**UKHMF CO-CHAIRS’ PROOF OF EVIDENCE**

**Summary**

1. The Rt Hon Ed Balls and the Rt Hon Lord Eric Pickles are the co-chairs of the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation (UKHMF) which provides independent advice to the Government on taking forward the recommendations of the Prime Minister’s Holocaust Commission.
2. The proof of evidence provided by Ed Balls and Lord Pickles:

* Provides background information on the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation
* Explains the purpose of the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre
* Explains why Victoria Tower Gardens is uniquely appropriate as the location for the Memorial and Learning Centre

*UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation*

1. The UKHMF was established in January 2015 to provide independent advice to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on delivering the recommendations of the UK Holocaust Commission’s Report “*Britain’s Promise to Remember*”.
2. Foundation members are appointed by the Prime Minister, on the advice of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.
3. The Co-Chairs of the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation advise the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government who is responsible within Government for the delivery of the project and is accountable to Parliament. Alex Powell, a senior civil servant within the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, is the Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for the UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre programme. He manages the project reporting through internal structures to the Department’s Accounting Officer and ultimately to the Secretary of State, following normal approval procedures in accordance with *Managing Public Money.*
4. The Prime Minister’s Holocaust Commission was appointed in 2014 “*to examine what more should be done in Britain to ensure that the memory of the Holocaust is preserved and that the lessons it teaches are never forgotten*”.
5. In the course of its work, the Commission encountered a minority of views that could be categorised as ‘revisionist’ and in some cases as outright denial of the facts of the Holocaust. Whether a result of simple ignorance, the influence of certain political agendas or straightforward antisemitism, it is clear that such views are still to be found. As the events of the Holocaust become more remote and there is no one left who can say, “I was there” there is the risk that the narratives of the deniers may become more widespread.
6. In its report “*Britain’s Promise to Remember”* (CD 5.9), published in January 2015, the Commission recommended that there should be a striking new Memorial to serve as the focal point of national commemoration of the Holocaust. The Commission proposed that the Memorial should be prominently located in central London to make a bold statement about the importance Britain places on preserving the memory of the Holocaust and stand as a permanent affirmation of the values of our society. The Commission recognised that a Memorial on its own would not be enough and recommended that there must be somewhere close at hand where people can go to learn more.
7. These recommendations (with others) were accepted by the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, who announced in January 2015 that the Government would build a national Memorial to the Holocaust and a world-class Learning Centre. The Rt Hon Theresa May reaffirmed the Government’s commitment to this objective, as has the current Prime Minister the Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP.

*Purpose of the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre*

1. The Memorial will honour the six million Jewish people murdered in the Holocaust. The learning centre will also remember the other victims of Nazi persecution, including Roma, gay and disabled people, and the victims of subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.
2. The Learning Centre will provide an engaging, reflective and powerful exhibition, which will set the Holocaust within the British narrative: historically, politically and culturally. This narrative will be balanced, addressing the complexities of Britain’s ambiguous responses to the Holocaust, avoiding simplistic judgements and encouraging visitors to critically reflect on whether more could have been done, both by policymakers and by society as a whole.

*Victoria Tower Gardens*

1. After an assessment of possible sites, the Foundation concluded that Victoria Tower Gardens would be uniquely appropriate as the location for the Memorial and recommended this site to the Government. The Foundation considered that no other site could meet the requirement for prominence in the same way. In January 2016 the then Prime Minister announced that the Government had accepted the recommendation.
2. Victoria Tower Gardens are immediately adjacent to the Palace of Westminster and the River Thames; they are within a very short distance of Westminster Abbey. Important national memorials, including the Cenotaph, are a few minutes’ walk away, as are all the major Government Departments, including 10 Downing Street. Establishing the Memorial in this location, alongside these nationally significant buildings and monuments, will provide an unequivocally bold statement of its importance. Moreover, the Memorial at this site will be seen by millions of people who come every year, drawn to this place at the heart of British national life.
3. The Palace of Westminster is the seat and symbol of parliamentary democracy in Great Britain. Locating the Memorial alongside the Palace of Westminster will establish a connection that will promote reflection along several lines:

* Contrasting the high ideals of government through parliamentary democracy against the depths of tyranny demonstrated in the Holocaust.
* A reminder that national governments were key players in the events of the Holocaust, and indeed of subsequent genocides.
* Asking, what causes governments, even in advanced and democratic societies, to support such atrocities?
* A reminder that actions and decisions taken specifically by the British Government had profound implications for many victims of the Holocaust.
* A challenge specifically to British citizens and parliamentarians to take responsibility for the commitment to avoid future genocides.
* The view of Parliament from the Memorial will serve as a permanent reminder that political decisions have far-reaching consequences.

1. Annex G of the evidence responds to the paper by Dr Dorian Gerhold on Victoria Tower Gardens dated 28 May 2019 and included with Baroness Deech’s Statement of Case.