

HMLC PUBLIC INQUIRY - SPEAKING NOTES - STEPHEN FRANKISS

Thanks Inspector.

I'm Stephen Frankiss.

I put in a written note which set out my views on the project. So I don't need to repeat them here. But it might be helpful, today, to explain a little about where I am coming from.

So, if it's OK with you, I would just like to say a few words about my background, my connection with Westminster and the Gardens, the basic reason why I support the project, and my mind-set.

So what's my background? My family have been here for many generations. My father's side were originally Huguenots who came to the Isle of Wight in the early 18th Century. My mother's side moved from the West Country to Suffolk in the 16th Century. They were fairly well-off middle class people.

I was born in Hampstead, brought up in the leafy Garden Suburb, schooled as a boarder at Highgate, did a couple of years' National Service, including a year as a Subaltern repairing tanks on the border with East Germany - quite near the Bergen-Belsen. This was unexpected and left a big impression on me. I discussed Belsen quite a bit with my Sergeant - Sergeant Lean - a tough, street-wise guy from Lancashire, who was one of Brits that opened up the camp after it had been locked down, with the water and electricity turned off, and tens of thousands of innocent inmates, starving, dying or dead from typhus, abandoned by the Nazis.

The horrific bestiality haunted him every night. Like Breugel's The Triumph of Death. I still think about it most days. One of the worst crimes in my lifetime.

Then, in a world so different from Belsen, I did six years reading and researching Natural Sciences at Cambridge, with a double first, and on to post-doc research at Pittsburgh and then here in London at UCL. Got a post in the Civil Service, working at the NPL - the National Physical Laboratory in Teddington. It was liberating.

After about 5 years I switched to the Admin Group of the Civil Service, mainly to do international work on technology, shipping and aviation, much of it negotiating international Agreements and MOUs. I did quite a lot of work on industrial strategies. And, also designing and testing the shipping parts of our War Plans and more. I worked on our maritime response to the Falklands Invasion. And then on harmonising air traffic control systems in Europe. Of course, I did the usual domestic Ministerial and parliamentary business. Mainly policy stuff. Sad to have left it some time ago as it was really interesting and variedNow I am spending too much time thinking about the pandemic - and the muddle - and my investmentsThat's probably more than enough about my background.

What's my connection with Westminster and the Gardens? It's very simple. I have lived in Westminster for about 30 years. Really feel at home here. Great place to live. Walking distance to the Gardens, to Batty Park, St James's Park, Southbank, Covent Garden and the West End. Friends in Pimlico and so on. I have visited the Gardens a great many times, typically once or twice a month. It's not the best garden in my range but I love looking at the Thames, and especially the

interesting light and skies. As a bonus, the new gardens would make it even easier to enjoy the Thames!

Now to the project. Why have I become a recent Supporter? I'm not a natural campaigner! In the Civil Service it's sensible not to campaign if you've worked in sensitive areas. I first heard about the project from a rather charming Opposer. Her emphatic assertions were clearly overblown. Hearing NIMBY-ists from afar is one thing but when they lecture you on your doorstep can be a quite pain! She wound me up and I realised it must be a substantial project if NIMBY-ists were so active!

I liked the bold architecture of the Memorial from the first time I saw the plans. And the more I thought about the project the more significant I realised it was. This would surely not be a monument just to the victims of the Holocaust, dreadful as that was, but, in a deeper sense, it would be an expression of our values about tolerance to minorities. And, importantly, it would provide education to support and sustain those values. This is so important for current and future generations who seem to be increasingly exposed to extreme, intolerant and misleading views.

The project does, of course, have a significant international dimension. When working abroad I was impressed how many people viewed the U.K. as traditionally one of the few bastions of liberal democracy, honest elections, minimal corruption, tolerance of minorities, reliable broadcasting and so on. To me, the Memorial would form part of that tradition. And its location would surely be important as it would show the political significance we attach to the project.

Turning to the Opposition, I commented in my note on their detailed concerns, which seem a bit overblown. I welcomed the Architect's attempts to address those concerns.

Finally, just a few words about my mind-set - and possibly that of others. When I first saw the plan to locate the project in the Gardens I was quite sure that it was right. Even though it would require a big change to a fairly small park. I then started to question if I really was right, it took some time to assess the pro's and con's.

I guess this is usually the case with powerful architecture. Our ancestors may have been horrified by the scale of King's College Chapel in Cambridge, Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. In Paris they were certainly shocked by the Eiffel Tower and the Centre Pompidou. These were all 'Marmite' projects and so is the Holocaust Memorial.

At first sight you either like or hate a Marmite project. And with this mind-set it's all too easy to be prejudiced and reach some quick but dodgy conclusions. Which is why we need to be particularly careful to think before reaching a conclusion.

You get a taste of this in the erudite Baroness Deech's long note, which actually sets out her conclusion in fairly strident terms in para 2 of her Introduction! Not the best way to analyse a complex Marmite project!

Getting away from that famous but sticky food, I would like to conclude, as a recent Supporter, by recording my gratitude to the government and many politicians for supporting and sustaining the project over the years.

I think they got to the right conclusion, probably quicker than me.

Thanks for allowing me to speak.

I hope this was helpful.

Stephen Frankiss