

Lucy Peck, for the Thorney Island Society: *"We are grateful to the Holocaust Memorial Bill Select Committee for hearing our petition so carefully and endorsing our concerns. The Government still refuses any discussion of alternatives, or of meaningful undertakings in relation to our concerns, so we will continue to oppose the project as currently proposed."*

Richard Buxton, for the Buxton Family and Thomas Fowell Buxton Society: *"The Committee has robustly criticised the Government in the way it has handled the matter, from the site selection to exorbitant cost, and even its conduct of the Parliamentary process. It has also rightly recognised that it will be beset with security problems. The Government must also now surely realise that the design and scope of any Holocaust memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens must respect other important issues commemorated there, including universal suffrage, the abolition of slavery and the quality of mercy, and it is now a case of "back to the drawing board"."*

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