

An opportunity to rebuild the Palace

by Don Madgwick



▲ Artist's impression of Ray Hall's plan (Andrew Williamson)

'Let's go up the Palace' a suggestion often uttered in Victorian times would, if Ray Hall has his way, be heard again throughout South London. He has spent the last twelve years producing a development proposal that would make a lot of people's dreams come true. His vision is to rebuild one of the most beautiful and loved buildings in the world; the Crystal Palace making it once again the focus of the grounds that are now Crystal Palace Park.

Because his scheme has been excluded from the public consultation process, he now finds himself in competition for the top site with the LDA who wish to make a Crystal Palace out of TREES! If these trees are planted, the opportunity to rebuild the Crystal Palace will be lost for ever.

Ray Hall agreed not to seek publicity and to work with the LDA within the dialogue process in return for

assurances that his Crystal Palace would be included in their public consultation; a move that he now regrets.

When the Palace burnt down in 1936, South London lost a focus that has never been replaced. Even after 70 years, people still dream of the day the Palace would rise like the Phoenix from the ashes to once again enthral, educate and entertain us.

Ray wants to embrace our heritage and confidently transport it into an exciting future. He refuses to deny the importance and significance of one of the greatest landmarks in the world. He urges people to celebrate it and bring it alive as a generator of sustainable viability that will secure the future of the park and the surrounding area.

The story so far...

The LDA have now submitted their Master Plan with its Tree Palace and they are likely to take up an option to acquire the Park from LB Bromley (the landowners) in March 2009

The Master Plan currently excludes the possibility of a new Crystal Palace choosing instead to sell parkland for housing; an option which will only bring in a one-off payment and will be so universally unpopular that it will surely be challenged legally.

Many people do not feel that a tree palace adequately pays tribute to the heritage and importance of this site. The Crystal Palace was truly the Palace of the People. Two thirds of the population of England visited it; a fact made even more amazing because the 'Lord's Day' lobby stopped it opening on Sundays; most people's only day off. When the Great Exhibition ended, it was its popularity that inspired its move to Sydenham where it was built with the same icon-

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ic design features. It sat on the hill-top looking out over its magnificent grounds and generated what we now know as South London. Such is the legacy of the people of South London latent in the name 'Crystal Palace'.

A New Crystal Palace Charitable Trust

A New Crystal Palace Charitable Trust is proposed that could enter into a long lease with the London Borough of Bromley as the owner of Crystal Palace Park and that trust would then commission, build and own the new Crystal Palace. It would be responsible for the viability of the new Crystal Palace as well as providing funding for the park. Successful and socially responsible commerce servicing a strong charitable arm is key to Ray's goal of enabling the regeneration of not only Crystal Palace Park but the whole of South London

Technical information

The new Crystal Palace is planned to be 280.8 metres in length and 79.2 metres in width. Built on the same module as Sir Joseph Paxton's original, its central, semi-circular barrel vault would rise to a height of 36.9 metres, with its lower nave and aisles stepping down to rest on an Italianate plinth designed to belong with the statutory listed remains of its forebear in a transformed Crystal Palace Park.

The iconic design would decorate what was the world famous boulevard (now Crystal Palace Parade) The Crystal Palace would be set back from the road and framed by an avenue of trees. For the first time in 70 years, the park, the boulevard and the Palace would once again be 'The Crystal Palace'.

A New Crystal Palace Ltd

New Crystal Palace Ltd is currently a shell company specifically set up to contract with the New Crystal Palace Charitable Trust. It would take a lease on a significant proportion of the volume that would be shaped within the structure of the new Crystal Palace. That company would in turn contract with operators of leisure, sports, entertainment, hotel, performance, educational, business start-up and community facility.

This would be within the framework of a business plan geared to the economic viability of the new Crystal Palace in the context of a renewed Crystal Palace Park. A major component would be enabling ease of public access and enjoyment of what could effectively be a very large conservatory in a park setting.

A business plan has been prepared that indicates that such viability is achievable. The interested operators include:

- a) A 4 rising 5 star hotel with conference, exhibition and spa/gym facility;
- b) Leisure provision including a 'real snow' ski slope, climbing wall, cinema and screening rooms, family entertainment and performance space for all generations;
- c) A Crystal Palace Story as a heritage destination;
- d) A huge landscaped Winter Garden set within the central barrel vault with a butterfly museum in the upper part of one nave and a botanical museum in the other;
- e) Stunning views not only of the renewed park but across central and outer London;
- f) Educational and business incubation provision in partnership with relevant universities, further education colleges and schools.

Other possible contents include; a Crystal Palace Museum and a

Museum of Sport, an Edwardian fun-fair and a wall of web cams showing what is happening at locations around the world at that moment in time.

Operators have been shortlisted and will now be chosen for their commercial and management skills and for their ability to partner with other community organisations.

For reasons of commercial sensitivity, Ray is unable to declare the names of the operators though the LDA and representatives of Bromley and Croydon Councils have been given them in confidence.

Ray is in discussions with a leading steel company and a leading glass wall company. There have also been confidential discussions with several potential sponsors who share Ray's desire that the Crystal Palace should generate its own electricity through solar and related sustainable technologies. He wants the building to produce enough power to export electricity into the Park and beyond.

Enthusiastic Support

The business plan for the scheme has been developed with specialists in: hotel and leisure (Patrick Goff), funding and investment (Chris Pritchard) and property and planning (Mark Pender). All members of the team are passionate about the Crystal Palace. With Ray as the Chairman, they make up the core of the project delivery team.

At the invitation of Cllr Stephen Carr, leader of Bromley Council, the team made a presentation to senior councillors and officers in June of this year. Stephen had also invited the leader of Croydon Borough Council, Cllr Mike Fisher, and his colleagues.

They expressed their "enthusiastic personal support" for the new Crystal Palace and they recommended that the LDA should consider the scheme

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very seriously.

Funding

The construction cost of the new Palace is estimated at £80 million pounds.

The ability to seek and secure such funding is in good part dependent upon a detailed planning approval being granted for the new Crystal Palace and a separate formal agreement with the London Borough of Bromley to commit the land for that purpose if approved.

Chris, Patrick and Ray have had very positive discussions with commercial funding institutions such as the Royal Bank of Scotland and – in greater detail – Clydesdale Bank. They are therefore confident that such an option on the top site could enable the commercial arm of the venture to gain the necessary funding – some £150 million.

Meeting with the LDA

Ray met Roger Frith of the LDA in July. Roger said three things of note. He confirmed that the LDA “would not do anything to preclude Ray submitting a planning application for his new Crystal Palace” * He said that they must support their own Master plan and, mindful of some local opposition to any form of development in the Park, he said the LDA must remain ‘neutral’ on the issue.**

*This turned out to be untrue as the LDA’s proposal to plant 350 trees on the site would make it impossible to ever rebuild the Crystal Palace. **They have also criticised the Crystal Palace scheme in the local press calling it unpopular, impossible and damaging to the park – all of which are patently untrue and hardly neutral. In any case after the longest and one of the most expensive public consultations in England, it is crucial questions like this that should be de-

cided by the public and not second-guessed by LDA grandees

The crucial point is that the ‘Rebuild’ option should have been included in the consultation and its exclusion has denied the public an opportunity to consider an important option.

November 30th 2011

The goal of the team is at least the laying of the foundation stone - if not the actual unveiling of the new Crystal Palace - in a renewed Crystal Palace Park on November 30th, 2011: the 75th anniversary of the burning down of its illustrious forebear.

What a moment for the people south of the Thames!

With Crystal Palace back on the world stage, Ray believes we could then play our role in hosting the people’s of the world during the Olympics.

Local support

The scheme has universal support among the local traders and the young people. It also has huge support in the local estates. Jean Haley who received an MBE for her work in the community arranged for Ray to meet young people on her estate. Many were unemployed and without confidence in the future, but lived within easy access of Crystal Palace Park. Ray is confident that they would greatly benefit from the 1000 jobs that will be generated by the Crystal Palace. The younger children on the estate have nowhere to go and nothing to do locally. These are the children who will benefit from the leisure facilities and the 1000 jobs that the scheme will generate. These young people need to feel proud of their area. A new Crystal Palace could provide that pride of place so lacking at present.

When details of Ray’s Palace appeared in the local press, the

headline the following week read ‘Support floods in for Ray’s Crystal Palace’ When we go out on to the streets we experience huge support. Importantly, most children and young people that we speak to get extremely excited by the prospect. The tree Palace may well have the support of the Main Group but we consider that the Main Group is in no way representative of the community at large and especially has not represented the youth, and the disadvantaged in the area who don’t even know that consultation process exists.

Conclusion

In spite of the present obstacles, Ray retains his trust and expectation that his vision can be realised. Although he is confident that everything is still to play for, he is acutely aware that if those who want this scheme do nothing about it, it will not happen. This is a pivotal moment in the history of Crystal Palace Park and now is the time for people to support Ray Hall’s scheme or let the opportunity fade away for ever.

The only way forward is for The Mayor to give people the choice; the LDA’s - Palace of Trees or Ray Hall’s - Crystal Palace. Master Plan or Masterpiece?

If you would like to know more about the Rebuild the Crystal Palace scheme please log onto www.thecrystalpalacesite.com or phone 07956 323 164, email: anewcrystalpalace@tiscli.co.uk

You can write directly to the Leader of Bromley Council, Cllr. Stephen Carr, Civic Centre, Stockwell Close, BR1 3UH or e-mail Stephen.carr@bromley.gov.uk

You can contact the LDA’s master planner’s local dialogue team at cpp@localdialogue.com

Or write to CPP consultation, local dialogue LLP, Freepost NAT 3717, London SE1 2BR.