Viscount Eccles Speaking Notes for November the 5th to be made, subject to delivery, to the Public Inquiry into Planning Application 19/00114/FULL.

I am grateful for the opportunity to deliver these Speaking Notes. I have made three submissions in my journey to understand how and why this Application is as it is. The Journey starts with the January 2015 Prime Minister’s Commission Report ‘Britain’s Promise to Remember’. It starts with the Prime Minister’s acceptance of the report’s recommendations and that of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Shortly thereafter the UKHMF was formed.

[NB in previous submissions I have misled myself because I thought that UKHMF was and was meant to be an executive body. UKHMF has been advisory to the MHCLG.

The Commission made five recommendations. They concentrated on delivering ‘directions of travel’. There were options and choices to be made as the Holocaust Memorial was established and operated in its early years.

The Commission’s report and its recommendations were very well received. I know of no opposition to them. I am strong supporter believing that we need a grant aided ‘national institution’ to commemorate the Nazi Holocaust. As important and more demanding will be the Institution’s contribution to research into and study and education in all that the Nazi Holocaust and previous and subsequent genocides can tell us.

As the Commission reminded us our national institution will come into operation nearly 80 years after the ‘Final Solution’. During those 80 years and before there have been charities, academic bodies, writers and commentators contributing to the recording and to the understanding we seek. There lies our duty to achieve close cooperation and our need to add value. “A Striking Memorial” will add value as will “A world Class Learning Centre”.

We are fortunate to live in an old and sophisticated democracy. We have had centuries in which to develop institutions in civil society which underpin and support our parliamentary conventions. Almost everybody wants to see a successful ‘National Holocaust Memorial Foundation’ as a new national institution in our civic society.

The challenge is how to implement this ambition. The question I have been addressing is ‘how well have we got on with this task so far?’ Cautiously and with due diligence I have listed three areas of doubt. They are that the implementation has been ‘Unconventional’, is an ‘Incomplete’ response to ‘Britain’s Promise to remember’, and it is perceived as ‘Partisan’. It is seen as Partisan because of the decision to leave executive control with the government of the day. There is no independent body as envisaged by the Commission.

There should be because for many years National Institutions have been legal entities subject to parliamentary approval: entities with considerable independence and a demanding level of accountability. Some like the IWM have Acts of Parliament. In IWM’s case an act 100 years old this year. Others like The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew are Non-Departmental Public Bodies, in Kew’s case under a Section of the 1983 Heritage Act. This policy and practice is supported across Parliament.

In implementing progress toward this memorial in 2015/6 no proposal was put to Parliament to form an NDPB. If it is argued that the MHCLA is entitled to be chosen by the Executive to implement the Commission’s recommendations: argued that parliamentary approval is not needed; argued that existing policy toward nationals can be bypassed then we get into the question of authorisation. Would Parliament approve if the matter was put to it? We also need to look at what the record shows.

I do not believe that the MHCLG can point to its accountability for any other executive body or national institution in the cultural sector comparable to the proposed Holocaust Memorial.

Following the decision not to form an arms-length executive body in 2015 things which would have been expected have not happened. There is no director, no finance officer and no Business Plan. There are no executive progress reports, no accounts, no record of developing co-operations, no memoranda of understanding, and therefore no emerging coherence and leadership between the proposed national institution and all the other respected players. Nor is there a professor. Nor has there been any fund raising.

Instead the entire public focus has been on the building. This has put the cart before the horse. Careful study of the five demanding recommendations makes it clear that this national institution needs to know what it is going to do before it decides where it will do it. Further that with its overwhelming public support it would have been wise to make its plans plain, to consult on them, and publish its findings and responses. It needed to carry its public with it and this it has failed to do.

Instead there is controversy. The consensus of 2015 has broken down. It is time to change direction

It would not take long to set things on a sound footing. Parliamentary time can be found to legislate for an NDPB. An accountable Board can be appointed as can a director and a professional team. A £75 million grant aided National Holocaust Memorial is a very attractive project surely able to attract charitable funds.

Action needs to be taken urgently because if the project with its very patchy record stays with the MHCLG it will ensure endless controversy. The Planning Application should be rejected.

Presumably it can be revived when an accountable independent Board and its executive management members commit themselves to an open style Business Plan to lead and cohere the commemoration, research, study and nationwide educational network envisaged by the Commission.

John Eccles 4th November 2020