

DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

C(80) 36

COPY NO 82

1 July 1980

## CABINET

## INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Environment

1. The Ministerial Committee on Economic Strategy have recently considered a proposal by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and myself for a new Government Conference Centre to meet our Commonwealth and European Community (EC) obligations in the middle 1980s. Following that discussion I was asked to consider alternatives to continuing with the project on the Broad Sanctuary site and the future use of the Broad Sanctuary site if we abandoned the Conference Centre project.
2. Only on Broad Sanctuary can we provide the full range of facilities for major international conferences, and meet the security and traffic considerations, in time for the EC Presidency in 1987. I have looked into the possibility of adapting Somerset House (a Grade I listed building) or modifying the project to rebuild Richmond Terrace to provide a Conference Centre there. Both projects would cost more and take longer than the Broad Sanctuary scheme; and at Richmond Terrace the requirement could not be met in full (brief details in annex). I know of no other building in London suitable and available for adaptation. A search for other sites, available and meeting the criteria, within three miles radius of Whitehall has also drawn a blank.
3. A temporary solution providing minimal facilities would be costly and not solve our long-term problem. The growth in requirements (especially interpretation facilities) means that Lancaster House is no longer a feasible solution. We would need to provide temporary buildings (perhaps in the Foreign Office courtyard or or Horse Guards Parade) and make use of surrounding offices. The feasibility of these solutions has not been examined in detail; but they would certainly cost several million pounds. Adapting the Lancaster House complex for the 1977 series of conferences cost £2 million at 1977 prices.
4. If we abandon Broad Sanctuary as a site for the Conference Centre, we could consider:

**CONFIDENTIAL**

- a. Leasing it for the construction of Government offices. I do not recommend this course; switching civil servants from one leased building to another will not save us money.
  - b. Grassing over Broad Sanctuary to turn it into a park. This is neither a simple nor a cheap option. There are secure telephone exchanges and other installations below the surface, which we cannot dispense with. Simply landscaping the site would cost about £ $\frac{1}{2}$  million, but measures to keep the exchange operational (secure access, ventilation, means of escape) would add £1 million to this. Providing at the same time for the Parliamentary telephone exchange extension would cost a further £2 $\frac{1}{2}$  million. Complete removal of all installations to another site - a prerequisite of commercial development - would be even more expensive.
  - c. Selling it for private development. I do not consider this appropriate on this site.
5. The Broad Sanctuary design has been approved by the local planning authority and the Royal Fine Art Commission. A public exhibition attracted no adverse comment. Planning is well advanced and construction of the diaphragm wall surrounding the site began under the previous Administration.
  6. The site has remained a conspicuous eyesore in the heart of London for 30 years. At this stage I need to start building the substructure; private sector finance for the superstructure, which is not due to start construction until 1982, is something that I will explore further. But I have covered the provision of sums for this project within my Public Expenditure Survey Committee budget.
  7. The Home Secretary has looked at traffic and security implications. Wherever we put it, a Conference Centre will generate traffic. Parliament Square is already heavily congested, and a Conference Centre at Broad Sanctuary would be likely to add to this problem. The local authorities are in consultation with the police on how to handle the traffic consequences of a Conference Centre here.
  8. A Conference Centre sited anywhere in central London would present significant security, public order as well as traffic problems, and consequential demands on police resources. The security authorities who have been consulted during the development of the proposal are agreed that a purpose-built, detached building on the Broad Sanctuary site would present fewer security problems than other sites in the centre of London which have so far been suggested (Somerset House and Richmond Terrace). There may be public order problems at the site, partly because of its proximity to the Palace of Westminster, but similar problems might occur at any central London site.

9. If colleagues accept that we need proper conference facilities to meet our international obligations, particularly towards the Commonwealth and EC, in the middle 1980s and beyond, my view is that the Broad Sanctuary site offers the only practicable solution.

M H

Department of the Environment

1 July 1980

<u>Site</u>		<u>Costs</u> <u>Sept '79 prices</u> £m	<u>Date of Completion</u>
Broad Sanctuary	Available	29.5	1986
Somerset House	Need to rehouse present occupants (£3m allowed for in cost estimate)	35	Not before 1988/89
Richmond Terrace	Available. Could not provide all conference rooms. Other facilities broadly comparable but smaller lounge for delegates	35	Not before 1988/89

NOTE: The estimates of costs for schemes at Somerset House and Richmond Terrace represent broad orders of costs only at this stage.