

## House of Lords Select Committee on Olympic and Paralympic Legacy

Written evidence submitted by:

Joyce Cook OBE, Chair Level Playing Field on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2013

### Sports facilities legacy / future UK hosting

- I. Level Playing Field (LPF) is a registered charity which was established in 1998 to represent disabled football fans in England and Wales. LPF extended its charity objects in 2008 to cover all sports.
- II. LPF works with key stakeholders to improve access to sports stadia and venues and to ensure an inclusive live matchday and / or sporting event experience for disabled sports fans. By using the special influence of football and other sports, LPF also aims to raise awareness more widely whilst encouraging many more disabled people to attend and enjoy live sporting events.
- III. More than 12% of the population is disabled with one in four families having a disabled member. At any given time, more than 40% of the population will require easy access including families with young children, young children, pregnant ladies, senior citizens and people with temporary injuries or ill-health. More than 50% of all disabled people have never participated in leisure or sport activities.
- IV. It is important to recognise the moral, legal and good business cases for providing truly accessible stadiums and other sporting venues. However, it should be noted that service providers have a legal duty to provide accessible facilities and to remove the barriers that may prevent disabled people from using their services (Equality Act 2010).
- V. LPF was a member of the Olympic Delivery Authority Built Environment Access Panel and acted as a Consultant to LOCOG ahead of London 2012.

### **To what extent are the legacy uses anticipated for the Olympic sports venues sustainable? Will the legacy uses deliver a positive return on investment?**

- VI. The annual spending power of the UK disabled community is estimated to be more than £80 billion. Accessible venues are more sustainable and inclusive and accessible facilities and services make good business sense. When disabled people are unable to attend an event or to use a service because of poor access, then most often, nor will their family or friends. Simply put, inaccessible venues lose business and risk their reputation.
- VII. The public were enthralled by the London 2012 Olympics and Paralympic Games with sports fans at each event playing their part and in doing so, showing the British people at their very best. Those fans fortunate to have been at London 2012 will never forget their experiences. The feeling of collective pride and passion in being in a stadium at an iconic sporting moment is not easily described – you have to be there to really understand how it feels – ask any fan.
- VIII. We're a sport loving nation and there are naturally an increasing number of disabled people who also wish to attend live events. London 2012 undoubtedly inspired many disabled people to follow live sports at a national and local level. We have personal testimonies from disabled fans who describe life-changing experiences in attending live sports for the first time, often giving them the confidence to try other new activities, and so by, helping to improve their daily lives.
- IX. London 2012 provided us with a great opportunity to improve access for the long-term with the Olympic Park showcasing just what could be achieved with its venues now set

to provide a legacy for disabled sports fans but there is still a great deal to be done before disabled sports fans can enjoy the same standards experienced by their non-disabled peers at other arenas. Many of our top level sports venues still have much to do on this front and there is often talk about the difficulties of improving access to existing stadia and venues. When considering some of our wealthiest sports, the case for making adequate access improvements becomes even more compelling.

- X. But for disabled fans that can only happen if our stadia and sporting arenas are truly accessible and inclusive. That means providing equal and fair proportions of accessible seating (wheelchair spaces and easy-access seats alongside fellow fans, family and friends), accessible services (such as audio-description for blind fans), accessible information (websites, easy read, and signage), provisions for assistance dogs, accessible amenities, accessible transport links, drop-off points and parking and so on.

**Olympic Park Legacy - Are current plans for the on-going development of the Olympic Park area likely to deliver a positive regeneration legacy? Is the potential legacy impact of hosting the Olympics being fully maximised, or have some opportunities been missed?**

- XI. The Olympic Park was built with inclusion in mind with the Olympic Delivery Authority Built Environment Access Panel (BEAP) established to ensure that the International Paralympic Committee minimum standards were met at each new venue (with LPF as a member of the BEAP). This ensured that each new venue was accessible and inclusive for all including disabled fans. This was further supported by LOCOG with the addition of accessible services and temporary overlays.
- XII. It is important that access and inclusion remains at the forefront of the Olympic Park legacy plans and LPF is reassured that the London Legacy Development Corporation exists to help ensure this is the case. LPF is also aware that a new Cabinet Office Olympic and Paralympic Legacy Unit has recently been established to help ensure long-term legacy solutions and having has been asked to provide feedback.
- XIII. Transport links in the Stratford area are excellent for disabled people and this has left an important legacy for local disabled people. However this is not the case in other parts of London and the UK.
- XIV. During London 2012, Gamesmakers and transport assistants provided additional support to disabled passengers with a marked improvement in services at most train stations and transport hubs. However, things seemed to have slipped again post Games and Paralympics which is a shame.
- XV. However there were some notable exceptions with original legacy opportunities to improve facilities and services missed at some venues; included amongst these were some of the most popular football stadiums frequented by local sports fans week-in-and-week-out.
- XVI. In LPF's view, lessons could and should be learnt from London 2012.

**Are the legacy uses for Olympic sports venues likely to have an impact (positive or negative) on other London or UK sports venues?**

- XVII. Whilst, LPF received a few isolated reports from disabled fans that had had problems during the Games and Paralympic Games, the experiences of the majority of disabled people who attended London 2012 were extremely positive with high access standards reported by most attendees to the Olympic Park.
- XVIII. LPF received very positive feedback regarding the number of volunteers - Gamesmakers - around the Olympic Park who were willing to help disabled spectators.

- XIX. Poor sightlines were a serious issue at Eton Dorney and some disabled people experienced problems in locating the accessible parking areas at various venues.
- XX. There were some problems with the ticketing system with wheelchair users unable to purchase tickets online and the ticket hotline often blocked by the sheer volume of users. This put off a number of disabled people from enquiring about tickets and buying them.
- XXI. There were also a number of issues related to limited PA ticket provisions with some disabled spectators having to buy more than one ticket in order for their PA to accompany them to Olympic events. A PA ticket should be provided, when required, as a reasonable adjustment.
- XXII. Many of our most iconic sporting venues still offer comparatively poor facilities for disabled sports fans and work is underway, with the support of LPF, to ensure further improvements ahead of the Rugby World Cup and the Commonwealth Games. However, this situation is perhaps most poignantly considered when reviewing the nation's favourite sport - football.
- XXIII. Some professional football clubs provide excellent facilities and services and LPF is always keen to celebrate good practice solutions, but we believe that many still do not comply with equality legislation and as such are discriminatory to disabled football fans. Many are failing to meet football's own guidance and minimum standards as described within the Accessible Stadia Guide<sup>1</sup>. It is LPF's view that this is unacceptable within an industry that remains collectively wealthy with record-breaking resources including the new Premier League TV broadcasting deal for 2013/14 which is reported to be in excess of £5.5 billion.
- XXIV. There is a substantial shortage of accessible matchday seating within many stadia, such as places for wheelchair users and amenity and easy access seating for fans with limited mobility or who use an assistance or guide dog. Many football clubs are struggling to fill their stadia on matchdays, but still there are insufficient numbers of wheelchair user spaces in particular.
- XXV. It should be noted that the Accessible Stadia Guide's minimum standards (for football) are significantly lower than those set by the Olympic Delivery Authority - Inclusive Design Standards and the International Paralympic Committee<sup>ii</sup>.
- XXVI. Yet, according to our latest information, only 14 of the 92 professional football clubs provide the minimum recommended numbers of wheelchair user spaces (according to the Accessible Stadia Guide). Many clubs offer very few away spaces for wheelchair users, some as low as 3. Consequently, many disabled people are unable to gain access to football matches. Whereas, if they were non-disabled fans, and didn't require accessible seating, they would have no problems in purchasing match tickets on a regular basis.
- XXVII. Only 3 Premier League clubs exceed football's own minimum numbers, 4 if we consider Arsenal FC with 96%. 50% of Premier League clubs meet less than 50% of the football industries own minimum standards for disabled seating provisions.
- XXVIII. 33 of the 92 (> 30%) professional English League clubs do not enable disabled away fans to sit with their own supporters; including 6 of the 20 clubs (30%) in the Premier League. The Accessible Stadia Guide states: Designated viewing areas should be provided for both home and away spectators.
- XXIX. Being able to attend a match and sit with your family or friends is taken for granted by most fans. This is frequently denied to disabled fans and they often have to sit in a completely different stand and use a different entrance. Disabled fans with children and families with a disabled child can find this an impossible situation.

- XXX. Accessible parking and other accessible amenities are often limited, of a poor standard or non-existent. Poor sightlines or views within disabled fans seating areas are commonplace with views often completely blocked by stewards, police, players (warming up), match officials and other fans that stand at key moments of the game or persistently stand. Many clubs offer only pitch side accommodation to wheelchair users with no shelter from the rain or ball. At some clubs, especially where seating is pitch side, the roof edge of the stand ends directly above the disabled fans and pours water onto them when it rains. Some clubs offer the loan of plastic macs by way of compensation.
- XXXI. LPF has heard rumours that disabled fans facilities and sightlines (for wheelchair users) may be further compromised by the additional cameras required at some Premier League clubs to accommodate their new TV broadcasting deals. **LPF would urge the Select Committee to seek reassurances that this is not the case.**
- XXXII. Accessible services for blind and partially sighted, hard of hearing and Deaf and learning disabled fans are provided at some clubs but this is an area that needs further attention. Clubs should routinely provide large print and audio match day programmes and accessible club websites with clear information. Hearing (or induction) loops and accessible text phone services should be common place and audio descriptive commentary should be offered at every professional club. It is a relatively low cost access provision - circa £5000 per club - yet 25% of clubs have yet to implement any such service and most only provide a very limited generic radio service rather than offering a dedicated audio-described commentary.
- XXXIII. Disabled fans often face having to sit with home fans as away supporters and many have stopped travelling to away games because the situation is so dreadful. This is completely unacceptable in terms of the football fan experience; it is quite simply miserable to have to sit with the opposing set of football fans. Disabled fans are often asked to hide their team colours, to refrain from celebrating goals and so on.
- XXXIV. However, it can also be an intimidating and hostile experience. LPF received complaints from a number of disabled fans travelling to away matches in 2012/13 who were verbally abused (including extremely offensive language) and threatened by the home fans sat next to them. LPF believes that this may even contravene the Equality Act with respect to harassment related to disability; "This type of harassment occurs when a service provider engages in unwanted conduct which is related to a relevant protected characteristic and which has the purpose or the effect of: violating the service user's dignity; or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the service user." (from Equality Act - Code of Practice).
- XXXV. A 2012 fans consultation conducted by Kick it Out found that 15% of fans had witnessed discriminatory chanting aimed at disabled fans. 89% of fans say that abuse towards disabled people is seen to be the most important issue to tackle in football.
- XXXVI. 82% of British football fans agree that being around other fans in the atmosphere of the grounds is as important as watching the game itself. 85% of British football fans associate football with friendship and camaraderie. (Football Passions Report 2008.) Disabled fans should not be deprived of this experience.
- XXXVII. Existing stadia and venues can be improved and adapted to remove physical, sensory and intellectual barriers. Several clubs have used smart inclusive, low cost design solutions and implemented good practice to improve access to their stadia. There is an opinion among some people in the game that what we are asking for cannot be achieved because stadia are old and nothing can change until clubs move to new premises. This is simply not true and a myth. Clubs can make reasonable adjustments to existing stadia without incurring prohibitive costs in almost every case.
- XXXVIII. Several clubs stand as good practice examples in showing what can be achieved towards meeting football's own minimum standards. Derby County FC and Everton FC have

proved that elevated disabled fans seating positions can be added to existing stadia. MK Dons has installed flexible disabled seating in its new stadium but this is also possible at many existing stadia.

- XXXIX. Arsenal FC added prefabricated aluminium super-risers to further elevate several wheelchair platforms originally built with obstructed views and we understand that a few clubs are now considering the installation of similar low cost super-risers in wheelchair user areas. We firmly believe that with the will and some careful planning a great deal can be achieved and certainly that which is reasonable.
- XL. LPF has long campaigned for the establishment of a football stadia improvement fund to enable clubs to make the necessary access improvements in line with football's own standards. This could be easily achieved by setting aside only a very small percentage of the new Premier League TV broadcasting revenue for this purpose.
- XLI. The claim is often made that many non-disabled fans can't get tickets to games. Whilst it is true that some clubs sell out for some high profile matches, it is apparent that all clubs now have to be more creative in selling their matchday tickets. Most clubs sell tickets on the gate or through their ticket office on matchdays. Meanwhile, disabled fans are frequently unable to get tickets and we have received complaints from disabled fans who have tried to purchase tickets before a match along with family or friends only to be turned away because there were insufficient wheelchair spaces and yet there were as many as 20,000 empty seats in the stadium at the game. Clubs are literally turning away valuable customers and good business.
- XLII. Some clubs continue to deny disabled fans an equal right to season tickets because they do not provide sufficient disabled seats such as wheelchair spaces – the waiting lists are disproportionately long and the information and process is not always clear or transparent. One club in particular refuses to sell season tickets to its wheelchair users and currently applies a pre-assigned (1 in 3 matches) rota scheme (for a small number of its disabled fans) with no choice of which matches are allocated.
- XLIII. London 2012 has proved what is possible provided there is a commitment to make access and inclusion improvements. Lessons should be learnt from London 2012.
- XLIV. The greatest London 2012 legacy for this sports loving nation would be to ensure a playing field at all our sporting venues so that many more disabled fans could watch live sports each week with all the joy that brings. In turn, perhaps they may feel inspired to play or have-a-go. To accept anything less would be a compromise and the opportunity may be lost for another generation.
- XLV. **What is your assessment of the proposed future use of the Olympic Stadium as the home ground of West Ham United FC?**
- XLVI. Maintaining the integrity of the Olympic Stadium in legacy is critical as it provided a world-class inclusive experience for all. As such, LPF has been extremely concerned to hear rumours that there may losses to the quality and numbers of disabled fans seats (wheelchair user places) in the stadium in reducing it to a 60,000 seater venue for West Ham United FC.
- XLVII. LPF has recently written to the London Legacy Development Corporation to seek reassurances that, in lowering the Olympic Stadium roof and removing the upper seating tiers, there will be no associated reduction in the numbers of disabled spectator viewing areas or the quality of sightlines and choice of locations around the stadium bowl. **LPF would urge the Select Committee to seek reassurances that this is not the case.**

**Ends**



**Thank you for your consideration. LPF will be pleased to answer any questions that the Select Committee may have and to give oral evidence to this inquiry.**

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**Level Playing Field is the trading name of the National Association of Disabled Supporters**

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<sup>i</sup> ***The Accessible Stadia Guide** published by the Football Licensing Authority (FLA) and FSIF in 2004; the Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds 2008; Football Association: Addressing the Requirements of Part III of the DDA 1995 - A Management Guide for Football Clubs 2003; Premier League: Guidance for Clubs on Disabled Fans and Customers; and Football League: Guidance for Clubs on Disabled Supporters and Customers.*

<sup>ii</sup> ***The Olympic Delivery Authority - Inclusive Design Standards** document provided ODA project teams with guidance on the principles of inclusive design they were expected to adopt and the procedures they were expected to follow in delivering them. The document also provided an overview of the current published inclusive design guidance and standards applicable to specific elements of projects and pointed to the standards the ODA expected its teams to try to meet. **The International Paralympic Committee Technical Manual on Accessibility** seeks to provide information and inspiration to the OCOG and the host city authorities, charged with the responsibility of staging the Olympic and Paralympic Games. It provides expert guidance and detailed technical information based on tried and tested best practice, to enable the delivery of truly inclusive Games for all stakeholders.*