

Baroness Jo Valentine's speech in the Lords Olympic debate

5 January 2010

(Lord Faulkner of Worcester to move that this House takes note of preparations for the hosting of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games in London)

My Lords, I declare that I am Chief Executive of London First, a non-profit making business organisation, which has consistently supported the Games coming to London, particularly for the legacy which the event will give to the UK and its capital.

I will focus today on four issues:

- business opportunities
- the use of the Olympic Park before the Games
- delivering on our transport promises and
- the opportunity for all of London to celebrate being the host city.

Firstly, as the noble Lord Mandelson has said: "With both Government and business working together, companies of all sizes across the UK can share in Olympic gold."

CompeteFor was established by the regional development agencies as a procurement portal to help businesses – particularly smaller ones - compete for a share of Olympic contracts. I should declare that, while receiving no financial benefit, my organisation London First has provided a home for CompeteFor's small team. I'm glad that we did so, for it now has 100,000 registered UK businesses. Both the ODA and LOCOG are placing contracts on the system and encouraging their suppliers to do likewise.

Beyond Olympic contracts, CompeteFor has now been adopted as a procurement tool by other public bodies, including Transport for London and several boroughs. So CompeteFor is delivering a legacy benefit – now.

The Minister may be unaware that the Government seem intent on commissioning another procurement portal, which would duplicate both its own Supply2Gov and the successful CompeteFor portal. I welcome the Government's ambition to open up Government contracting opportunities to the nation's SMEs. But surely this could be done more economically by adapting what we already have.

Secondly, I'd like to add my congratulations to the Olympic Delivery Authority for the advanced state of their preparations. I recently visited the site again. It is an impressive hive of well managed bustling activity, huge progress and a remarkable transformation.

The park may even be completed a year early. Surely we should regard this as an opportunity! Why not offer the many companies who have contributed to building the park the opportunity to lease all or part of the park for a week at a time, to show international clients around? This would animate the park - show off what British business can do – and generate an income to cover some of the caretaking costs.

My third point is a gentle reminder. Increased capacity on the Northern Line by 2012 was promised to the IOC as part of London's bid. The Minister's colleague, the Noble Lord Adonis, must bang heads together at London Underground and contractor Tube Lines to make sure that as well as learning lessons from the Jubilee Line upgrade, the timely delivery of the upgrades is assured. Olympic visitors and London's everyday Tube commuters would be grateful for some elbow room.

Finally, the Noble Lord Coe's LOCOG has jumped through many hoops in order to remain on track to meet commercial sponsorship targets - in a very tough fundraising environment.

My Lords will wish to note however that the supplement on Londoners' council tax will raise £600million towards the Games, so London is contributing much more than any individual corporate sponsor.

For understandable reasons, the organisers are wary about protecting the brand.

They are protective about the word Olympic, and about Games and gold, silver, bronze. Even mentioning London and 2012 in the same sentence can result in a shot across the bows from the Noble Lord Coe's brand police.

My Lords, we should be building the excitement! My worry is the reputation earned by LOCOG's storm-troopers threatens to undermine the potential for London and the UK to fully embrace the sporting celebration ahead. Such is the absence of branding in and around the city, Londoners and visitors might not be aware of the Games taking place.

London should be given the status of so-called tier 1 sponsorship, including branding opportunities. Surely we should see Mayor of London posters badged as Olympic Host City, on our transport systems. Those posters should be in the arrivals lounge at Heathrow and City airports, on some of our red buses, on Tube platforms and in carriages, on some taxis - and - on the Mayor's new hire bicycles.

This will not damage the value to the commercial sponsors of the Games. By building awareness, anticipation and a shared sense of ownership, it could even enhance value.

So may I ask the Minister: when will London be able to wear its Olympic Badge with pride - and when will Londoners and the rest of the country be able to fly Olympic flags from their upstairs windows?

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