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The Millennium Dome

The Millennium Dome is the centrepiece of the exhibition to be held in Greenwich in the year 2000 celebrating the millennium. The project is expected to cost £758 million in total, of which £399 million will be provided by a grant from the Millennium Commission - one of the five distributors of the proceeds from the National Lottery. In June 1997 the Labour Government reaffirmed its support for the Greenwich Exhibition, and Peter Mandelson, the Minister without Portfolio, was given overall responsibility for the project. Twelve million people are expected to visit the exhibition during its lifetime (31 December 1999 to 31 December 2000).

This paper provides a short history of the New Millennium Experience before examining the current state of play in the construction of the Dome, its contents, and the facilities for visiting it.

Philippa Carling & Antony Seely

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¹: This section was written by Philippa Carling. The remainder of the paper was written by Antony Seely.

I Introduction : A great statement of confidence

"Speaking for myself, I feel that it is right in the conduct of the nation's affairs every so often for nations to make a great statement of confidence, of great commitment to their own pride in the past and their optimism for the future. There could be no more obvious moment to do that than on the anniversary of the millennium." The Rt Hon Michael Heseltine CH MP in evidence to the Culture, Media & Sport Committee on 13 November 1997.¹

The Millennium Dome is the centrepiece of the exhibition to be held in Greenwich in the year 2000 celebrating the Millennium: a colossal structure - indeed, the largest single construction project in Europe - built on a 180 acre site on the 'Greenwich Peninsula', derelict for over a decade, the one-time site of a gasworks, a steel stockyard and a munitions factory. The Dome is to be 320m in diameter and 50m high at its centre - the same height as Nelson's Column. It is to house a single theatrical show, and 13 separate exhibitions - each reflecting an aspect of the theme: "*Time to make a difference.*" The Exhibition is to open to the public on 1 January 2000 - at 10am daily through the year. In tandem with the Exhibition, a range of regional activities and events are to be scheduled under the 'Challenge' initiative. This is to be launched in April 1998, and its best results will be shown during the Exhibition's tenancy at Greenwich.

The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, summarised the purpose of this festival in his speech on 24 February 1998, when the first details of the Dome's contents were published: "In this Experience I want people to pause and reflect on this moment, about the possibilities ahead of us, about the values that guide our society ... It will be an event to lift our horizons. It will be a catalyst to imagine our futures ... As we approach the Millennium we can boast that we have a richness of talent in this country that is unparalleled: the finest artists, authors, architects, musicians, designers, animators, software makers, scientists ... so why not put it on display?"²

The total budget of the Millennium Exhibition is £758 million, split between four sources: £399 million from the National Lottery Distribution Fund, granted by the Millennium Commission (one of the five distributors of the proceeds from the National Lottery); £150 million from sponsorship; £194 million from commercial revenue (ticket sales, merchandising and licensing); and, £15 million from disposal proceeds. The Commission has awarded a grant of up to £449 million to the New Millennium Experience Company Ltd, the operating company which is running the Exhibition.³ The company is to make a repayment of £50 million after the year 2000, resulting in a *net* total grant by the Commission of £399 million.

¹ Culture, Media & Sport Committee, *The Millennium Dome*, 11 December 1997 HC 340-II 1997-98 Q1

² Speech by the Prime Minister - "Why the Dome is good for Britain" - Royal Festival Hall, 24 February 1998

³ New Millennium Experience Company, *Time to make a difference: factsheets*, February 1998. A copy of Tony Blair's speech, cited above, and the full press pack issued on the Dome's contents, are deposited in the Library [HC Deb 23 February 1998 cc 27-28W Deposited Paper 3/6094].

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The Commission is an independent body whose sole purpose is to distribute 20% of the National Lottery Distribution Fund for "expenditure on projects to mark the year 2000 and the beginning of the third millennium." It has nine members appointed by the Queen: two Ministers, one of whom chairs the Commission; one member nominated by the Leader of the Opposition; and six independent members.⁴ The Millennium Commission was set up under the *National Lottery etc Act 1993*, which established the legal framework for the distribution of Lottery funds. During the Second Reading of the Bill, the then Secretary of State Peter Brooke referred to two previous national festivals in describing his ambitions for the millennium fund:

I see the millennium fund as largely promoting projects which lie beyond the scope of individual organisations. There are some notable precedents: the Great Exhibition of 1851, which was a remarkable celebration of the greatness of the arts, manufacture, industry and commerce in this country; and, 100 years later the Festival of Britain planned as a commemoration of the Great Exhibition, and described by its secretary general as "A tonic to the nation." Both left their architectural legacies - the splendidly innovative Crystal palace by Joseph Paxton, sadly now destroyed; and the Royal Festival hall, designed by Leslie Martin and Sir Robert Matthew ... [The fund] offers a scope for making real improvements to the face of the United Kingdom. Because it will be funded out of a new income stream, which will not count as public expenditure, the projects that we will be able to take forward will be additional to those already planned or in prospect.⁵

In February 1996 the Commission announced that Greenwich would be the site of a national exhibition to celebrate the millennium. Over the following year the future of the exhibition was called into question, particularly in the light of the General Election on 1 May 1997 and the possibility that an incoming Labour Government might cancel it. Nonetheless in June 1997 the Labour Government reaffirmed its support for the Greenwich exhibition, and Peter Mandelson, the Minister without Portfolio, was given responsibility for the project.

In its report on the Dome published in December 1997 the Culture, Media & Sport Committee proved to be a robust supporter of the project: "the Dome is magnificent in conception and likely to be breath-taking in execution ... the Commission, endorsed by the then Government, was right to decide to provide a central focus to the commemoration [of the millennium] in the form of a festival. Equally, the present Government was right to decide to continue with the project."⁶ Even so the Committee was strongly critical of certain aspects of the project: the paucity of information on what the Dome would contain, the lack of preparation of transport routes to the Dome and transport options at the site itself, and the uncertainty that surrounds the future of the Dome after the year 2000.

⁴ The Secretary of State Chris Smith is Chairman; Dr David Clark (Minister of Public Service) and Michael Heseltine the two other Members of the House on the Commission; the remaining members are: Sir John Hall, Dr Heather Cooper, Lord Glentoran, Lord Dalkeith, Simon Jenkins & Ms Patricia Scotland QC.

⁵ HC Deb 25 January 1993 cc 727-728

⁶ Culture, Media & Sport Committee, *The Millennium Dome*, 11 December 1997 HC 340-I 1997-98 p.x,vi

The Committee proposes to undertake periodic inquiries into the Dome and related matters in the future - something the Government has welcomed in its official response to the report.⁷ Indeed in a recent editorial the *Times* argued, "what is needed now is a sceptical eye on the project to ensure that the exhibits, the transport and the organisation of the Dome are as excellent as they need to be to justify the huge sums of lottery money that is being pumped into them."⁸

Since the project's inception the Millennium Dome has attracted a good deal of criticism;⁹ indeed if the *Times* is to be believed, "attacking the Dome is Britain's favourite sport."¹⁰ Some have thought the project is flawed because the ambitions held for it are inflated: "the Greenwich Dome will succeed if it provides a good, Disneyesque day out. To put the authority of the British state in play for things as evanescent as those is sheer folly."¹¹ Others have suggested that the Dome, far from allowing national concerns to be explored, will simply reflect present uncertainties: "if there is a hole in the Dome where a vision should be, it's because Britain itself suffers from just such a gap ... like most countries, we evolved gradually and over time - undefined by a collective mission. As a result, we struggle to understand Blairite talk of a national project."¹² Some have been disappointed that Christianity does not provide the central theme of the Exhibition, though the *Financial Times* has argued this too is simply a reflection of the times we live in: "Religious critics say that by relegating Christianity to a sub-division of the outer ring, the Dome exposes a void at society's heart. It may, in fact, be a perfect reflection of a society which lacks shared beliefs but possesses abundant technological means of expression."¹³

A more fundamental objection is that no festival, however grand, can predict the future: "the plans for the Millennium Dome are at least a useful reminder of a painful truth. Humanity is never more inept than when it celebrates itself en masse, except when it tries to exhibit the future ... Futurists have only ever managed to portray the present ... [the Dome will be] something unique added to the London skyline - an immortal monument to 1999."¹⁴ On reflection one might argue that this observation, while correct, misses the point: the Dome was never conceived as one vast crystal ball; rather, it is an opportunity to ask questions of the present in a way not afforded the country before. Difficulties in predicting what the Experience will be like are to be expected, given it has not been tried before: as the Prime Minister said in his speech on the Dome, "[its] content will contain a rich texture of feelings: spiritual, emotional, fun ... Exhilarating like Disney World - yet different. Educational and

⁷ Department for Culture, Media & Sport, *The Millennium Dome: Government Response to the Second Report from the Committee*, Cm 3886 February 1998

⁸ "Leader: Britain's Xanadu", *Times*, 25 February 1998

⁹ A Mori survey commissioned by the Catholic aid agency, Cafod, and the Catholic newspaper, *The Universe*, found that almost two-thirds of respondents felt that a higher priority should be put on the cancellation of Third World debt than on building the Dome to mark the year 2000. BBC news internet site on 2 February 1998 : <http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/>

¹⁰ "Leader: Britain's Xanadu", *Times*, 25 February 1998

¹¹ "Editorial: political follies under the Dome", *Independent*, 25 February 1998

¹² "Don't laugh: Mandy's Dome could be a big hit with the punters", *Guardian*, 25 February 1998

¹³ "Powers of expression could triumph over shared beliefs", *Financial Times*, 9 January 1998

¹⁴ "Editorial: a goofy Dome", *New York Times*, 6 March 1998

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interactive like the Science Museum - yet different. Emotional and uplifting like a West End musical - yet different."¹⁵

The relative weakness of the central theme - "*Time to make a difference*" - is thought by some to be a potential obstacle to the project obtaining both sponsorship and visitors. In its response to the first details of the Exhibition, the *Financial Times* was sceptical: "yesterday's unveiling of seven out of the thirteen exhibition zones makes it harder, rather than easier, to sum up what the experience will be about ... the plans ... showed a curious mixture of Disneyland, pedagogy, business promotion and showbiz - emulsified with a few drops of secular piety."¹⁶ The *Guardian* suggested that scepticism itself was the principal problem: "the first raft of ideas is sufficiently impressive to dispel most criticism and ought to persuade remaining sceptics to sublimate their negativism into positive energy to make the project as successful as it deserves to be."¹⁷ As Andrew Marr wrote recently in the *Independent*, "the Dome is so hated, by so many decent and intelligent people, and has accumulated so few friends and so many hard questions, that to be on its side puts me in a tiny minority."¹⁸

One of the Commission's members, Simon Jenkins, discussed the genesis of the Exhibition in evidence to the Culture, Media & Sport Committee and reflected on its precedents:

"Going right back to the start of the Millennium Commission experience, there was no question in our minds that there would have to be an exhibition of some sort ... we came to the conclusion that if we did not have any sort of national show, there would be a deep sense of public disappointment ... We always had a vision; it was a great national exhibition to rival the great exhibition, the Festival of Britain. Its general theme would be time. The acting out or the operating of that theme within the Dome would take the form of exhibits reflecting different sorts of time and it was only going to be a matter of working out how that particular vision of seeing time through the eyes of the British nation, how that particular vision was going to take concrete form ... which was going to be a matter of controversy ... I think ... the history of these exhibitions, the history of the great exhibitions through the Festival of Britain is the history of relentless cynical preamble. They are hated, loathed and despised in advance, but as soon as they are open, they are great, seminal cultural events. It is always thus ...

The most important thing for us was to keep the project driving forward, to make sure that the maximum amount of flexibility was available for different figures, and to hope that we did not suffer, if I may say so, from the Festival of Britain syndrome. Everybody here seems to have been to the Festival of Britain. I was, just. I do remember it was extremely boring. It was a nationalised industry trade show. I do not hear anybody now complaining about the buildings and it was a seminal event of post-war British culture. All that is *ex post facto*. If you had been sitting here in 1950 as a Select Committee, you would have been excoriating

¹⁵ Speech by the Prime Minister at the Royal Festival Hall, 24 February 1998

¹⁶ "Dome starts out on long haul to seduce sceptics", "Leader: Dome-ocracy", *Financial Times*, 25 February 1998

¹⁷ "Leading article: Dome show is on the road", *Guardian*, 25 February 1998

¹⁸ "True confessions of a social outcast", *Independent*, 7 January 1998

the extravagant waste of money on a show on the South Bank. If you read the history of that exhibition, Herbert Morrison went through hell."¹⁹

Herbert Morrison, the then Foreign Secretary, had taken over formal responsibility for the Festival of Britain in 1947, and his continued enthusiasm for the Festival during a difficult construction programme attracted considerable criticism.²⁰ As Morrison's biography comments, "his personal identification with the Festival - in his own and in other people's minds - was total. When a Tory MP with a felicitous slip of the tongue referred to him as 'the Lord Festival' it seemed appropriate and stuck." At its opening, Morrison explained "to have organised the Festival now may be madness but it is the sort of madness that has put us on the map and is going to keep us there."²¹

There are similarities also between the Millennium Festival and the Great Exhibition of 1851, held in Joseph Paxton's Crystal palace from 1 May to 11 October of that year.²² Henry Cole conceived the idea of an international exhibition in June 1849, with Prince Albert's patronage, only 18 months before the planned opening; and Paxton was given just nine days to design the palace itself. Critics of the Exhibition were forthright in their opposition. In June 1850 the *Times* argued, "the whole of Hyde Park and ... the whole of Kensington Gardens, will be turned into a bivouac of all the vagabonds of London."²³ In his discussion of the Exhibition the historian Asa Briggs noted that criticism of the project soon disappeared, in the colossal crowds who flocked to Hyde Park - crowds, one should note, who could attend thanks to the Victorian equivalent of the Travelcard:

"To Disraeli ... [the Exhibition] was "a godsend to the Government ... diverting public attention from their blunders." To those less interested in the promoting of political ambition it was a national triumph. The *frondeurs*, like Colonel Sibthorp,²⁴ who had ridiculed both the idea and the site of the Exhibition in 1850 - "an industrial exhibition in the heart of fashionable Belgravia to enable foreigners to rob us of our honour" - prophesied public indifference and financial failure. As events proved, there were over six million visitors between the opening and closing days ... Cheap excursions ensured the success of the enterprise. Visitors poured in from all parts of the country and overseas."²⁵

It is important to recall that the Dome is only one of the projects which has received funding from the Millennium Commission. To date the Commission has supported 186 capital projects on 3,007 sites to a total grant of £1,235 million and has also made Millennium Awards to individuals through existing grant making organisations who work in partnership with the

¹⁹ HC 340-II 1997-98 Q 97 Q 99 Q 106

²⁰ A national cement famine which developed in 1950 was frequently blamed on Morrison's Festival scheme.

²¹ Bernard Donoghue & G.W.Jones, *Herbert Morrison*, 1973 p.493

²² The palace was dismantled after the Exhibition and rebuilt on a much larger scale in Sydenham. Its role changed - from exhibition centre to pleasure palace - hosting concerts, sporting events and conferences, until destroyed by fire on 30 November 1936.

²³ Quoted in Patrick Beaver, *The Crystal Palace*, 1986 p.21

²⁴ MP for Lincoln who fought a campaign against the Exhibition.

²⁵ Asa Briggs, *Victorian People*, 1954 pp 43-44

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Commission.²⁶ By 31 December 2000 it expects to have allocated £1.7 billion from the millennium fund.²⁷ The Commission's net total grant to the Exhibition is set at £399 million - which is under 4% of the £10 billion the Lottery is expected to raise for good causes over its first seven years of life (ie, when Camelot's licence to operate the Lottery expires). In this respect the sheer size of the Commission's expenditure, and the Dome itself, is testament to the astonishing power of the National Lottery to raise money - and the transformation it has wrought in British public life. It is notable that other governments do not appear to have made preparations for a national festival on this scale.²⁸ This was a point touched on by Simon Jenkins in evidence to the Culture, Media & Sport Committee:

"Suppose we had not [funded an Exhibition]. Suppose the Government had said to us 'You are going to have £1.2 billion rising to £2 billion to celebrate the Millennium' - that was the phrase which was given to us as a remit ... and the Millennium Commission had said, 'We don't think we're up to it' ... I do think a lot of people would have said ... 'What one earth are you up to? Can you really not give us a decent show?' That was our starting point and I think we were right."²⁹

For Andrew Marr in the *Independent*, the potential lies in the Dome's ability to pose all its visitors some hard questions: "It needs to pose hard questions about human futures, the choices and lifestyles ahead, the consequences of new technologies. Is the car culture going to carry on growing, or shrivel away? What future is there for the countryside? What drugs will we take, and how will they change us? Will we explore space further, and why? Is there a limit to human longevity? Will we carry on finding and using carbon fuels? For how long will sex and reproduction continue to be linked? It doesn't need a state sponsored show to ask questions, of course. But the authority and reach of the state, even in these privatised years, is such that it can cause them to be asked and debated more widely and vigorously than any private company could ... It has the potential to be the grandest and most enjoyable act of public education any of us have witnessed."³⁰ A judgement on this most hopeful of possibilities awaits 31 December 1999.³¹

²⁶ So far 34 Partners have been offered £39m who will make grants to up to 15,000 individuals. £200 million is available for Millennium Awards. Millennium Commission press notice, 6 March 1998

²⁷ HC Deb 26 June 1997 cc 602-603W

²⁸ Australia, Germany and Italy are all linking national celebrations with other events (the Olympic games; the fall of the Berlin wall; the Vatican's celebration of the year 2000), whereas in France, "the Eiffel Tower will lay a giant egg and the Seine will be filled with coloured plastic fish at midnight on December 31 1999". "Widening the millennium experience", *Financial Times*, 23 January 1998

²⁹ HC 340-II 1997-98 Q 98 Q 99

³⁰ "True confessions of a social outcast", *Independent*, 7 January 1998

³¹ Computer aided design of the Dome shown overleaf: Chorley Handford / Hayes Davidson



II The Millennium Commission

The legal framework for the distribution of Lottery funds is provided by the *National Lottery etc Act 1993*. Under section 22 of the Act the net proceeds of the Lottery are paid into the National Lottery Distribution Fund, which is divided into five equal parts for the five good causes: arts, sport, heritage, charities and the celebration of the millennium.³² Once an appropriate amount is deducted for expenses the balance is apportioned between eleven bodies:

- The Arts Councils for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- The Sports Councils for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- The National Heritage Memorial Fund
- The Millennium Commission
- The National Lottery Charities Board.

The councils or boards of each body are responsible and accountable for the distribution of funds in their sectors, and for individual decisions on Lottery applications. Under section 26 of the Act the Secretary of State is empowered to issue policy directions which set out a framework for the wider aims of Lottery funding, types of projects and general grant criteria, and distributors must take these into account. For its part the Millennium Commission is permitted to make provision for the establishment of bursary or similar schemes, to provide funds for endowments and to support millennium celebrations.³³

Generally the Commission intends to make grants to four different types of project:

- large capital projects of national or regional significance to "be landmarks for the 21st century"
- smaller capital projects of local significance (minimum £100,000)
- a millennium festival, and local celebrations
- a millennium awards scheme - grants to individuals to unlock their potential and skills in a way which will improve the quality of life for the wider community.

Details of the projects under consideration by the Millennium Commission were given in a long written answer in June 1997:

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make a statement on the projects under consideration by his Department to commemorate the millennium.

³² Under the provisions of the *National Lottery Bill [HL] 1997-98*, which is being considered by Parliament at present, a sixth good cause would be added to these five: the New Opportunities Fund, which is to support specific initiatives, additional to core programmes funded through taxation, in the areas of health, education and the environment.

³³ The Commission was set up under ss 40-43 & schedule 6 of the *National Lottery etc Act 1993*. Its address is: Portland House, Stag Place, London SW1E 5EZ tel.0171 880 2001 The Commission also has a site on the Internet: <http://www.millennium.gov.uk>

Mr. Chris Smith: The Millennium Commission, which I chair, funds projects designed to mark the year 2000 and the beginning of the third millennium. Already over £1 billion of lottery money has been committed to over 100 projects on over 2000 sites across the country. By 31 December 2000, the Commission expects to have allocated £1.7 billion for its programme across the country.

This programme has three components:

The Capital Projects: £994 million has so far been allocated, on twelve landmark projects in the nine English regions and in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as on smaller, more local projects. Landmark projects include setting up the University for the Highlands and Islands; the Eden project in Cornwall which will establish one of the world's largest glass houses for extraordinary plants; the International Centre for Life in Newcastle, introducing people to the science of genetics; the Lowry Centre at Salford's waterfront which will feature a centre for Virtual Reality; and the Millennium Point in Birmingham, which will be a centre for scientific and educational excellence.

The Millennium Awards: Over £200 million will be set aside to help tens of thousands of talented people fulfil personal goals which have a wider community benefit. These will include projects managed by the Prince's Trust, The Royal Society, Mind and CSV Scotland.

The Millennium Exhibition: this will be a place of excitement and of education, opening up a "window on the future", and it will be based at Greenwich. The Commission will provide up to £400 million net, with a further £50 million of cashflow support. The Exhibition site on the regenerated Greenwich peninsula will also become the hub of a technological and educational network providing a legacy for the whole nation. There is a range of other activity being planned for the Millennium across the nation. My Department is responsible for a Millennium Co-ordinating Group, established as a forum for a wide variety of bodies with a part to play in events to mark the Millennium. I am attending the next meeting of this Group in the coming month, and will use that opportunity to develop the themes on which we want to focus. Out of this work will come proposals for national occasions, as well as arrangements for tracking and publicising the range of other events which will be organised by people around the country.

My Department is also recommending the calling of a one-off additional Bank Holiday to mark the Millennium, and will consult with relevant interest groups about a suitable date, which we hope will be 31 December 1999. Officials are also discussing with the Churches and representatives of other faiths the holding of a number of national services during the first weekend of the year 2000. Today we are publishing new information about how the Exhibition will take shape. I am writing to all right hon. and hon. Members about this, with information about other Millennium projects, and have placed copies in the House Libraries.³⁴

It is worth noting that the initial design of the Festival was quite different from the current plan of a single site at Greenwich. When the Millennium Commission first decided on the concept of the Festival in January 1996, it chose the designs of Imagination Group plc -

³⁴ HC Deb 26 June 1997 cc 602-603W

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which focused on securing the maximum degree of public participation in the project from its inception:

"In making its original proposals for the Millennium festival to the Commission, the Imagination Group decided to break away from the traditional conceptions of a festival along the lines of 1851 and 1951 and from the normal notions of theme-park construction. It did not want to create an exhibition that people simply went to and looked at, but a living, evolving Millennium destination, a place which the people of Britain had helped to create and in which they had a stake.³⁵ The one-year event would be the culmination of a three-year programme. The components of the exhibition would tour the country and evolve in response to popular involvement; mass participation in this development would then draw people to the exhibition site. The attractions, exhibits and regional contributions would descend upon the festival site in time for the Millennium, each unified by the theme of time."³⁶

Substantial delays in the project appear to have led to this idea being downplayed - then rejected,³⁷ though there remains a plan for a national programme of activities to be based on the themes of the Experience. The Select Committee found it "a matter for regret that the full force of Imagination's vision of the festival site as a climactic destination of a national programme developed over three years has been dissipated", though "the national programme is still likely to be an important component of the New Millennium Experience Company's brief to attract and involve people from across the United Kingdom."³⁸ Details of the national programme were given in the Government's response to the report:

"The Department for Culture, Media & Sport in partnership with the Millennium Commission, the New Millennium Experience Company and the Local Government Association will be hosting a series of conferences beginning on 27 February in Bristol, followed by conferences in Belfast, Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham, Swansea and finishing in London on 16 April. The conferences will announce the establishment of new Millennium Festival Committees for England, Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland which will promote and enable co-operation and co-ordination between funding bodies across a wide range of projects, and the establishment of a £100 million fund to support activities – the result of a joint commitment by the National Lottery Distributors of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in partnership with the New Millennium Experience Company.

The conferences will also disseminate information about the organisation and funding of millennium events, activities and celebrations around the country which are being, or could be, promoted and supported by members of the

³⁵ Evidence p.51; Q 143

³⁶ HC 340-I 1997-98 p.xiii

³⁷ Indeed Imagination withdrew from the project in March 1997.

³⁸ HC 340-I 1997-98 p.xiv

Millennium Festival Committees. In addition, the conferences will provide a forum for the New Millennium Experience Company to announce details of its own national programme and how, under the overarching theme of "Time to Make a Difference", the programme will both reflect and relate to the Millennium Experience at Greenwich. Both the New Millennium Experience Company's national programme and that of the Millennium Festival Committees will be supported through NMEC's network of 12 offices in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English Regions. These will act as one-stop shops for events' organisers."³⁹

Some have wondered quite why the Millennium is being celebrated on 31 December 1999 when the world will enter the third millennium a year later, on 1 January 2001. Baroness Trumpington set out the reasons behind this during a Lords debate on the Millennium Fund in January 1994:

The noble Lord, Lord Redesdale, asked me when the old millennium ends. It is worth putting that on the record. The historically correct date on which the new millennium will begin is 1st January 2001. But the Government recognise that many people in this country will wish to celebrate the millennium as we begin the year 2000. That is why the *National Lottery etc. Act* refers specifically to celebrations which mark the year 2000 and the beginning of the third millennium. Many people have suggested that the Government are trying to stop people celebrating in the year 2000. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is not for the Government to tell people when they should or should not be celebrating the millennium. Indeed, we have an excuse here if anyone is looking for one to celebrate for a whole year. I hope that it will all be a huge success.⁴⁰

³⁹ Cm 3886 February 1998 pp 1-2

⁴⁰ HL Deb 31 January 1994 cc 1180-1181

III The Exhibition at Greenwich (July 1995 - June 1997)

The Millennium Commission was established in February 1994, and the following month it decided as a matter of policy it might wish to fund millennium celebrations including a possible national festival. By March 1995 the Commission had published a consultation paper on its proposed procedure for choosing the location and shape of the Exhibition, to promote "the most exciting and enjoyable experience available at the millennium anywhere in the world."⁴¹ Two separate but inter-related tendering exercises began, to select a site for the festival and to select an operator, and by January 1996 the Commission announced its preference for the designs and concepts submitted by the company Imagination Group plc.⁴²

The choice of location lay between Greenwich and the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, and the next month the Commission's choice of Greenwich was explained by the then Secretary of State for National Heritage, Virginia Bottomley, in a statement to the House:

The Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a statement to the House about the millennium exhibition. The Millennium Commission, of which I am chairman, announced this morning its preference to hold an exhibition, based on the theme of time, on the Greenwich peninsula in the year 2000. Following consultation, the commission announced last year its aspirations for a national exhibition to provide the focus for the celebrations of the year 2000. The commission believed that there should be a single shared experience for the whole nation as we move into the 21st century, and that we should celebrate our achievements, abilities and potential as a nation.

The commission, with only grant-giving powers, needed to identify a location and an organisation capable of producing an event that would meet the commission's aspirations and justify the expenditure of lottery money. The commission therefore conducted two separate competitive processes, to identify the potential site and the potential operator. In January, it announced that it had decided not to proceed with the Derby or Stratford sites, and that it had asked Imagination Group Ltd. to develop further its proposals for the exhibition, to enable the commission to make a fully informed choice between the two remaining sites—the national exhibition centre and the Greenwich peninsula. Today's announcement by the commission takes the process closer to a firm commitment to finance an exhibition.

The commission was impressed by the NEC's potential: it was at the heart of the country, was well networked and had a sound operational track record. The strength of local support and the dedication and commitment of the team greatly impressed the commission; I pay tribute to that. The commission decided, however, that Greenwich offered the greatest potential as the site for an exhibition that would meet the commission's aspirations, allowing more people to see a more exciting presentation of the exhibition theme based on time. The chosen site is on the prime

⁴¹ Quoted in the memorandum given by the Commission to the Select Committee HC 340-II 1997-98 p.30

⁴² The company withdrew from the project in March 1997. In evidence the company's director explained that "we felt at that time there was not a credible experienced operating company in place with the vision and the structures to deliver the project ... It is a huge and wonderful opportunity, this project, and it really does require a steamroller approach to get it done in time." HC 340-II 1997-98 QQ 144, 154

meridian, and the Imagination proposals for Greenwich feature "The Circle of Time", adding a potential dramatic landmark.

Moreover, the Greenwich peninsula could enable the commission to deliver a substantial legacy by regenerating an important part of south London through a potential permanent entertainment and leisure development, together with residential and retail space. It could also stimulate the further regeneration of the remaining British Gas landholding on the peninsula. That would represent excellent value for grant.

I stress that the celebration will not be confined to Greenwich; there will be a nationwide programme. The programme organisation will begin later this year. In 1997, we will see the development of a series of regional centres to shape the content of the exhibition. Artistic, scientific, historical and sporting components will be incorporated into the millennium exhibition. In 2000, each region will own a week in the millennium exhibition programme and will deliver its vision of the new millennium. The exhibition will be presented in 12 themed pavilions, each focusing on a different interpretation of time—such as "Action Time" and "Past Time"—with parallel entertainment, education and activity programmes.

The commission is inviting Sir Peter Levene to examine the work completed to date and the work that Imagination, British Gas and English Partnerships are undertaking, and to provide advice to the commission by its May meeting as to whether a sound and commercially viable proposal is deliverable. If so, the commission expects to confirm the grant, partnership funding, planning and other implementational issues by September. British Gas will now proceed with site decontamination and preparation works on the Greenwich peninsula. For the first time, the commission has made public its financial commitment to the exhibition—in principle, it is willing to commit up to £200 million in lottery grant to the exhibition, and the remaining capital and operating costs will be raised from other sources. The commission stressed that the exhibition depends on the private sector to deliver its full potential. The commission will need to be fully satisfied of the viability of the whole project, including the firm commitment of private sector support, before confirming its grant decision.

The exhibition is the single most significant event to be funded by the national lottery. The lottery is already helping to regenerate the cultural fabric of the country, providing financial assistance to projects that develop social cohesion by bringing people together to participate in sport, the arts and heritage projects. It is changing the landscape for community involvement. With a project of this scale, it is inevitable that there will be implications for Government. In order to ensure that the Government's participation is well planned and co-ordinated, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has today announced that he has asked my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to convene a ministerial group that will have the task of overseeing the Government's role and taking forward the necessary planning of any Government involvement in this event.

This unique opportunity to stage the millennium exhibition would not be possible without the contribution from the national lottery, which has already brought benefits to people across the country. It provides the means by which the dreams and aspirations of the people can find their realisation. Future generations will look back on the millennium exhibition as the time and the place when the United

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Kingdom showed the world just what we can achieve, working together as a nation to leave a truly lasting legacy for the future.⁴³

An operating company - Millennium Central - was set up to run the festival under the aegis of British Airways which had agreed to be a major private sponsor. However by the start of 1997 the Commission and the Conservative Government had concluded the project should be managed in the public sector. One problem had been the difficulty faced by Millennium Central in raising the £150 million in private sponsorship required to match the Commission's £200 million grant, and the viability of the project appeared in doubt. The company became a Non-Departmental Public Body subject to requirements generally applied to such bodies by the Government, and a Government Minister was established as its sole shareholder.⁴⁴

Under the terms of the *National Lottery etc Act 1993* money from the Lottery may only be channelled to the Millennium Commission until 31 December 2000, when the Commission itself winds up. However the Secretary of State may make an order to extend the Commission's life,⁴⁵ and in January 1997 the then Minister Virginia Bottomley explained that provision would be made to extend the funding life of the Commission for one year:

On 6 December last year, the Millennium Exhibition operating company Millennium Central submitted its proposals for a National Exhibition to the Millennium Commission. The Commissioners decided at their meeting on 11 December that an Exhibition will take place in Greenwich in the year 2000. At its meeting on 13 January 1997 the Commission agreed that the indicative budget now available provides a basis on which a grant of £200 million can be made. Immediate negotiations on the terms and conditions of grant will begin in parallel with the preparation of a detailed business plan and the creation of the management team. This will be done in such a way as to drive costs down. In addition to the Commission's grant, the Exhibition will be funded through commercial income including private sector sponsorship. The Millennium Commission has a target of £150 million for sponsorship, of which more than half has been identified. Entrance charges will be set at a level which allows as many people as possible to attend but which also maximises revenue.

The operational targets for visitor numbers & income for the Exhibition are, of course, estimates and will remain so even when the detailed business plan is prepared. The Government will expect the business plan to be delivered within the indicative budget and will keep progress under continuous review to ensure that a first class Exhibition is delivered at Greenwich in the most cost effective way. Nevertheless, the Government has taken the view that the Commission should have provision to cover variations from the estimates in the plan without prejudicing its existing grant programmes and the possibility of a fourth round of capital projects.

The National Lottery etc Act 1993 allows for money from the National Lottery to be channelled to the Millennium Commission only until 31 December 2000, although that period may be extended by Order. An Order will accordingly be brought forward to extend the funding life of the Commission for one year. Millennium Central understands that should the need for provision to cover variations arise, it will be required to make a new application to the Commission for this purpose. But any such application will only be made for contingencies and inflation which at present cannot be predicted and both the Government and Opposition agree that everything

⁴³ HC Deb 28 February 1996 cc 887-888

⁴⁴ Millennium Central Limited, as it was then called, became operative on 12 February 1997 when its first Board meeting was held. At the time its sole shareholder was the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Roger Freeman.

⁴⁵ Under section 30 of the *National Lottery etc Act 1993*

possible must be done to keep within the existing budget. The Government is putting in place the normal public sector procedures necessary to monitor and review a project of this sort. No public expenditure will be committed to the Exhibition beyond that which will be made available to English Partnerships to acquire and prepare the site.

The Government has decided that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Mr Roger Freeman, should assume responsibility for Millennium Central. It would not be right for the Secretary of State for National Heritage to take this role in view of her position as Chairman of the Millennium Commission. To do so would also fetter her discretion as Secretary of State to act properly under the terms of the National Lottery etc Act 1993. Mr Freeman will be advised by the Department for National Heritage. He will be the company's shareholder and will appoint its board members and will be answerable to Parliament for its performance. The Government is also pleased to announce that Robert Ayling, Chief Executive of British Airways, is to be Chairman of Millennium Central and that Jennifer Page, currently Chief Executive of the Millennium Commission, will be Chief Executive of the company.

The Government has discussed the Millennium Commission's plans in detail with the Opposition, who are represented on the Commission. The Opposition remain enthusiastic about the proposed exhibition at Greenwich. They will want, if elected, to review all aspects of the project delivery, to ensure it is cost effective and properly implemented so that it will come within the existing budget. The Government is pleased that the Shadow Heritage Secretary, Dr Jack Cunningham, who has supported the plan for a National Exhibition from the start, has agreed to the terms of this announcement.

A National Exhibition should be a landmark in the lives of British people; it should be an event of which the whole country can be proud and which other nations will admire, and be a worthy successor to the 1851 Great Exhibition and 1951 Festival of Britain. The decontamination and regeneration of the 300 acre Greenwich Peninsula - the largest single derelict site in Southern England, just six miles from Westminster - will be one of the great legacies of the event. 5000 people will work to build the Exhibition. The associated national programme will involve the whole country in the celebration of the Millennium. This will be an exhibition for the whole nation.⁴⁶

Though the Minister's statement did not specify the amount of the contingency funds referred to in this announcement, they were agreed at just under £250 million. This remains the case.

The Greenwich Peninsula is a 294 acre site used over the last century primarily as a gasworks, but which has lain derelict and contaminated for the last decade. English Partnerships, a Government sponsored regeneration agency,⁴⁷ is responsible for the 'remediation' of the land and the long-term development of the whole site,⁴⁸ and as such, is responsible for the only direct expenditure of taxpayers' money on the project:

"The highly contaminated 294 acre former gasworks in Greenwich was purchased by English Partnerships in February 1997 from British Gas. Under the terms of

⁴⁶ HC Deb 20 January 1997 cc 448-449W

⁴⁷ The Agency describes itself in its memorandum to the Select Committee: "English Partnerships is a Government sponsored agency which works in partnership throughout the English regions to transform areas of need into quality places for people to live and work. We are the only regeneration body able to represent the whole of England initiatives such as Greenwich Peninsula. Since we began operation in April 1994 we have become a national centre of expertise in the regeneration of derelict land and buildings, the attraction of investment from overseas and the management of land and property." HC 240-II 1997-98 p.144

⁴⁸ The Millennium Festival itself is to occupy only 130-180 acres of the Peninsula.

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the acquisition British Gas is responsible for undertaking all statutory decontamination works on the site and for meeting all payments to London Underground in respect of the new Greenwich North Station. English Partnerships' preferred approach to procuring the site was to endeavour to establish a joint venture with British Gas to deliver a site for the proposed Exhibition and secure the long term regeneration of the Peninsula. Whilst British Gas recognised the long term benefits of establishing a joint venture, the negotiations ultimately proved abortive. The only option open to English Partnerships was therefore to secure the site if the Exhibition programme was to be maintained and the Peninsula regenerated for a high quality sustainable mixed development. The Peninsula is situated on the south bank of the Thames and is accessed from the south by the A102M and from the north by the Blackwall Tunnel. London Underground are constructing the Jubilee Line extension and the North Greenwich station. This is due to be opened in September 1998 when it will ultimately provide a 14 minute journey to the West End.

In the short term, approximately 180 acres at the northern end of the site will be used for the Millennium Experience. English Partnerships is preparing the site for the Experience but is not involved in its delivery. We have entered into an agreement for lease with the New Millennium Experience Company for the Exhibition site. The lease provides *inter alia* for English Partnerships to undertake site preparation works and on completion for the operating company to enter into an occupation lease which expires on 30 June 2001. A peppercorn rental is reserved under this arrangement. There is an option for New Millennium Experience to extend the lease by a further 12 months, subject to paying a commercial rental, at which time the Dome is to be removed and the site reinstated unless English Partnerships agree otherwise. Our primary concern is the long term regeneration of the entire Peninsula. Our role in relation to the Experience is to provide the infrastructure and a serviced development platform on which the Millennium buildings are being constructed. Our aim is to ensure that the infrastructure is not restricted to the need of the Experience but serves a dual purpose, allowing the long term regeneration of a much wider area. All contracts are, to date, running to time and to budget.

The Agency is projected to spend up to £200 million on the Greenwich Peninsula over the next 10 years. English Partnerships has to date spent some £38 million, of which £20 million was spent on purchasing the site and £18 million on reclamation and infrastructure.⁴⁹

Turning from the site to the Millennium Dome itself, the Select Committee's report provides the following history of the Dome's design and construction:

"In July 1995 the Millennium Commission asked potential Exhibition operators to provide "an all-weather venue capable of accommodating a large audience for

⁴⁹ Memorandum by English Partnerships to the Select Committee HC 240-II 1997-98 p.145

one-off events and entertainment."⁵⁰ Imagination's initial proposals for the site envisaged an arrangement of separate pavilions within a circular footprint.⁵¹ In May 1996 the Richard Rogers Partnership, working closely with the Imagination Group, devised the concept of a large, single, weather-protective envelope for the Exhibition - the Dome.⁵² The architect Lord Rogers of Riverside described the Dome to us as essentially "a very big umbrella" to protect people from the rain and the wind, that enclosed the biggest space with the least amount of material, that followed the bend of the Thames, that was "a very classical shape", that maximised flexibility as to content and "that would hopefully lift the spirit architecturally".⁵³

This concept captured the imagination and won the backing of the Millennium Commission in August 1996, when it asked the Richard Rogers Partnership to seek planning permission. An application was submitted in October 1996 and, following public consultation by Greenwich Council, outline planning permission was given in January 1997."^{54,55}

The design of the Dome has gathered some criticism. In March 1996 the *Times* observed, "for £200 million of lottery cash we have just one image: a giant whoopee cushion run through with cocktail sticks but big enough to contain 13 Albert Halls and 50,000 people."⁵⁶ When it visited the site in November 1997 the Select Committee was more impressed by the building: "the structure has great power, even in skeletal form, to excite and inspire." Nonetheless the Committee noted one fundamental flaw, arising - so it felt - from the way the project had been run from the start: the lack of detail on what this magnificent structure is going to contain. "[The Dome] must not be seen purely as an exercise in monumental architecture. Its success will depend crucially upon its contents during the Millennium Experience and ultimately upon its use thereafter ... It is the greatest of pities that the project was not planned to include the Dome's future use from day one. This weakness arose directly from the absence of adequate private or public sector leadership of the project for much of 1996."⁵⁷ Indeed in the aftermath of the 1997 General Election it was thought that the survival of the entire project was open to question, dependent on the views of the new Labour Government.⁵⁸

⁵⁰ Evidence, p.31

⁵¹ Evidence, pp 32, 53, 56

⁵² Evidence, pp 56 53

⁵³ Q 157

⁵⁴ Evidence, pp 32-33, 56-57, 13

⁵⁵ HC 340-I 1997-98 p.ix

⁵⁶ "Lift off for dome starts millennium countdown", *Times*, 26 March 1997

⁵⁷ HC 340-I 1997-98 p.x

⁵⁸ "Blair puts exhibition plans to the 'Euan' test", *Times*, 19 June 1997

IV The New Millennium Experience Company (June 1997 -)

In January 1997 when the Conservative Government made provision to extend the life of the Millennium Commission, the Labour party agreed to the changes on the proviso that, if elected, they would review all aspects of the project delivery, to ensure it was cost effective and properly implemented so that it would come within the existing budget.⁵⁹ The review was undertaken in May and early June. On 19 June the Government reaffirmed its support for the Greenwich exhibition, under five conditions:

- it would result in no extra burden on the public purse
- its content would entertain and inspire
- it would be a truly national event
- it would provide a lasting legacy
- the management structure of the operating company would be strengthened.⁶⁰

The *Financial Times* reported the decision in the following way:

Mr Blair told the cabinet that the dawn of the year 2000 would be 'a hugely important moment in history' and that the event was 'an excellent idea', ending two years of tortuous speculation over whether the Greenwich skyline would ever be reshaped by a mammoth millennium dome. Downing Street said Mr Blair had told colleagues 'there were times when political leaders have to follow their instincts' and that the decision over whether to back the exhibition was one of them.

Mr Blair was quick to identify with the exhibition's fate by visiting the site of the dome. As he did so, Lord Rogers, a friend of Mr Blair's and architect of the dome, described his decision as 'courageous and visionary'. Mr Blair's cabinet colleagues expressed astonishment that he was giving the green light to an exhibition which has considerable financial risks and, as yet, no central theme. 'Tony is a buccaneer and he loves to take a risk,' said one. 'But this is about as risky as any decision he will ever take.' ... But the prime minister emphasised that his government would 'relaunch' the project over the next few weeks, ensuring that five key tests are applied.⁶¹

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport, Chris Smith, described the Government's reasons for going ahead with the Dome in a letter to Norman Baker MP:

To have abandoned the exhibition would have wasted many millions of pounds of public investment already committed by the previous administration, but our decision was based on more than this. As the Prime Minister said when he announced the Government's decision on 19 June, we believe the New Millennium Experience at Greenwich will be a dazzling way for our country to start the new millennium, that it will create a valuable legacy for the nation and that it will help to regenerate a disadvantaged area of South East London.⁶²

As part of the Government's review, a revised business plan was produced, which estimated expenditure of up to £758 million. It was forecast that £150 million would come from

⁵⁹ HC Deb 20 January 1997 cc 448-449W

⁶⁰ Memorandum by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport HC 340-II 1997-8 p.107

⁶¹ The five tests cited above. "Blair backs Millennium dome despite sceptics", *Financial Times*, 20 June 1997 Also reported in: "Dome chiefs baffled by Blair's five demands", *Times*, 20 June 1997

⁶² 'Will write' answer dated 20 October to PQ: HC Deb 31 July 1997 c.516W

sponsorship and £209 million from commercial revenue, receipts and disposal income. It was agreed that the shortfall between forecast expenditure and forecast income would be made up from lottery receipts. The new plans foresaw a cash-flow requirement from the Millennium Commission of £449 million.⁶³

Of this total, only the £200 million sum which had been announced earlier will come from the Commission's main budget. The additional £249 million will be provided by an extension of the period during which the Millennium Commission receives certain proportions of the National Lottery Distribution Fund. This additional amount is ring-fenced from the Commission's main budget so that the needs of the Greenwich project "will be met without any siphoning off of resources or cash from any other Millennium project".⁶⁴ The current plans envisage a repayment by the Company to the Commission of £50 million during the operating period, resulting in a *net* total grant by the Commission of £399 million.⁶⁵

In the view of the Select Committee the new Labour Government made the right decision:

"In view of our earlier comments on the conception of the Millennium festival and the potential of the Dome, we welcome the Government's decision in June 1997 to proceed with the project. In the light of the financial arrangements for the project, there was never a realistic prospect that the money committed to Greenwich could be diverted to another, appropriate single project. Had the project been abandoned, the additional sum of £249 million would have been spread among the lottery distributing bodies and the opportunity to provide a principal focus for millennium celebrations would have been lost. A considerable proportion of the original grant might have been wasted and the long-term regeneration of the site would have been placed in jeopardy."⁶⁶

Peter Mandelson, the Minister without Portfolio, was given responsibility for the project, along with the Secretary of State.⁶⁷ The operating company running the project was renamed the New Millennium Experience Company,⁶⁸ and Mr Mandelson made the single shareholder.⁶⁹ Details of the Company's Board were given in a press notice:

"The Minister Without Portfolio, Peter Mandelson, announced on 26 June that Michael Grade, Sir Alan Cockshaw and Ruth Mackenzie had agreed to serve

⁶³ This will be a cash grant which will not be adjusted for inflation. It will be paid in instalments up to and including financial year 1999-2000.

⁶⁴ HC 340-II pp 35, 86, 107, 49-50; QQ 105, 410. On current forecasts of lottery income, it will be necessary to continue the funding life of the Millennium Commission until sometime in 2002 to meet the Government's funding commitment: HC Deb 5 December 1997 c.373W

⁶⁵ HC 340-II pp 49-50

⁶⁶ HC 340-I 1997-98 p.xi

⁶⁷ Dept of National Heritage press notice, *Chris Smith sets out the Millennium Plan*, 26 June 1997

⁶⁸ The New Millennium Experience Company, 110 Buckingham Palace Road, London. SW1W 95B tel: 0171 808 8200

⁶⁹ In evidence to the Committee the Minister explained, his position as single shareholder "is the technical basis on which I hold Government responsibility for the company following its reconstitution at the beginning of this year." HC 340-II 1997-98 Q396

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as Board members of The New Millennium Experience Company. The appointments take effect from 9 July 1997.

Notes to editors

1 The New Millennium Experience Company is the operating company for the Millennium Exhibition at Greenwich and its associated national programme throughout the UK. The Exhibition will open on 31 December 1999. The New Millennium Experience Company has three sources of funds for the Exhibition: a grant from the Millennium Commission, funding from sponsors and admission fees, merchandising etc.

2 Michael Grade was formerly Chief Executive of Channel 4 and is currently Chairman of First Leisure Company; Ruth Mackenzie is currently Executive Director of the Nottingham Playhouse and soon to be Director of the Scottish Opera; Sir Alan Cockshaw is Chairman of AMEC Construction. With the exception of Ruth Mackenzie who, as a longstanding member of the Labour Party, has spoken in its support, none of these individuals has carried out any political activity in the past five years or holds any other ministerial appointment.

The three new appointees were selected from a number of qualified candidates. However, the public interest in the announcement and the need for urgency meant it was not possible to convene a panel with independent membership to scrutinise the process. The Commissioner for Public Appointments has been informed. The positions are not remunerated.

3. Other Board members of The New Millennium Experience Company are:

Chairman: Bob Ayling Chief Executive, British Airways

Deputy Chairman: David Quarmby Chairman, British Tourist Authority and English Tourist Board

Chief Executive: Jennie Page CBE

Ian Ash: Director of Corporate Relations, British Telecom

Len Duvall: Leader, Greenwich Borough Council

Sir Brian Jenkins: Chairman, Woolwich Building Society

The Hon Sara Morrison: A Director, GEC.⁷⁰

The company has 40 staff at present, ranging from the Chief Executive through to IT and administrative staff, though details such as the remuneration packages of senior staff awaits publication of the company's accounts.⁷¹ It has commissioned the company International

⁷⁰ Dept of National Heritage press notice, *Peter Mandelson announces 3 appointments to the New Millennium Experience Company*, 26 June 1997

⁷¹ HC Deb 17 July 1997 c.325W

Management Group (IMG) to raise the £150 million in sponsorship necessary for the exhibition, under the following terms:

The fees paid to Mark McCormack's International Management Group (IMG) will be on a sliding scale of 4% to 15% of the sponsorship raised, reflecting the fact that its task will become more difficult as the sponsorship total rises. All IMG's fees will be success-related, and it will bear all its own costs: ie no sponsorship, no fee. If IMG is successful in achieving the target it has been set, it will receive in the order of £9 million. We are pleased that IMG is part of the team that is working to make the Millennium Experience at Greenwich a success.⁷²

Details on the sponsorship raised to date were given in a written answer:

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what level of sponsorship has to date been achieved in respect of the Millennium Experience at Greenwich. [31195]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is today announcing its first four Founding Partners: BT, Manpower, Sky and Tesco. These four companies are each committing a minimum of £12 million value to the overall Millennium Experience. The Company is also announcing signed confirmation of the commitments of British Airways and BAA. Together, those six companies are making a direct private sector contribution of nearly £59 million. The New Millennium Experience Company also has commitments coming up for detailed negotiation which would add a further £16 million, taking the overall level of support to £75 million; and the Company is in serious negotiation with 40 other potential sponsors. The NMEC is also announcing today that it has reached agreement in principle with Camelot to be the official distributor of tickets for the Millennium Experience at Greenwich. This will mean that there is a ticket outlet within 3 miles of 95% of the population of the United Kingdom.⁷³

There has been considerable interest in the contracts that the company has signed up to now, though information on this question has been limited on grounds of commercial confidentiality.⁷⁴ Similarly the Government has been unwilling to require the New Millennium Experience Company to publish interim accounts:

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: To ask the Minister without Portfolio (1) when the New Millennium Experience Company will publish its next set of accounts; [13001]
(2) when the New Millennium Experience Company will place interim company accounts in the Library. [13002]

Mr. Mandelson: The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), then named Millennium Central Limited, became operative on 12 February 1997 when its first Board meeting was held. On the same date the shares of the company were transferred to the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the company became subject to the normal controls applied by the Government to non-departmental public bodies (NDPB). The

⁷² 'Will write' letter from the Secretary of State to Jeremy Corbyn MP dated 20 October in answer to PQ HC Deb 31 July 1997 cc 515-516W

⁷³ HC Deb 24 February 1998 c.204W

⁷⁴ HC Deb 11 November 1997 c.533W

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NMEC is required to produce its first Accounts and Annual Report for the period 12 February 1997 to 31 March 1998 and to submit them to the Shareholder by 30 September 1998. In line with policy applying to all NDPBs, the NMEC's Accounts and Annual Report will be published and copies will be placed in the Library of the House.⁷⁵

Further details on this position were given in a subsequent written answer, though some information has been provided on the contracts the company has entered into:

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio (1) if he will release interim accounts and contractual information for the New Millennium Experience Company before September 1998, under the Public Interest Override provisions in Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information: Guidance on Interpretation; [17591]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 11 November 1997, Official Report, column 533, what paragraphs of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information: Guidance on Interpretation form the basis of his decision not to release interim accounts and details of contracts awarded by the New Millennium Experience Company. [17613]

Mr Mandelson: The new Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) are accountable to Parliament in the same way as any other Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB). As such they are required to produce audited accounts for the period between February 1997 and March 1998 by September 1998, and these will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament at that time. Expenditure for the period before the Company became an NDPB is accounted for in the Millennium Commission's Annual Report which was placed in the libraries of both Houses in October 1997.

Only companies listed on the stock exchange are required to produce interim accounts.

To require NMEC to produce audited interim accounts would take time and place a more onerous regime on them than on other NDPBs.

The Code of Practice on Access to Government Information only relates to requests to disclose information that currently exists. As the Company does not produce Interim Accounts, the Code of Practice is not relevant in relation to this request.

As far as the request for the disclosure of contractual information is concerned, I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I have given today to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews). I do not consider that the Public Interest Override provision on Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information: Guidance on Interpretation is relevant or appropriate in this case.⁷⁶

Lord Sefton of Garston asked Her Majesty's Government:

What arrangements have been made with any company or organisation regarding the Millennium Dome, and in particular:

- (a) whether tenders were requested before the Government agreed to the constructions;
- (b) whether the financial provisions were approved by HM Treasury;

⁷⁵ HC Deb 11 November 1997 c.533W

⁷⁶ HC Deb 22 December 1997 cc 400-401W

- (c) whether they will recover any costs;
- (d) when each company involved was registered; and
- (e) who are the directors of each company involved.

Lord McIntosh of Haringey: The New Millennium Experience Company Ltd (NMEC) has responsibility for building the dome and for developing and operating the Millennium Experience at Greenwich and an associated national programme of events and activities. The NMEC operates according to company law but it is also a non-departmental public body (NDPB) and follows the appropriate procedures for the procurement of works, goods and services.

The grant memorandum between the Millennium Commission and NMEC provides for the Millennium Commission to oversee the procurement procedures implemented by the NMEC and, in certain cases, the Commission's or the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's approval is required before contracts are entered into. The Treasury has no role with respect to individual contracts.

NMEC (then called Millennium Central Ltd) became operational in February 1997. Tenders for works, goods and services sought during the period between February 1997 and 19 June 1997—the date on which the Government made a final decision to proceed with the project—were made on the basis of an interim grant contract with the Millennium Commission which contained provisions to cover the project being cancelled following any review. In a few cases the NMEC took over procurement processes already begun by the Millennium Commission as part of its developmental work on the project prior to the Commission's formal award of grant to the NMEC.

The only contract that NMEC has cancelled to date was that with Koch Hightex, which contained a cancellation clause to cover just such an eventuality. The NMEC is now party to over 90 works, goods, and services contracts. It does not hold details of the directors of each of the companies involved or when each of the companies was registered. The costs of compiling such details could only be done at disproportionate cost to the taxpayer.⁷⁷

In evidence to the Select Committee, "Mr Mandelson admitted that the Company might appear to have a sense of 'inhibition' which he attributed to earlier instability of the project and its proneness to criticism." For its part the Committee welcomed the decision to publish the company's business plan - excluding commercially sensitive material - in March 1998: "We recommend that revised business plans be made public periodically thereafter. We expect to be able to compare these published plans with the full texts in each case to satisfy ourselves that all exclusions are genuinely on the grounds of commercial confidentiality."⁷⁸ In addition the Committee raised a wider point about accountability:

"The Millennium Experience is a complex and high risk project. Accountability matters. It matters above all else because of the level of expenditure involved. Mr Mandelson told us in reference to the additional grant through the Millennium Commission: "It is not public money, no. It is lottery money."⁷⁹ In the context of accountability, this is a distinction without a difference. It is not money raised

⁷⁷ HL Deb 19 January 1998 cc 217-218W

⁷⁸ HC 340-I pp xxvi, xxvii

⁷⁹ Q 409

by taxation and it may be excluded from certain public expenditure definitions, but it is still taxpayers' money, and expenditure which must be held to account in the same way as money paid in taxation, whether directly or indirectly. The accounts of the Millennium Commission are, like those of other lottery distribution bodies, subject to examination by the Comptroller and Auditor General and have been reported on by him.⁸⁰ On the same day as he gave evidence to us Mr Mandelson referred, in a written Parliamentary answer, to guidance applying to the New Millennium Experience Company which reads as follows in relation to accountability for public funds: "Board members have a duty to ensure the safeguarding of public funds—*which for this purpose should be taken to include all forms of receipts from fees, charges and other sources*—and the proper custody of assets which have been publicly funded."⁸¹ We have already expressed concern in another Report about the adequacy of financial control of lottery grants to private organisations.⁸² **We would regard any but the highest standards of probity, effectiveness and efficiency as even less acceptable in the case of a public body in receipt of lottery money. We have no reason to believe that such standards are not being maintained, but we should like to be convinced fully that they are. We recommend that all appropriate Government guidance be amended so as to make it explicit that any public body in receipt of lottery money shall be held to account for its use to the same standards as if that money were taxpayers' money.**⁸³

The Government's response to this recommendation is reproduced below:

"26. The Government agrees with the Committee that public bodies should apply high standards of probity, effectiveness and efficiency in all their dealings, regardless of whether their resources are derived from the Lottery or the taxpayer. The Financial Directions issued to Lottery distributors by the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, under sections 26(3) and (4) of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993, require them to ensure that high standards are applied to the handling of all Lottery monies. The Directions require the application of rigorous terms and conditions of grant to all grant recipients, regardless of whether they are in the public or private sector.

27. The New Millennium Experience Company became a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) in February 1997 by virtue of the transfer of its issued shares to the ownership of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on behalf of Government. At that point the Company became subject to the normal rules and guidelines which Government applies to its NDPBs. For NMEC its relationship with Government and with the Millennium Commission, together with the

⁸⁰ *National Lottery etc. Act 1993* (c 39), section 43; *Report and Accounts of the Millennium Commission for 1996-97*, pp 59-63

⁸¹ HC Deb 2 December 1997 c.165W; *Guidance on Codes of Practice for Board Members of Public Bodies*, Cabinet Office, January 1997, para 3 1; our emphasis.

⁸² First Report from the Committee, *The Royal Opera House*, HC (1997-98) 199-1, para 37

⁸³ HC 340-I 1997-98 pp xxv-xxvi

framework for its operation as an NDPB, are set out in Financial Memorandum issued by the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and in the Grant Agreement with the Millennium Commission. These two documents provide the framework for financial management, control and audit of an NDPB, as set out in Government Accounting and require, inter alia, the New Millennium Experience Company to maintain high standards of probity, effectiveness and efficiency. As a Company limited by shares, the NMEC is also bound by the requirements of the Companies Act.

28. The Government notes the Committee's intention to look at the effectiveness of these arrangements at its next inquiry.

29. The Government agrees that it is important that information about the New Millennium Experience Company is made available on a regular basis. Production of an annual Corporate Plan is a condition of the Millennium Commission's grant to the New Millennium Experience Company. The Corporate Plan will be published by the end of March and audited accounts will be published by the end of September 1998. Both will be updated annually and the full texts made available to the Committee.

30. The New Millennium Experience Company agrees the importance of ensuring effective communication with the public about the Millennium Experience project. The Company is considering how this is best achieved in respect of the Board's proceedings and annual public meetings in Greenwich and will report to the Committee before its next inquiry."⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Department for Culture, Media & Sport, *The Millennium Dome: Government Response to the Second Report from the Committee*, Cm 3886 February 1998 p.7

V Transport to the Exhibition

The Culture, Media & Sport Select Committee undertook a thorough investigation into the transport links to the Millennium site. The Millennium Experience is aiming to attract 12 million visitors and in its evidence to the Select Committee the Millennium Commission said that in selecting a site it was keen that it should have a local transport infrastructure capable of handling 100,000 visitors per day, at least half of whom should be able to travel by public transport.⁸⁵ The New Millennium Experience Company acknowledged in its evidence that transport was "a key issue" and "aims to assist the provision of a truly integrated, multi-modal transport network to access the Experience and to link with historic Greenwich and Greenwich Town".⁸⁶ It has developed a strategy around the assumption that most people will arrive by public transport. It will be a virtually car-free event: the only provision for private car-parking on-site will be for disabled drivers and VIPs.⁸⁷ Based on the assumptions that it would be impossible to travel to the Experience by private car but that there would be off-site parking provision, consultants, commissioned by the organisers to analyse the proportion of visitors travelling by different modes, produced the following breakdown:⁸⁸

Main Mode	Final Leg	%
Tube or Rail JLE	-	36
Car	JLE	12
Car	Bus	8
Car	Ferry	8
Coach	-	13
Riverbus	-	7
Taxi	-	5
Bus	-	4
North Kent Line	Millennium Transit	5
Walk/Cycle	-	1
Car	Car (disabled/VIP)	1
		100

However, much of the infrastructure upon which the public transport strategy relies remains to be completed. Mr Mandelson said in his evidence to the Committee that he was more confident about the content of the Dome than certain other things, including transport.⁸⁹

The New Millennium Experience Company expects up to half of those attending the Experience to travel by the Jubilee Line, either for the greater part of their journey (36%) or the final leg (12%). The Jubilee Line Extension (JLE) was conceived and construction begun well before Greenwich was chosen for the Millennium Experience. The decision to build one

⁸⁵ HC 340-II 1997-98 Evidence p.37

⁸⁶ Evidence p.85

⁸⁷ Evidence pp 129-130

⁸⁸ Appendix 6 Memorandum Submitted by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions HC 340-II 1997-98 p.130

⁸⁹ Q 382

of the new JLE stations at North Greenwich, which was dependent on a financial contribution from British Gas the former landowner, was an essential prerequisite for the selection of Greenwich as the festival site. Witnesses to the Select Committee were agreed that the success of the Experience was heavily reliant upon the successful completion of the JLE.

A. The Jubilee Line Extension

The JLE will extend the existing Jubilee Line a further 16 km into south and east London, from Green Park to Stratford with 11 stations and will create a direct link to London Docklands. The journey time from Green Park to Stratford is estimated to be 22 minutes. The current journey time between Waterloo and Canary Wharf will be reduced by 30 minutes. Nine of the eleven stations will feature interchanges with existing London Underground, British Rail services and Docklands Light Railway (DLR) services. Six of the eleven stations will feature interchanges with two or more services of other railway operators and three stations, Canada Water, North Greenwich and Canning Town will feature bus interchanges. Two maps showing the connections and route of the JLE are on p.33.⁹⁰

The JLE will be wheelchair accessible and at stations between Westminster and North Greenwich, platform edge doors consisting of sliding glass screens will open under the control of the train operator, once the train is properly berthed at the platform. A 'state of the art' signalling system is planned incorporating on-board computer power and a station information monitoring system, tracking train positions every second.

The Jubilee Line Extension was originally planned to open in March 1998. In the course of 1997, the programmed opening date slipped to the end of September 1998.⁹¹ London Underground, in its evidence to the Select Committee, attributed the delay to problems associated with a particular tunnelling method and delays in construction, particularly at Westminster station, which had proved to be an enormous civil engineering task.⁹² Mr Denis Tunnicliffe, Managing Director of London Underground Ltd, believed then that there was a better than even chance it would open in September 1998 or shortly thereafter.⁹³ However, London Underground had also encountered difficulties with contractors due to deliver a new signalling system for the Jubilee Line in time for the opening of the extension. It considered it unlikely that the system would be available for the September 1998 opening and planned initially to operate a limited weekday service on two separate railways: one from Stanmore to Charing Cross and another from Waterloo to Stratford.⁹⁴ A service through Westminster would be opened thereafter. London Underground was confident of establishing the through service by 2000 for the Millennium Experience but it was not so certain that the new signalling system would be operating by then.⁹⁵ The Select Committee was told that if the new system was not operating, the number of trains per hour through Greenwich would be 17

⁹⁰ source: London Underground, *Jubilee Line Extension Project*, November 1994

⁹¹ HC 340-II 1997-98 Evidence p.74; Q 219

⁹² QQ 219-220, 263

⁹³ Q 222

⁹⁴ Q 220

⁹⁵ Q 231

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rather than 24 and in consequence, the trains would be more crowded and a higher proportion of passengers would have to stand.⁹⁶ London Underground, nevertheless, was confident that it could handle the number of passengers using the North Greenwich station even with the 17-train service.⁹⁷ The Select Committee, in its report, said that it remained to be convinced that 17 trains per hour amounted to an acceptable service and recommended that **"it should be a matter of the utmost priority for London Underground to work on the delivery of a signalling system to allow 24 trains per hour to use the North Greenwich Station in 2000 as the congestion created by a limit of 17 trains per hour would significantly detract from the pleasure of the day out."**⁹⁸

On 9 February 1998, London Underground announced that the JLE would be open for a through service from Stanmore to Stratford well in time for the Millennium Experience.⁹⁹ It is planning for a through service in the Spring of 1999 with a signalling system based on existing technology. Denis Tunnicliffe explained that the signalling contractor had hit considerable difficulties with the planned state-of-the-art 'moving block' signalling system and until these were ironed out London Underground had decided jointly with the contractors to install a 'fixed block' signalling system using existing technology. Trains are expected to run at approximately two and a half minute intervals, equivalent to 24 trains per hour. The signalling contractor plans to install the 'moving block' system before the end of 1999, subject to London Underground being satisfied with its safety and reliability. An article in *Sunday Business* explains that the moving block signalling system based on radio links between trains allows up to 36 trains an hour on the line, twelve more than can be accommodated with conventional 'fixed block' signalling.¹⁰⁰

The Government responded to the Committee that it had had intensive discussions with London Underground about the JLE. The Government welcomed the announcement on 9 February to open a 24 train per hour through service in Spring 1999. London Underground had apparently modelled the demand predictions for the JLE during the Millennium year and this showed that a peak service of 24 trains per hour would be more than adequate to deal with the expected visitor flow. There had been doubt about the completion of the new Westminster Station in time for an opening of the JLE in September 1998 but this should be ready for the opening in Spring 1999.¹⁰¹ The *Evening Standard* reported that the Deputy Prime Minister was concerned about the failure of the complex signalling system which had put back the opening of the JLE until Spring 1999.¹⁰² JLE engineers were said to have expressed doubts that even Spring 1999 would be met. The *Guardian* reported on 14 February that the chief executive of Westinghouse Signals, the company responsible for the installation of signalling equipment had been sacked.¹⁰³

⁹⁶ HC 340-II 1997-98 QQ 220, 256-258

⁹⁷ Q 261

⁹⁸ HC 340-I 1997-98 para 43

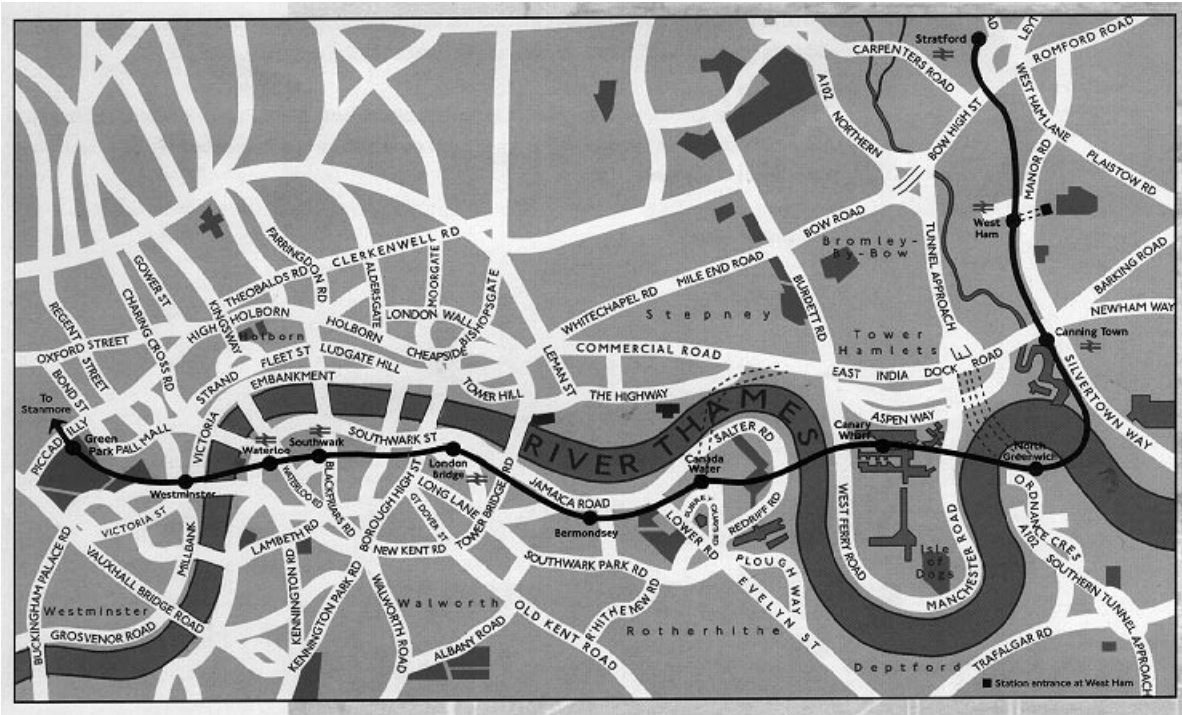
⁹⁹ London Underground press release, 9 February 1998 No 606

¹⁰⁰ "Jubilee delays threaten Dome", *Sunday Business*, 15 February 1998

¹⁰¹ source: Jubilee Line press office

¹⁰² "Prescott voices fears over delays hitting JLE", *Evening Standard*, 10 February 1998

¹⁰³ "Tube line scapegoat", *Guardian*, 14 February 1998



Other transport links

1. Railways

The Docklands Light Railway, which currently only runs north of the Thames, will be extended through Greenwich town centre to Lewisham. This extension is scheduled to open early in 2000, but, according to the Government, may be ready in late 1999.¹⁰⁴ Greenwich Council is working with London Transport towards the construction of a rapid transit system linking the Dome site with Charlton (a nearby mainline railway station) and eventually Greenwich town centre and Woolwich.¹⁰⁵ The proposed route makes use of an abandoned rail corridor through the Greenwich Peninsula and would provide a quick one-stop service from Charlton Station to the Millennium Experience.

2. The River Thames

The other main transport route to the Dome, which remains under development, is the Thames itself. A river passenger service was attempted in the early 1990s, but did not prove a commercial success. The Millennium Experience at Greenwich in 2000 has served as a "prompt" to persuade the public and private sectors to revive river passenger services on the Thames. In July 1997 the Deputy Prime Minister launched the Thames 2000 initiative to increase use of the river. He asked the Cross River Partnership - an organisation concerned with regenerating the South Bank of the Thames and improving links across the Thames and composed of local authorities and other public and private bodies - to take the initiative forward.¹⁰⁶ Mr Fred Manson, the Cross River Partnership's project manager, in his evidence to the Select Committee, stated that the establishment of a river passenger service by 2000 was "incredibly high risk" and "a really steep task".¹⁰⁷

If the timetable is met, according to the consultants' analysis up to 1.6 million visitors will use the river to travel to the Millennium Dome in 2000. Mr Manson thought that many might use it for a one-way journey.¹⁰⁸ On 24 November 1997 the Deputy Prime Minister announced that the Cross River Partnership and the New Millennium Experience Company had formally invited a shortlist of potential operators to tender to run new River services.¹⁰⁹ Some of these would serve the Millennium Experience, with direct services from dedicated central London piers and downstream "park-and-sail" sites, as well as a shuttle service to

¹⁰⁴ HC 340-II 1997-98 Evidence p.131 See also Evidence pp 15, 137; QQ 44-45, 52, 64

¹⁰⁵ Evidence p.15; Q 337

¹⁰⁶ Evidence pp 131, 64-66; Q 175

¹⁰⁷ QQ 175, 180

¹⁰⁸ Evidence pp 64; 130; Q 177

¹⁰⁹ HC Deb 24 November 1997 cc 375-376W

Greenwich. Mr Manson had said in his evidence to the Select Committee that contracts would have to be awarded in the first two months of 1998 to provide time for the successful bidders to build boats.¹¹⁰

The Partnership has also drawn up a programme of new infrastructure works along the River. This will provide new piers at key locations, including close to Waterloo and Blackfriars stations. The Partnership has sought funding from the Millennium Commission for this project and matching funding is expected to come from a variety of sources, including local authorities, the Port of London Authority, the Single Regeneration Budget and the private sector. The New Millennium Experience Company is also developing new piers on the Greenwich peninsula and downstream. The Deputy Prime Minister also announced the Government's intention to establish a new agency responsible for managing piers and for promoting and co-ordinating river passenger services in succession to the Cross River Partnership, initially under the auspices of London Transport.

The Select Committee concluded that the success of the river passenger services to the Millennium experience would depend to a large extent on the cost of the service. Potential operators have been asked to prepare tenders on the assumption that no subsidy will be available. Mr Manson felt that a differential would be justified for a premium service.¹¹¹ It is also thought unlikely that the service can be included within the Travelcard system, although the Government and the Cross River Partnership believed that it might be possible to integrate the purchase of Travelcards with that of a supplement for river passenger services.¹¹² Mr Prescott said in his November 1997 written answer that he hoped that new river passenger services for the Millennium Experience would leave a permanent legacy thereafter, "as well as providing an important access route to the Millennium Experience, the aim is to secure a lasting legacy of new investment and high-quality services, which will provide a convenient and attractive new means of travel for Londoners and for visitors."¹¹³

3. Park and ride

For the "car-free" concept to operate, there is great dependence not only on the public transport links, but also on effective links to the site itself for those whose journeys begin by car. The Select Committee took evidence on the proposed parking facilities. The New Millennium Experience Company is seeking planning permission for off-site park-and-ride and park-and-sail parks.¹¹⁴ These will connect with existing public transport services and new services to the site.¹¹⁵ London Underground acknowledged the value of parking areas near or at stations on the Jubilee Line, but expressed no enthusiasm for enhancing such services itself. It suggested that the creation of off-site parking was for the New Millennium Experience Company.¹¹⁶ The Select Committee was concerned by the attitude of London

¹¹⁰ Evidence pp 64; Q 215

¹¹¹ HC 340-II 1997-98 QQ 176-178, 180, 204

¹¹² Evidence p 131; QQ 176, 178

¹¹³ HC Deb 24 November 1997 cc 375-376W

¹¹⁴ Evidence pp 87, 126

¹¹⁵ Evidence p.131

¹¹⁶ Q 252

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Underground and recommended as a matter of urgency that "London Underground identify a number of sites on the outer periphery of its system which could be developed as park-and-ride points."¹¹⁷

The Government said in its response to the Committee that the New Millennium Experience Company was keen to utilise capacity at existing car parks at underground or rail stations or close to the public transport network as part of its park and ride strategy.¹¹⁸ With the help of London Underground Ltd and the rail companies, the New Millennium Experience Company was seeking to identify that capacity in all parts of London. The Company would seek to develop marketing and ticketing strategies to encourage visitors to leave their cars and join public transport as close to their homes as possible.

There will be provision for coach parking at the site and so the traffic volume around Greenwich will increase. Road access to the site at present was described by the Government to the Committee as "congested" from the north and "certainly not good" from the south. Coach access "depends critically upon solving some of the area's road access problems". The Government believed that these problems could be overcome, subject to certain provisos, including one that the Experience opens after the local morning rush hour.¹¹⁹ The Company has agreed to open the Experience at 10.00 am on weekdays in order to avoid the rush hour in central London, although closing hours are still the subject of debate.¹²⁰

4. Park-and-fly

It was revealed in the *Times* that Greenwich Council has granted outline planning permission for a cable car, to be known as the Meridian Skyway, to run over the Thames from East India station on the Docklands Light Railway to the Millennium Dome.¹²¹ The article claimed that the cable car would cost around £8 million and would be based on a design used to transport skiers in Chamonix in France. It will apparently consist of 23 gondolas each carrying 15 people and will be able to carry 5,000 visitors an hour, charging a £2 single fare for the three-minute journey between East India station and the Greenwich Peninsula and would operate from an hour before the Dome opens to an hour before it closes. Some more detail was given in an *Evening Standard* article: the company behind the project is Meridian Cable Cars, a spin-off from Capitol Projects, an engineering firm linked to the Docklands Light Railway.¹²² This article reported that single fares would be between £2 and £4, depending on how much the company could raise in sponsorship and advertising. Work would start in May or June 1998 with safety tests in summer 1999 and the cable car would open for passengers in October 1999.

¹¹⁷ HC 340-I 1997-98 para 45

¹¹⁸ Cm 3886 February para 16

¹¹⁹ HC 340-II 1997-98 Evidence pp 128, 131, 126-127

¹²⁰ Q 288

¹²¹ "Cable car to Dome a ride into the future", *Times*, 4 March 1998

¹²² "New £10m Skyway to carry Dome visitors into 21st century", *Evening Standard*, 5 March 1998

5. Roads

On 9 December 1997 the Deputy Prime Minister announced improved access arrangements for the Millennium Exhibition and other planned developments on the Greenwich Peninsula.¹²³ He announced that the draft Scheme and Orders for improvements to the A102(M) trunk road would now be made following consideration of the Inspector's report on the local public enquiries held in September 1997.

This scheme involves widening the A102(M) between Blackwall Lane and Woolwich road from three to four lanes and undertaking a number of associated improvements, including new slip roads and a new roundabout at the junction of Blackwall Lane and Bugsby's Way. Construction is planned to commence in mid-1998.

6. Bicycles and transport within the site

The press pack issued by the New Millennium Experience Company stated that there would be new cycle and pedestrian routes along the Thames, including a new walkway from Greenwich town centre and that provision would be made for cyclists.¹²⁴

The Select Committee commented on the vast area covered by the Experience site which made the development of transport systems within it an urgent priority. It was worried that the Company was only considering the development of a transit system to circumnavigate the Dome. It expected the Company to prepare a study and report to it on transport options within the site at the time of its next inquiry, including the following elements:

- **the prospects for a transport system from the coach park to the entrance to the Experience;**
- **a secure bicycle park near to the entrance of the Dome to encourage arrival by bicycle;**
- **a transit system around the outer circumference of the Dome;**
- **transport systems within the Dome which, though available to meet the needs of people with disabilities, are also available to other visitors as an attraction.**¹²⁵

The next inquiry was planned for the early months of 1998.¹²⁶

The Government, in its response to the Committee, said that it understood that the New Millennium Experience Company's plans and operational systems for access and in-site transportation were advancing well. Coaches and buses would set down their passengers next

¹²³ Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions press notice 9 December 1997 No 300/Transport

¹²⁴ New Millennium Experience Company, *Time to make a difference: factsheets*, February 1998

¹²⁵ HC 340-I 1997-98 para 47

¹²⁶ HC 340-I 1997-98 p.xxviii

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to the Piazza entrance. The coach park was only some 250 metres from the entrance to the Experience and therefore transport was not needed between the two. Secure parking facilities for bicycles would be available close to the entrance, with associated locker facilities, and a transit system was planned around the perimeter of the Dome. The perimeter route would be accessible from perimeter doors at all points around the Dome about 70 meters away from the centre of the main display area.¹²⁷

B. Ticketing

Mr Keith Bales, who worked formerly for the Disney Corporation and gave evidence to the Select Committee, stressed the importance for the success of major visitor attractions of integrating ticket sales for the event itself as part of packages including transport.¹²⁸ Mr Manson said that the New Millennium Experience Company was keen on integrating tickets and transport services and expected such an arrangement to be made between the Company and the river passenger service operator.¹²⁹ There seemed to be some disagreement between the Company and London Underground about the development of an integrated ticket for the Underground and the Experience but discussions were going on.¹³⁰ The Committee concluded that the "development of affordable and integrated ticketing packages is essential if the Experience is to attract families in huge numbers from across the United Kingdom. The contradictions in evidence to us from London Underground and the New Millennium Experience Company respectively do not augur well for the development of such packages."¹³¹ The Committee recommended that London Underground be far more forthcoming in integrating its tickets into package arrangements for admission to the Dome. **"Furthermore, we regard it as essential that the New Millennium Experience Company work out the most economically attractive and inclusive series of packages that could include travel by coach, train, Underground and air, together with family and group admission."**¹³²

The Government, in its response to the Committee, agreed that the journey to the Dome should be a positive part of the Millennium Experience. It reported that the New Millennium Experience Company was determined to ensure that visitors to the Dome could buy their transport tickets at the same time as their Experience ticket whatever mode of travel was involved. It was having urgent discussions to this end with transport providers, including London Transport. Boat operators would also be included in these arrangements. The Government said that the New Millennium Experience Company was looking at the feasibility of incentive arrangements to help increase the attractiveness of inclusive packages. The Company was also talking to the travel trade and developing a trade pricing strategy to include group, family and other rates.¹³³

¹²⁷ HC 340-I 1997-98 para 21

¹²⁸ HC 340-II 1997-98 Q 83

¹²⁹ QQ 178, 203-204

¹³⁰ Evidence pp 138-139; Q255

¹³¹ HC 340-I 1997-98 para 44

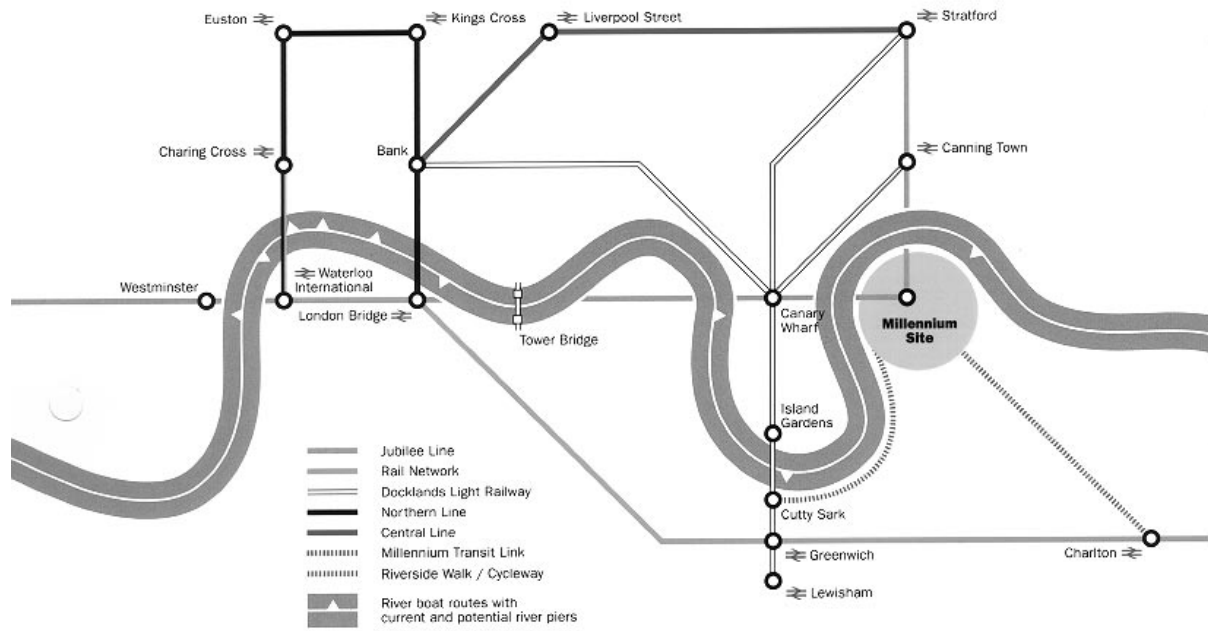
¹³² HC 340-I 1997-98 para 45

¹³³ Cm 3886 February 1998 para 13

A map showing all the transport routes to the Dome is provided on the following page.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ source: New Millennium Experience Company, *Time to make a difference: factsheets*, February 1998

Transport



VI The Millennium Dome - recent developments

A. Construction of the Dome

Construction of the Dome began almost immediately after the final confirmation of the Government's commitment to the project in mid-June 1997. The first mast was erected on 13 October and the main steel framework was in place by the end of that month. The erection of the cable roof structure has commenced.¹³⁵ During the progress of their report, the Select Committee were told that the construction project is on schedule and within budget.¹³⁶ During an adjournment debate on the Dome on 28 January 1998 Peter Mandelson explained, "construction is on time. If anything, it is ahead of time. Spending is within budget, costs are firmly under control, and the creative development of the Dome's contents has leaped ahead. Arrangements for the national programme are well in hand. The millennium company is performing highly competently. It is doing a job of the utmost importance to the country, and it thoroughly deserves our support."¹³⁷

The Experience is expected to create 2,000 new jobs during construction, and a further 5,000 during its life.¹³⁸ In November 1997 Lord McIntosh gave further details of the construction programme during a short Lords debate on the Millennium Exhibition, from which the following quotes are taken:

Lord Peyton of Yeovil asked Her Majesty's Government: What is the likely cost of the millennium dome, when will it be completed, and what means of transport will be available to those who are expected to visit the site.

Lord McIntosh of Haringey: My Lords, the overall cash budget of the New Millennium Experience at Greenwich and the associated national programme is £758 million. That includes allowances for inflation and contingencies. Costs attributable to individual components of the project are subject to contractual negotiation. They will be published in the accounts of the New Millennium Experience Company Limited at the appropriate time. The dome structure is planned to be completed in September 1998. Installation of internal structures and content is planned to be completed in September 1999. There will be a wide variety of public transport modes for visitors to choose, including the new Jubilee Line station next to the experience site and river services from central London ...

Lord Strabolgi: My Lords, can my noble friend say what is the anticipated life of the millennium dome? How long is it expected to last?

Noble Lords: One thousand years!

Lord McIntosh of Haringey: My Lords, I like that idea. The dome is to be built of PTFE - polytetrafluoroethylene. The oldest building of that material is in California

¹³⁵ For those interested in the building's progress, a view of the Dome is provided on the *Daily Mirror* Internet site, courtesy of a television camera permanently trained on the Greenwich site:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/cgi/dome.pl>

¹³⁶ HC 340-I 1997-98 p.ix

¹³⁷ HC Deb 28 January 1998 c.281

¹³⁸ HC Deb 17 July 1997 c.326W

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and was built in 1973. It is still in extremely good condition so the dome will have a life of at least 24 years. The steel structure is planned to have a life of 60 years ... The total estimated number of people going on any day will be 30,000 to 40,000. The capacity planned for is 75,000 ... The project is cash limited. It is on time and it is within budget ...¹³⁹

As Lord McIntosh confirmed, the dome is to be built of PTFE - polytetrafluoroethylene. Originally it had been proposed that the Dome's roof be made from PVC,¹⁴⁰ despite concern being expressed by environmental groups,¹⁴¹ but, as Peter Mandelson confirmed in a written answer, this decision was changed to give the Dome a greater enhanced lifespan:

Mr. Mandelson: On 22 August 1997, the New Millennium Experience Company - NMEC - announced its decision to change the roofing material of the Millennium Experience dome from PVC-coated polyester to PTFE-coated glass fibre. The reason for the change was to give the dome a greatly enhanced lifespan, thereby assisting delivery of the Government's aim to ensure an enduring legacy from the millennium experience. The extra longevity and durability of the dome's roof covering as a result of the change to PTFE-coated glass fibre will increase significantly the legacy options which can be considered. As part of its earlier considerations about PVC-coated polyester, the NMEC required a full environmental review, taking account of all available information in the UK, Europe and elsewhere, of the material's manufacture and disposal. The NMEC was satisfied that the material met all UK and EU environmental requirements. The company had no discussions with the European Commission but did receive representations about the use and safety of PVC from members of the public, from environmental groups including Greenpeace, and from companies involved in the chemical industry. PTFE-coated glass fibre, which is widely used across the world on large tensile roof structures, does not contain plasticising additives and also meets all UK and EU environmental requirements.¹⁴²

The Select Committee welcomed this decision since "part of the great architectural merit of the Dome is the flexibility it offers as to future use," though it was concerned that "the Government does not seem to be thinking ahead with sufficient clarity about the use and location of the Dome after the end of the festival ... The Government ought now to be actively considering uses of the Dome after 2000 which will be carefully planned and capable of being implemented swiftly, so that there is no possibility of what should be a premium site deteriorating once again into a derelict area."¹⁴³

Some details of the Government's thinking on this matter were given in a written answer in December 1997:

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Minister without Portfolio what steps he is taking to secure a lasting legacy from the Millennium Experience at Greenwich; and if he will make a statement. [18923]

¹³⁹ HL Deb 3 November 1997 cc 1221-1224

¹⁴⁰ Cabinet Office press notice, *Millennium dome roof: Mandelson responds to Greenpeace*, 21 July 1997

¹⁴¹ "A toxic monument to a green future", *Independent*, 25 July 1997 It should be noted that some commentators have seriously questioned whether the environmental risks from PVC were correctly reported at the time of the Minister's decision: "Greenpeace and PVC", *Daily Telegraph*, 18 October 1997

¹⁴² HC Deb 27 October 1997 c.649W

¹⁴³ HC 340-I 1997-98 p.x, p.xxv

Mr. Mandelson: When the Government announced in June its decision to go ahead with the Millennium Experience at Greenwich, it was on the basis of 5 clear commitments. One of these was that there would be a lasting legacy. The Government remains determined to secure long-term benefits for the nation from the Millennium Experience, and has sought outside advice on how to maximise these legacies. Earlier this year the Government invited Mr. Dennis Stevenson to assess the prospects. I am extremely grateful to Mr. Stevenson for the advice which he has now provided, and am pleased to place in the Library of both Houses a copy of a letter to me summarising his conclusions.

His analysis, which the Government accepts, shows first that a number of valuable legacies can already be identified. Specifically, the Millennium Experience is acting as the catalyst for English Partnerships' reclamation of derelict and polluted riverside land at Greenwich—a site of a size and potential unique in Western Europe; providing the platform for the pioneering Millennium Village launched by the Deputy Prime Minister in July; stimulating improvements in public transport, Thames river services, roads, and pedestrian walkways on the Peninsula; and using the Dome to promote national awareness and long-term taking-up of IT based learning, for example through the University for Industry and the National Grid for Learning.

There is a range of possible long term uses for the Millennium Experience Dome itself. These include developing the Dome as: a new arena for participation and spectator sports; a TV or film production studio and visitor centre; and using the site for a large scale international convention centre. These ideas serve to illustrate the Dome's future potential, and reflect the steps which have been taken to ensure the Dome can have a long life. Commercial interest in acquiring the Dome is, however, likely to be maximised in 2000, when it can be seen successfully in operation, and when commercial and popular awareness of the site is at its height. The Government will therefore decide on the Dome's long term future at that time. Meanwhile, I invite those with serious interest in the Dome's future use to register their ideas (which should not involve additional cost to the Exchequer) and to hold exploratory discussions with us. Proposals may either be for its use at Greenwich (where in 2000 it will occupy a 40 acre site) as a complement to English Partnerships' high quality and lasting development of the Peninsula, or for its transfer to another part of the United Kingdom.¹⁴⁴

Further details were given in the Government's response to the Select Committee's report:

"24. The Government has always planned a high quality development across the entire Greenwich Peninsula site and English Partnerships, the Government's regeneration agency, is playing a key part ensuring that well developed plans are properly implemented. The most recent part of this implementation process was announced on 18 February, when the Deputy Prime Minister announced the winner of the competition to develop the Millennium Village. The winning scheme meets all the Government's objectives – a development that is built to the highest quality of architectural design, embraces a mixed use approach to the development process, and minimises environmental damage through the careful planning of water and energy efficiency measures. It will create an enduring

¹⁴⁴ HC Deb 1 December 1997 cc 2-3W

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legacy for the future, as part of the wider Millennium project for the regeneration of the Greenwich Peninsula.

25. The Government agrees with the Committee that the Dome will be a major public asset. Our aim is for the Dome to complement English Partnerships' high quality development of the Greenwich Peninsula. The Government has accepted Sir Dennis Stevenson's advice that the best time to make final decisions about the nature of the Dome's future use will be in 2000. Between now and then we will actively encourage potential investors to come forward and register serious expressions of interest with us as a basis for dialogue and detailed preparatory discussion. This process was launched in December 1997 and is now firmly under way."¹⁴⁵

B. Contents of the Dome

Arguably the aspect of the Dome about which least is known is what will be put in it. Lord McIntosh gave the following details in November of last year:

A whole series of projects have been put forward to be contained in the dome other than the central experience, which is the responsibility of Sir Cameron Mackintosh. Eleven of the 22 proposals which came in are being worked up. Until that has been completed and they can be made public it is difficult to raise money other than by doing what IMG is doing at the moment, which is working on a sponsorship strategy. However, we know that we have staunch support from the original private supporters of the dome, particularly British Airways and British Telecom ... The proposals for the inside of the dome are of two kinds. First, there is the experience itself, which is being worked on by Sir Cameron Mackintosh and John Napier. That will be an in-the-round 10,000-seat auditorium, probably several times a day. Around that there will be a whole series of exhibitions and interactive experiences. None of us knows yet in detail what they will be ...¹⁴⁶

The Select Committee found this lack of clarity deeply worrying:

"However inspirational the Dome, the impact of the Experience will depend principally upon what is inside the Dome in 2000. It was on this most important of topics that we found official witnesses to this inquiry least informative. The Company asked for our understanding of the primary needs to attract sponsors and to ensure that the product launch did not "go off half-cock". The Company knows what will be in the Dome but cannot tell us.¹⁴⁷ At times, the process of discovering the proposals for the content of the Dome was akin to drawing teeth. From what we know so far, the Millennium Experience is not so much a journey through time, as, at any rate for those of us not made privy to the plans, a journey into the unknown ...

¹⁴⁵ Cm 3886 February 1998 pp 6-7

¹⁴⁶ HL Deb 3 November 1997 cc 1221-1224

¹⁴⁷ QQ 271, 285, 312-313, 321

With regard to the contents of the Dome itself, we know more about what the Experience will not be than what it will be ... The theme of the Experience will be time and more particularly that "the new millennium gives us a chance to pause, to reflect and to take stock of ourselves: who we are, what we do, and where we live."¹⁴⁸ Mr Mandelson assured us that the theme would be developed with humanity and emotion.¹⁴⁹ ...

Both Mr Grade and Mr Mandelson endeavoured to convey their sense of excitement at the product within the confines of a Commons Committee Room. The former said that the Experience would be an event people "hopefully will remember and pass on. It will be something they have never seen before." There would be spectacular events and all sorts of rides.¹⁵⁰ ... He told us that he was "thrilled" by many of the ideas emerging from the design tendering process.¹⁵¹ He also confirmed that he was committed to a spiritual element to the Dome's contents...¹⁵²

Some of these glimpses inside the Dome are of interest. Nevertheless, on the basis of them, we cannot, as yet, share the excitement of the organisers, much as we would like to. Even if secrecy were to make sense on commercial grounds, which we do not necessarily accept, this is not just a commercial project. This is a public project which needs to generate public support and excitement and which should involve the public. The information which has been given so far does not provide sufficient basis for proper Parliamentary scrutiny of the development of the Dome's content. In view of the level of commitment to the project of money raised directly through taxation and of money raised from the National Lottery, it is vital that there should be constant, close Parliamentary scrutiny of this project and that there should be enough information available to make that scrutiny meaningful. The limited content information available so far matters because upon the contents depends the whole viability of the Company's financial plans, particularly in relation to, first, attracting sponsorship and, second, marketing and visitor numbers."¹⁵³

During the adjournment debate on the Dome in January 1998, several Members were critical of this lack of detail, though Michael Heseltine, who remains a member of the Millennium Commission, made a number of interesting points on the matter:

If one is launching a project, one has to be sure that it is subject to detailed criticism and questioning before it is launched. Take a new car, for example. Motor

¹⁴⁸ QQ 275, 344

¹⁴⁹ Q 388

¹⁵⁰ QQ 272-273

¹⁵¹ QQ 392-394

¹⁵² Q 421

¹⁵³ HC 340-I 1997-98 pp xiii-xv

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manufacturers go to huge trouble to stop the press getting photographs of cars as they are tested, because they want to have conducted all the tests to destruction until the launch.

We face the same dilemma with the festival. There is a huge, prodigious weight of work and detail about the contents of the dome. Some of it has leaked - as it does in this day and age - in the national press. There are a vast range of working models, specifications and details, and within a short time - I know that the Minister will say something about this later this morning - we will be part of the unveiling of the project. I believe that it will be extremely exciting. It will undoubtedly arouse a great deal of interest and controversy. There is no escape from that. One cannot have something like this without everybody having their own ideas about what it should be.

Those of us who are close to the process have to take decisions. It cannot be done by public consultation. One cannot have 10,000 different views on the dome. Someone has to be in charge and take a decision. That is why we invited Robert Ayling, the chief executive of one of Britain's most successful companies in the international travel business, to become the lead figure in deciding the details and masterminding the execution of the project. He has done that with great diligence.

I hope that this debate will not concentrate on the weaknesses, difficulties and delays. Now that it is clear that the money will be spent, that the project will happen, our task must surely be to avoid the mistake that our predecessors in 1851 made, which nearly destroyed the great exhibition of that year before it ever took place. Our task is to maximise the national gain and recognise that this is a non-party-controversial issue; it is an all-party endeavour.¹⁵⁴

Mr Mandelson gave a little more information on the central 'Experience' to the Exhibition in a recent answer:

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will make a statement on the current state of plans to use the centre of the Millennium Experience Dome as a space for theatrical performances. [23231]

Mr. Mandelson: The content of the Dome will provide a unique, once-in-a-lifetime experience for every visitor, on the theme that the millennium represents a "Time to Make a Difference". An integral part of this will be a central attraction which will provide an exciting multi-media event that can be shared by all who visit.

The centre of the Dome will be opened up to create a large, informal piazza with views across the Dome from every vantage point, utilising to the full the natural contours and scale of this impressive space. The New Millennium Experience Company are still developing and improving the design with the aim of ensuring that maximum resources go into the content rather than the internal structure of the Dome.

Earlier schemes involved creating an enclosed auditorium at the centre of the Dome, which would in effect have been a separate internal amphitheatre building. The

¹⁵⁴ HC Deb 28 January 1998 c.271

revised plans will still offer people an uplifting central experience without the need for a large and costly central structure.¹⁵⁵

The most detailed information about the contents of the Dome was published in February 1998,¹⁵⁶ when models of seven exhibits went on display. The idea of the central show remains, although it is now to be staged by the musician Peter Gabriel and the impresario Mark Fisher. In addition a second smaller Dome is to be built next to the main building to provide live entertainment for up to 6,000 people. Around the central 'Experience' are to be a series of thirteen zones demonstrating the theme "Time to make a difference" - grouped in three areas: 'Who We Are' with zones called Mind, Body and Spirit; 'What We Do' with zones called Work, Rest and Play; and 'Where We Live' with zones called Local, National, and Global.

The sheer diversity of exhibits is undeniable (a map of the Dome is shown on pp 48-49 below).¹⁵⁷ The area dedicated to questions of spirituality - the Spirit Level - is to be set "within an area of garden which draws inspiration from ... a Christian monastic cloister ... Japanese Zen gardens and the formal exuberance of Muslim gardens." To allow visitors to see how the environment can be shaped by our behaviour, the Living Island will "take visitors on a journey to a typical British seaside resort." An examination of how we relax is provided by "boats designed as 16-seater beds, floating off through dream environments." Most notable, perhaps, is the Body Zone - dominated by a vast silver figure, faced by a similarly gigantic baby, its hollow form allowing visitors to tour its exhibits from its top - the height of the Dome itself - down to heel, a staggering 320 feet away.

Writing in the *Times*, Marcus Binney argued that "the millennium team has hit on three themes which have always fascinated humanity - the giant figure, the world of fantasy and the miniaturised world of toys ... The design makes the most of the huge dimensions of the dome, with its impressive height and vast circumference. The images are sophisticated and original enough to generate genuine excitement."¹⁵⁸ Jonathan Glancey in the *Guardian* thought the contents were likely to succeed with visitors, but was rather caustic in his admiration: "As a form of public entertainment in the tradition of the Colosseum, public executions, Bartholomew Fair, the phantasmagoric World Fairs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and Disneyland, it is unlikely to go wrong ... yet the best of British thinking in 2000 and beyond is likely to be somewhere other than at Greenwich."¹⁵⁹

Hugh Pearman in the *Sunday Times* was enthusiastic, though more for the Dome and the occasion itself, than its contents: "Despite all the effort put into the contents [of World Expos such as the Dome], people tend to remember the buildings instead ... People remember the excitement of going, of being with the crowds, of feeling a part of history ... [The zones unveiled on 24 February] turned out to be slightly better than most people expected ... They are not coruscatingly brilliant - several being large-scale examples of fairly standard themed

¹⁵⁵ HC Deb 26 January 1998 c.68W

¹⁵⁶ HC Deb 23 February 1998 cc 27-28W; Deposited Paper 3/6094

¹⁵⁷ source: New Millennium Experience Company, *Time to make a difference*, February 1998

¹⁵⁸ "Sophisticated style shows this is no Son of Disney", *Times*, 25 February 1998

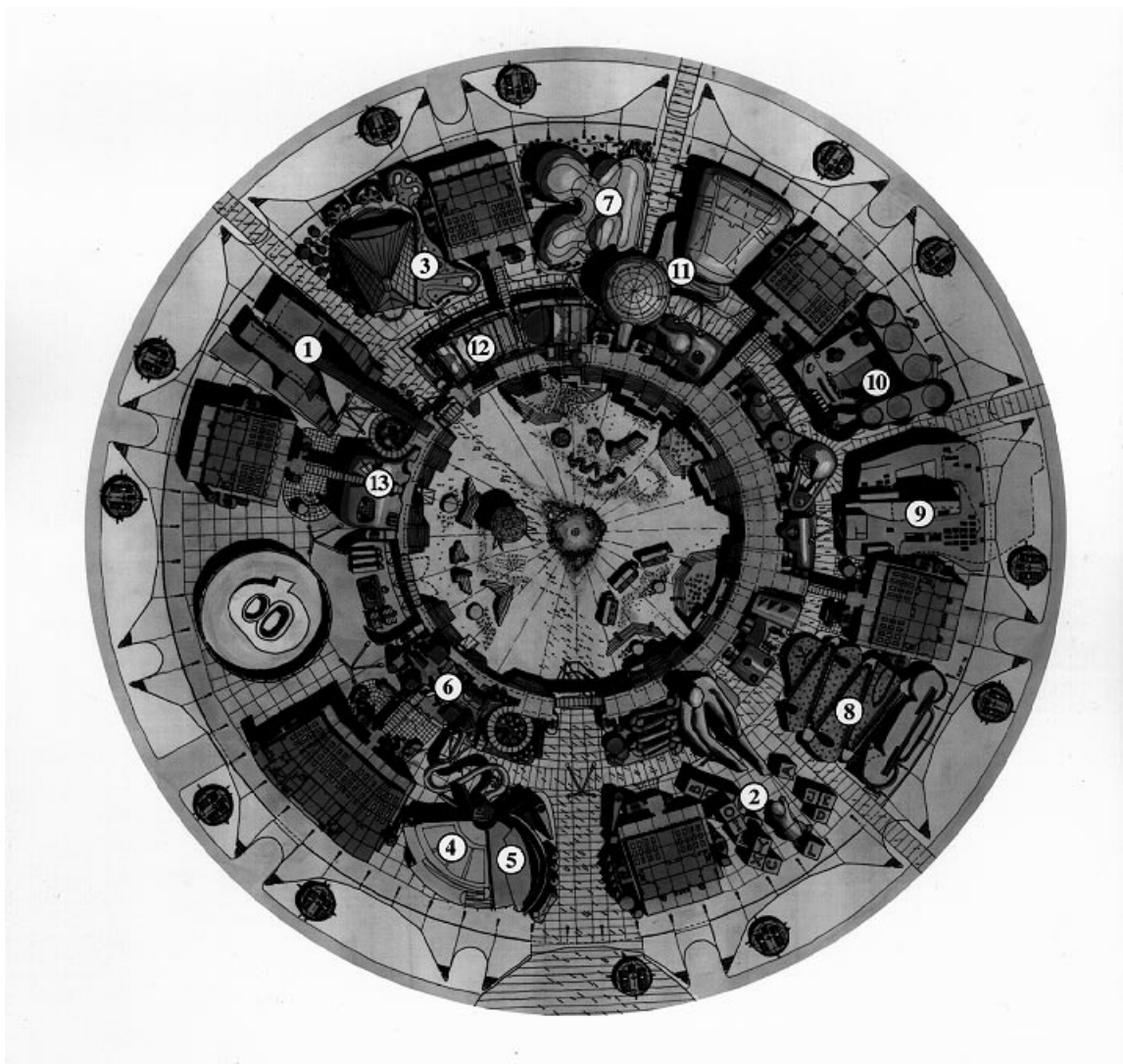
¹⁵⁹ "Back to the future in the Dome of the Seventies", *Guardian*, 25 February 1998

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interactive displays such as you find increasingly in places such as the Natural History or Science museums. This is hardly surprising, because there is only a handful of professional exhibition designers in the nation with the capacity to handle such big stuff. But the effect of having them all grouped together, under the ultimate Big Top of Rogers's Dome, is undeniably powerful."¹⁶⁰

The Dome itself is due to be completed in September 1998, the sales promotion for the Exhibition is planned to start in January 1999, and the public will be able to buy tickets from July. Greenwich residents are to be given a free preview over three days in December 1999: the rest of the Dome's visitors will have to wait until the next century.

¹⁶⁰ "What will it all add up to?", *Sunday Times*, 1 March 1998



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|-----------|---------------------------|--|
| 1 | The Mind | Discover the creative power inherent in us all |
| 2 | The Body Zone | Voyage into the human machine
and learn how to get the best from it
<i>(displayed today)</i> |
| 3 | Spirit Level | Experience a moment of peace and reflection
<i>(displayed today)</i> |
| 4 | Licensed to Skill | Match your hidden skills to the new world of work
<i>(displayed today)</i> |
| 5 | The Learning Curve | Open your mind to life-long learning
<i>(displayed today)</i> |
| 6 | TransAction | See how money and finance are changing your life |
| 7 | Dreamscape | Dream, imagine and return refreshed
<i>(displayed today)</i> |
| 8 | Serious Play | Find out how leisure can re-activate your life
<i>(displayed today)</i> |
| 9 | Shared Ground | Travel the British Isles and learn what the future holds
for your community |
| 10 | Living Island | Choose how to protect your environment day by day
<i>(displayed today)</i> |
| 11 | Atmosphere | Experience the wonder of your planet |
| 12 | Time to Talk! | Learn better ways of talking to each other |
| 13 | uk@now | Decide what being British means for all our futures |