

In this submission I support the building of a National Holocaust Memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens and a centre for learning [Learning Centre] to support Holocaust research, and education.

The Proposer's HMLC project as described by the minister on 4.9.24 needs revision. It is controversial, underfunded, and incomplete.

[A personal note remembers my extensive project experience in nuclear power, with 3i, and as CEO of CDC. My petition points to a practical way forward. My commitment to learning from all the atrocities of the Second World War started in 1945, my School Certificate year. It is as strong as ever. Hence this paper.]

In Its first 2015 Cameron Phase the Holocaust Commission made four recommendations. These and a further 'final recommendation' for 'a permanent independent body' were accepted by the Prime Minister with senior cross-party support. In the report the Commission also proposed an early start to 50/50 funding, half Public Subscription and half public money. With 33% inflation since 2015 the Commission's ambitious civil society scheme, if implemented in full today, might well cost some £800 to £900 million.

A start was made; The Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities was nominated to monitor progress; [The DCMS had been expected]; Sir Peter Bazalgette was named for the Chair of the independent Holocaust Foundation to manage the accepted scheme with £50 million provided. The extreme disparity between the ambitions of the Commission and the Department and the Cabinet Office approaches to implementation was immediately apparent. Almost nothing was done to resolve the incompatibility. Clearly £50 million, increased to £75 million was only a small start. The 'independent' Foundation was left unincorporated. Then in mid 2016 Cameron resigned; Sir Peter held on for a while longer and then resigned; and it emerged, without explanation, that the Commission's scheme had collapsed.

So began Phase two on a significantly slimmed down version of the cross-party accepted scheme with no sponsor in place of David Cameron. As the NMLC proposal developed and despite its highly political nature Ministers left its implementation largely to officials. There were no explanations of the policy decisions as they were made; why the postponement of the 'permanent independent body'; why the Foundation's change to become an advisory body; why could we only expect a small part of the Commission's scheme; why a disruptive memorial like none other in London; why the display of Britain's role before and during the war; why a visitor attraction in competition with the IWM; why 'Learning Centre' when no such Centre was proposed. [JDE message of 19.11]

Cross-party support for a partial and amended implementation of the project continued without the usual scrutiny. In 2019 the Holocaust Memorial Charity was registered to assist with raising funds toward the planned £25 millions of civil society funds. This charity has now been inactive for five years. Throughout it was difficult to understand the rationale for the developing response to the accepted Commission recommendations.

There has been no good reason for the sketchy ministerial approach to explanation and advocacy. This prevails. The Proposer's opening to the minister's September second reading speech reads as if the project is justified because we need to start asking questions which in fact have been studied in civil society institutions ever since the war. Nothing was said about building on to all the existing good work done by the Wiener Holocaust Library, by universities, and Holocaust charities. Nothing was said about the wide difference between what was accepted in January 2015 and the September 2024 proposal.

Phase two has been a serious political failure. Now we face a controversial, underfunded, and very incomplete project.

Incomplete because there is no information about an independent governing body; there is no management in waiting; there is no finance plan; when will there be agreement between the Parks and the HMLC defining both their interests; how are discussions with the Metropolitan Police progressing. There is apparently no detailed security nor construction risk assessment. [see N. A. O. 2022 report]

Looking outwards how do HMG see this post 2016 project being impacted by today's increasingly complex Middle Eastern events, and by the Israeli dependence on the Shoah? Or is this just a domestic Whitehall affair proceeding on a tacit understanding of Jan 27th 2015.

In my petition I propose a major modification which might be completed within the estimated £138 million. The memorial building needs altering to one smaller and in harmony with other VTG memorials; the co-located centre for learning [Learning Centre] should engage in no activities on the ground of its own. It should be an enabling institution supporting our existing research, and educational institutions which study the Holocaust and related subjects. Civil society is best placed to research, study, and guide educators. [JDE message on funding of 20/11.]

This institution – The VTG Holocaust Memorial – would promote consensus, greatly reduce security risk, and if registered as a Charitable Trust be active in raising funds for distribution within civic society. The Holocaust Memorial Charitable Trust with widened objectives might well become the incorporated body responsible for the Memorial and the co-located 'centre for learning' [Learning Centre]. The fund raising and its distribution could commence shortly there being no need to wait for the Memorial.

This acceptance of reality would, I believe, become widely welcomed not least by the local public as they continued to enjoy a mildly modified Victoria Tower Gardens.

John Eccles 3.12.24.