

Proof: BARONESS DEECH

Personal statement

Aims of a holocaust memorial- prevention of antisemitism and genocide; education; challenging Holocaust denial

Security issues

Design issues

Introduction

1. I am Jewish and a crossbench peer. My father fled from Nazi persecution and arrived in England in 1939 via Austria and Prague. He was a founder member of the World Jewish Congress and as a journalist covered the Nuremberg Trials. My grandmother in Poland was refused entry to the UK when the war started and died in a concentration camp, as did many more relatives on both sides of my family. For me, like for many, remembering the Holocaust is an almost daily occurrence. As a child, the stories my parents told me were of their family and the fate that overtook them. I attended the Eichmann Trial in Jerusalem. I have visited Holocaust memorials and museums all over the world and read about their purposes and effects. I have followed the Victoria Tower Gardens (VTG) project from the moment I heard about it and responded to consultations whenever possible. I was the instigator of a letter in the Times from 8 Jewish peers objecting to the plans.ⁱ
2. There may be a place for a sixth holocaust memorial in the UK but this is the wrong place. It is understood that the substantial planning objections may be outweighed by strong public interest in putting up a new building. The public interest that may be prayed in aid of granting the application is 1. Prevention of antisemitism and genocide; 2. Learning about the causes of hatred and genocide; and 3. Challenging holocaust denial by presenting the facts. Moreover the new holocaust memorial would have to be seen to be meeting those objectives while the existing UK memorials do not. The other major ones are: Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre (National Holocaust Centre and Museum) in Nottinghamshire; The Holocaust Exhibition and Learning Centre, Huddersfield; the Hyde Park Holocaust Memorial, London; the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition, London; the Wiener Library for the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide, London, and there are other small ones.

Prevention of anti-Semitism and genocide

3. The claim that it must be sited next to Parliament (albeit on the wrong side from the perspective of parliamentarians approaching the Palace from Whitehall, Portcullis House or the underground), in order to make the point that democracy protects against genocide is not evidenced by history.ⁱⁱ The Holocaust did not take place because Germany was undemocratic but because of many centuries of racial and religious hatred across Europe. Democracies across Europe have been powerless to stop the rise of antisemitism and extremism in recent years – on the contraryⁱⁱⁱ. There are over 300 holocaust memorials around the world, from China to New Zealand. Most have learning centres or museums attached. Sadly, the countries which have the greatest number, which include the USA and France, are also those that have seen

the sharpest rise in antisemitic incidents in recent years. Bearing in mind that holocaust memorials do not in themselves combat antisemitism and that proximity to government buildings has no discernible effect, statements about needing a reminder to politicians do not amount to a public interest in siting a holocaust memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens (VTG) that can outweigh the drawbacks. Impressive memorials in Ottawa, Canberra, Berlin, Belgium, Paris, Athens, Jerusalem and New Zealand are not situated next to their Parliaments. Arguably politicians are the category of persons least in need of being reminded about religious and racial tolerance. If it were a simple tourist attraction (an abhorrent concept in itself) there might be a case for siting it in central London, but it is designed to be more than that.

A Learning Centre

4. There is no need for a national learning centre to be in Westminster. The plan does not fulfil earlier criteria developed for its educational function. Evidence of how the memorial plan has grown and been diverted from its original purpose can be found in the Board of Deputies 2014 submission to the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission^{iv}. The Board noted the inadequacy of Holocaust education (a problem not yet resolved); it noted the urgency of the drive for restitution for victims of the Holocaust, primarily from Poland (also not yet resolved); and it noted that modern antisemitism often takes the form of excessive attacks on the state of Israel. It concluded that the Imperial War Museum exhibition on the Holocaust should be expanded, and praised it for setting the context; and that there should be a "Central London" memorial. This was a much more modest and effective programme. The Commission concluded that non-Jewish victims of the Nazis should be included for commemoration, that is Roma, disabled people and homosexuals, amongst others, which was subsequently confirmed^v. It stated that there should be space for lectures, seminars and offices, and should take over the Imperial War Museum Holocaust exhibition. It proposed three possible locations, which did not include VTG. Then the National Holocaust Memorial Foundation September 2015 paper "National Memorial and Learning Centre: Search for a Central London Site"^{vi} specified as requirements that the chosen site should provide (1) a place where people can pay their respects, contemplate, think and offer prayer, (2) a lecture theatre and classrooms, (3) office for holocaust educational organisations, and (4) space for gatherings of up to 500 people for commemorative events. Either these requirements have been abandoned or if they are to be met by VTG the space and building required will be far more extensive than the plans seen so far.

Holocaust Education

5. Current holocaust education was reviewed and criticised by the University College London Centre for Holocaust Education Report *What do Students know and Understand about the Holocaust* (2016).^{vii} There is no evidence in the VTG project that the recommendations, especially those on p. 219 of the report, will figure in the planned memorial and there is no suggestion anywhere in the UCL Report that siting in Westminster is vital. There appears to have been no consultation with holocaust studies experts on that.
6. On the contrary, the Report manifests the need for accessibility to information by schools throughout the country. The National Holocaust Centre in Newark, and others

in the North could, if resourced, extend information to a broader section of the population. The current lockdown has shown how the internet can be used more widely. The objectives of a Learning Centre could be met more effectively, more accessibly and more economically by digitalisation, some of which is already under way^{viii}. This would avoid crowds and many other problems associated with the VTG and would be available to everyone, including those unable to travel to London. It is a matter of great concern that siting such a sensitive memorial in Westminster will turn it into just another tourist attraction. Either it is to be a quiet reverent place of learning and memory or a busy noisy irreverent tourist attraction but it cannot be both. There is a category of so-called “dark tourism”, that is visits to sites with connections to tragedy, and it would be hurtful for the VTG memorial to become one more such site.

7. We do not know what are the lessons that are to be learned from the learning centre’s focus on the British response to the Holocaust.^{ix} What will be done differently in the future and by whom? Researchers have posited that Holocaust memorialisation is instrumentalised for the political ends of the country constructing a memorial^x. In other words a holocaust memorial can be turned into a signal that “it was not our fault, we have a different and new identity, we did much to assist, we are distancing ourselves from current allegations of antisemitism against a political party, we are promoting “British values””. In statements about the design and location of the learning centre there has come to be increased emphasis on the promulgation of British values, anti-extremism, and faith as the foundation of those values, to such an extent that the project now appears to be more of monument to those values at the expense of a focus on the causes of the Holocaust. The desire of politicians to locate the memorial in Westminster is to further that project, and is not relevant to holocaust learning. There is a case that building in Westminster is less of a tribute to the importance of holocaust memory and education and more of a political signal. It could be argued that siting it near Parliament, as if responsibility lay there, displaces accountability for extremism and hatred from where it should belong.

Holocaust Denial

8. This is a form of anti-Semitism as well as a distortion of history. Highlighted by the case of David Irving versus Deborah Lipstadt^{xi} it has not diminished. However the rate of holocaust denial in the UK is low (6% according to the David Baddiel programme on BBC TV 17th February 2020) and highest in the Middle East, especially the West Bank and Gaza. If there are particular difficulties in teaching children in remote parts of the UK the facts about the Holocaust, then centralisation in London will not assist. Moreover Holocaust denial is not subject to rational thought and it is highly unlikely that any deniers would visit the new memorial and learning centre and change their minds. The growth in the number of memorials around the world has not served to put an end to holocaust denial; hate speech laws and regulation of internet media may be more useful in this regard. The memories of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust are recorded in two oral history projects of the British Library, the Living Memory of the Jewish Community, and the Holocaust Survivors’ Centre interviews. The story of the Kindertransport is extensively covered by the National Holocaust Centre and Museum and the Harwich Kindertransport project. Contextual history is provided by the Imperial War Museum exhibition (and also the RAF Museum). There is nothing in this problem of holocaust denial, grave though it is, that points to a special need to site a new learning centre in Westminster.

Security

9. I am very familiar with the VTG as my office building is right by the entrance. I have anxieties about security. My specialist witness is Lord Carlile who was for 10 years the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation. While of course the Palace of Westminster has security which can be extended, a new and relevant threat is that of protests. As has been seen from the desecration of Holocaust memorials around the world in recent years, this new one is likely to become a target for vandalism, as were 5 London memorials recently. Examples of vandalism are too numerous to list exhaustively but include Greece, 4 times in 2018, Trikala 2019, Ukraine twice in 2020, Budapest 2014 and 2016, Finland 2019, Poland several times in 2016 and 2019, Montevideo 2017, Boston twice in 2017, France Lyon 2019, Latvia, Strasbourg, Oslo 2019, Guernsey 2013, Prague 2019, San Francisco 3 times in 2008, Belarus several times, Berlin, Brussels 2015, Uruguay 2017, New Jersey, Long Island 2019, White Plains 2019, Philadelphia 2019, Glasgow 2019, Weymouth 2012, Salisbury 2018, Paris 2019, Oslo 2019, Ottawa 2020, Seattle 2019, Belarus several times; Brooklyn 2019 and Oradour 2020^{xii}. Those constructions that do not have an immediate visible message about the Holocaust and its gravity seem to be more likely to attract vandalism than those whose message about the Holocaust is immediate.^{xiii} The design for VTG invites mis-use because it stands in isolation and there is nothing in the design to indicate any serious historical significance. So it will have to be protected with a fence, or otherwise in a way that will reduce its impact. It may also become a focus for possible terrorist attacks and protests, especially related to Middle East issues. Since the proposed Learning Centre also includes the history of LGBT, Roma and other genocides, it may attract protests connected with them too. Recently we have seen the effect of relatively small Brexit and Black Lives Matter protests on the area, on passers by and on politicians. This turmoil will be magnified if the memorial is placed in VTG. Security is likely to mean more checks at the entrance to the Gardens for everyone, whether intending to visit the Memorial or not.

The surroundings

10. The Horseferry Playground and children's safety. Other witnesses will speak to parking and how the safety of traffic, visitors and pedestrians will be imperilled. The Horseferry Children's Playground, refurbished as recently as 2015 by the Royal Parks, is to be re-sited, but its surroundings will be changed to such an extent by a memorial that the site would no longer be an appropriate one for children. This can be seen by comparing it with the siting and safety standards set out by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents^{xiv} – and the Royal Parks own standards.^{xv} No longer a relatively secluded area, the children will be very close to the thousands of adults arriving for the Memorial and quite apart from wrecking the atmosphere, there will be child protection issues. Visitors to the memorial and families using the playground will mingle, and this will require a risk assessment, not yet carried out as far as is publicly known. Many of these issues could be avoided if the Learning element were digital.
11. The Memorial will overshadow both physically and in terms of significance the Buxton memorial to the abolition of slavery. The prospect of permission to build in VTG being given to one persecuted minority and its genocide has already led to requests to build similarly to commemorate other genocides in those Gardens or other Westminster locations.^{xvi}

12. The design is entirely unsympathetic to the surroundings. The architects entered an almost identical design for the competition to design a memorial in Ottawa, in a much larger island site with few neighbouring buildings. [photos attached]. It was rejected. It has not been changed materially to blend with the London surroundings. The Canadian context, both historical and geographical, was entirely different and yet the same design notion was offered as appropriate for London. It looks like a fence – forbidding entry rather than inviting it, challenging the rest of the Gardens rather than complementing them. Where the symbolism of a structure is not immediately apparent to the passer by, it tends to be treated with disrespect, as has been the case with the open air memorial in Berlin consisting of grey concrete slabs. There is research about the inadequacy of the Berlin memorial^{xvii}. The essence of the objections relating to Berlin is that the monument lacks specificity (who killed these Jews? when?) and the omission from it of any human figures, names or dates depersonalises and downgrades the tragedy. This is equally true of the Adjaye design. The assumption that everybody will know what it is about could be the first step on the road to anonymity. Visitors use the Berlin outdoor memorial as a playground or picnic site, as I have seen there (photo attached). The Adjaye/Arad design likewise is lacking in visible historical reference and is aesthetically unrelated to the deaths of 6 million Jews or to the surrounds.^{xviii} It is more representative of the architects' unique style than the memory: there are several similar designs by the same architect relating to different memories. It seems that as an afterthought explanations were sought to relate this one to the Holocaust. Legitimate resentment on environmental grounds is inimical to the welcoming atmosphere in which such a memorial should be situated. Some observers have described the plan as an eyesore or a giant toastrack. The design suggests that visitors will be positively encouraged to use the roof of the Learning Centre and make is likely that they will clamber on any fins that are accessible. This disrespect will surely lead to the 'mound' area being fenced off.
13. The original cost of the Memorial and learning centre was estimated at £50m, the size of the government grant, which was subsequently increased to £75m. According to the answer to a parliamentary question, the current estimate is £102m^{xix}. There is no public business plan and no detail of how the centre will be organised, and what will happen if the extra funds are not raised or the running costs escalate beyond resources. If it is not maintained properly there will be further damage to this important site.
14. Alterations to the VTG would be contrary to the London County Council (Improvements) Act 1900 s.8, and therefore would result in litigation unless it is repealed by primary legislation. This statutory provision highlights the importance of the dedication of the Gardens in their open accessible condition which has been maintained for over a century without interruption.
15. The evidence of the consideration or rejection of alternative sites as set out in the EIA is marked by partiality, because the aim always was to find a Westminster "iconic" site, and others were rejected often on subjective grounds, such as lack of impact. The reasons for rejecting a learning centre in a Millbank building are out of date. The obvious location is the Imperial War Museum, especially if the focus is to be on the British response to the Holocaust.
16. The inquiry should note the extreme difficulty in expressing objections, whether based solely on planning considerations or to the project itself. The word "sacred" has been

attached to the project in such a way as to imply that any objection is sacrilegious. Objectors have been described as antisemitic^{xx} and considerable pressure has been applied to prevent even the most reasonable of objections. The government was criticised for influencing the results of the consultation by engaging a private company to solicit favourable responses to the consultation carried out by Westminster City Council.^{xxi} The cost of this was £140,000.^{xxii} The meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Holocaust Memorial on 21.11.18, at which I was present, was taken over by noisy supporters who arrived early and drowned out any objection in orchestrated fashion. The Jewish community is in fact divided on the worth of the project but it has been suggested that the community should not object in order not to alienate the well meaning non-Jewish project supporters. The politicisation of the project has destroyed the prospect of its meeting its objectives and the refusal of Ministers to listen to the anxieties of those who lost family members in the Holocaust is distressing.

September 2020

ⁱ <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/eight-jewish-peers-shoah-memorial-evokes-neither-holocaust-nor-jewish-history/>

ⁱⁱ Paper by Dorian Gerhold, submitted

ⁱⁱⁱ https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-antisemitism-overview-2008-2018_en.pdf
Antisemitism: Overview of data available in the European Union 2008–2018

^{iv} <https://www.bod.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/BOD-Holocaust-Commission-Submission-May-2014.pdf>

^v <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/adjaye-associates-and-ron-arad-architects-win-uk-holocaust-memorial-international-design-competition> <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/winning-design-team-uk-holocaust-memorial-announced-va>

^{vi}

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/459046/National_Memorial_and_Learning_Centre.pdf

^{vii} <https://www.holocausteducation.org.uk/research/young-people-understand-holocaust/>.

^{viii} <https://www.holocaust.org.uk/Appeal/forever-project> <https://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk/digital-holocaust-resources> <https://geschichte.lbg.ac.at/project-visual-history-of-the-holocaust>

^{ix} <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-holocaust-memorial-to-reaffirm-britains-commitment-to-stand-up-against-antisemitism-prejudice-and-hatred>

^x (*An Emerging Holocaust Memorial Problem? The Condition of Holocaust Culture in Britain*, Andy Pearce, UCL, “The Journal of Holocaust Research 2019, p.117, *et al*). Niven, B., Williams, A. ‘The dominance of the national: on the susceptibility of Holocaust memory.’ *Jewish Historical Studies*, 2020, 51(1), pp. 142-164. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.jhs.2020v51.010>.

^{xi} 2000 EWHC QB 115

^{xii} <https://www.facebook.com/WorldJewishCong/videos/533117130746223/>).

^{xiii} For example, Track 17 in Berlin, the Liverpool Street Station Kindertransport statue; the “Gypsy Wagon” in Kiev, the Menorah in Belgrade

xiv <https://www.rospa.com/Play-Safety/Advice/Design>

xv https://www.royalparks.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/56457/The-Royal-Parks-Play-Strategy.pdf

xvi <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/10/slave-trade-memorial-charity-uk-government-refusal-of-funding-boris-johnson> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-50287345>
Parliamentary question by Lord Hylton <https://www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?id=2020-01-20c.922.3>

xvii

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memorial_to_the_Murdered_Jews_of_Europe#Public_reception_and_criticisms; *Mediation at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin* I. Dekel 2013.

xviii <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/david-adjaye-says-disrupting-the-park-is-key-to-his-holocaust-memorial-thinking/10039635.article> <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/david-aaronovitch-the-westminster-holocaust-memorial-doesnt-hit-me-in-my-heart-97765wdc5>

xix <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-05-13/253498/>

xx <https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/holocaust-memorial-multimillion-pound-project-parliament-rejection-324407>

xxi <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/consultant-big-ideas-accused-of-rigging-decision-on-holocaust-memorial-site-fpmfkwlv> <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/government-accused-of-trying-to-rig-public-consultation-on-planned-holocaust-memorial-1.484968>

xxii <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2019-10-02/293452/>