

10.44 Martyn Heather

Statement to the UK Holocaust Memorial Public Inquiry

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak to the Inquiry. My name is Martyn Heather and I am the Head of Education & Welfare at the Premier League however I would just like to state that the views I will express are my own.

You may well be wondering why someone from the world of football wishes to speak at this inquiry so if I could just give you a brief background this will hopefully give you some context. Part of the work we do with the young players in our academies, who range from aged 8 – 23, is seldom seen outside of the football environment. One of our stated aims is we wish to not only produce the best players in the world, but we also want to develop holistically well-rounded young people. As such we undertake a comprehensive programme of formal and informal education programmes supported by a wider programme of player care initiatives which we believe will not only equip the young people for life as a professional player but also prepare them for life outside of football whenever that outcome will arise. Having young people who are socially responsible and who contribute to society is something we continually strive for. A great example of this would be Marcus Rashford and his ongoing campaign to enable young people to access free school meals outside of term time. Marcus is a product of the excellent education and care he has received from his club.

One of the initiatives we undertake, as part of the holistic development, is a programme in partnership with the Holocaust Education Trust. The PL are currently coming to end of our two week 'No Room For Racism' campaign and you will have seen a lot around players taking the knee in support of 'Black Lives Matter'. These become no more than gestures if they are not supported through the education of players, and young people, around the issues of equality, diversity and inclusion helping to deepen their understanding of the differing forms that racism can take. Unfortunately, anti-Semitism can end up the poor relation when issues around racism are discussed and hence why we wanted to ensure that it is central to our education programmes.

I wish I could show you the videos of the young people who have been through our programme as their voices are far more powerful than mine; but the impact of learning about the holocaust, hearing survivor testimonies and visiting Auschwitz/Birkenau has given them a passion to ensure that history will not repeat itself.

Alongside this we have been heavily involved in the Foundation Stones project, alongside our friends at the Big Idea Company, whereby young people paint stones with messages around the holocaust and other genocides and which will form part of the foundations of the new memorial. The sessions where they have been painted, and the workshops which

support them, have led to extremely moving and thought-provoking statements. Bearing in mind the significance of stones in the Jewish faith there can be no better way to remember the victims than by including the stones within the building's foundations.

I was fortunate last year to be at a tournament in Poland where we had under 15 teams from England, Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic. As part of the off-field activities we hosted a Foundation Stones session. Whilst the languages for the delivery may have been different the messages on the stones conveyed the same language. Young people from around Europe who were learning the lessons of the past but standing united in their hopes for the future.

What relevance does this have to the inquiry? Well for HET and ourselves to deliver the most effective learning environment for the programme we have to travel to Poland to understand first hand the horrors of the holocaust and how it came about. In an ideal world every young person should have to visit Auschwitz/Birkenau as part of their education, but we know that is a difficult dream to achieve. Shamefully we have no central place in our country where we can bring, not just young people, but the public as a whole to learn about the atrocities that the Nazi regime inflicted on the Jewish people, and other minority groups, whilst looking at our own complicity and actions as a country in the events which eventually led to the persecution and massacre of 6 million Jewish people.

We should stand proud as a country that we at times were alone in standing up to the evils of the Nazi ideologies. People from my father's generation went to war to defeat Hitler's regime and many of them gave their lives in pursuit of freedom and this memorial should also be a testament to the sacrifices they made to enable us to live in the democratic society we have today.

There has been much discussion recently around our historical past and how we should teach it. Pulling down statues will not erase the mistakes of the past but teaching the narrative and context around events will empower people to understand why events occurred and how we can prevent the same mistakes in the future. Whilst through the excellent teaching resources of HET we can start to explore the role our country played, pre the second world war, in at times seeming to condone the actions of Nazi Germany. These lessons can be far more effectively taught through a dedicated interactive learning environment, which this memorial will provide, and which would give schools and youth groups, in particular, a place in this country where there is a focus for their education on the holocaust.

In the context of my own world I only recently discovered that in October 1935 the Football Association invited the German national team to play a friendly international this was just one month after Germany passed the Nuremberg Race Laws which saw Jewish rights taken away. To add to insult the game was played at White Hart Lane home of Tottenham Hotspur a club noted for its significant Jewish following. Despite protests there was little sympathy amongst the general footballing public and protests on the day of the game were robustly dealt with by the authorities. Three years later the England team again played Germany in Berlin and prior to the game the whole England team gave the Nazi salute.

I only mention these because we seem to want to erase these actions from the memories, having a dedicated learning centre where we not only recognize and remember the victims but which will also teach us about the mistakes we made helps us to not repeat them in the future. We have all seen a significant increase in hate crime, which many of our players suffer on a daily basis, and we need to be prepared to face our past and recognize that if hate goes on unchecked the terrible events of the holocaust can be the consequences.

To me there is only one place the UK holocaust memorial can be and that is right next to the seat of our democratic government, it sends an unequivocal and powerful message that we will, as a country, face up to our past but more importantly we will fight against all forms of prejudice, discrimination and racism and stand alongside the victims of these evils. It is a sad indictment if we feel it is more important to have a space to exercise and walk our dogs than it is to have a memorial and learning centre which will honour the memory of the victims.

I have been privileged in the past few years to hear the testimonies of five survivors from the holocaust. Their bravery in telling their personal stories entails them constantly having to revisit the horrors and suffering of the past that they faced. They do it because they do not want the memories of their families and other victims to be forgotten. Unfortunately, we are at a point where the number of survivors is diminishing. To not have somewhere their memories and stories continue to be told would be an insult to their bravery and allows the potential for the same to happen in the future.

I do not profess to be an architect or an expert on environmental impact but what I do see is a building which compliments its surroundings which looks aesthetically pleasing and I know every measure has been taken in ensuring there is minimal impact on the environment. For those who say we need a memorial but please not in my back yard I would say that is no different to those who were able to apply the 'out of sight out of mind' attitude towards the events that were unfolding in Germany in the 1930's.

I implore the inquiry to approve this application so that we will have a long overdue permanent memorial to remember the victims and to educate future generations to ensure history is never repeated.

Thank you again for allowing me this opportunity to speak to the inquiry.