

Advocates of Olympic horse show hounded out at debate

Plans to hold Olympic equestrian events at Greenwich Park have been approved, putting an end to months of opposition. **MARK CHANDLER** was at the planning meeting.



The park will fully close for four weeks during the 2012 Olympics

AN APPLICATION to hold Olympic equestrian events at a royal park has been approved but "amidst threats of legal action".

Both sides of the debate were heard in a mammoth five-hour meeting at Woolwich Town Hall last week.

The park will fully close for four weeks in 2012 while it hosts the eventing, dressage and modern pentathlon events, with other areas partially closed from April of that year until November.

A test event will be held next July before the main event, which will feature a 23,000-seat arena in front of the Queen's House.

Olympic Organising committee chairman Lord Coe was heckled at one point as he made his speech to the Greenwich Council board on March 23.

He was hounded by several people at the end, with one person labelling him "pathetic".

But the only members of the 12-strong board who voted against the proposals were Tory councillors Dermot Poston and Geoffrey Brighty, who cited fears over damage to the park and the length of its closure.

Campaign group No to Greenwich Olympic Equestrian Events

(Nogoe) had organised a petition against the event, signed by 13,500 people

Members of the group spoke at the meeting along with a host of residents and others concerned about damage to the 87-hectare World Heritage Site.

Nogoe's John Hine told the meeting: "It's hardly believable we should be discussing a virtual takeover of our royal park."

The group and other people raised concerns not enough detail had been provided in the application and the possibility of long-term damage.

Mr Hine warned: "It won't be put back and can't be put back to where it was today."

Community groups, including the Friends of Greenwich Park, raised concerns there was not enough detail in the plans.

But voting for the application the deputy leader of the council, Councillor Peter Brooks said: "I'm happy to loan this park to the rest of the world."

It was approved with 38 conditions attached, including the creation of a consultative group to see it through.

For Olympics news, visit newsshopper.co.uk/sport/olympics_2012



The Olympic Organising Committee proposed to use Greenwich Park to host the eventing, dressage and pentathlon events at the Olympics

'WE'LL CONSULT WITH ALL'



Lord Coe

LORD Coe said afterwards: "We know it's only loaned and we also know with that comes a massive responsibility. "I think we have a fantastic opportunity to showcase this wonderful park around the world. "We live in a democratic process and I was delighted people had the opportunity tonight to express their views. "We were a better bid because of the external scrutiny. "We'll consult with all groups, including Nogoe. I mean that."

'COUNCIL HAS NO RIGHT'

JOHN Hine (pictured) from Nogoe said: "Obviously I'm extremely disappointed. "I don't think it was entirely clear the council quite understood what the opposition case was. "They were obviously set on having the Olympics in Greenwich Park. "We think the council has no right to make a decision on some of the vague information provided and we're taking advice from our lawyers. "But if it does go ahead we want to be involved in the monitoring process. "We want to make sure the adverse effects, which we're absolutely confident are going to occur, are kept to a minimum."





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