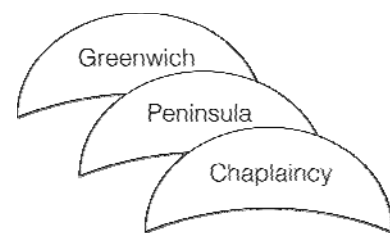


The Greenwich Peninsula Chaplaincy



Newsletter November 2006

www.greenwich-peninsula-chaplaincy.org.uk

On time for July 2007

It's not very visible from the outside, but inside The O₂ (formerly the dome) over 1,000 construction workers are creating a 20,000 capacity arena for music and sports events, a cinema complex including a premiere screen, an exhibition space, clubs, bars and restaurants. The project is on time and on budget, and AEG Europe plan to open The O₂ in July next year.

The faith communities: working together

For over a year now the Greenwich Peninsula Chaplaincy has been providing a chaplaincy service to the construction site for two hours each day Monday to Friday. The chaplains provide an available listening ear, and are usually found in one of the two canteens or wandering the construction site or the offices.

There are eight chaplains: Sheikh Ali Barakat, the Rev'd Derek Clacey, the Rev'd Martyn Coe, the Rev'd Michael Dent, Captain Eileen Halliday, the Rev'd Nancy Odunewu, Mr. Harbhajan Singh, and the Rev'd Malcolm Torry. The chaplains are all volunteers, and they are from a variety of faith communities: one Muslim, one Sikh, and six Christians of various denominations.

The chaplains work to an agreed set of guidelines, and Malcolm Torry is responsible to the chaplaincy's trustees for co-ordinating and supervising the chaplains' work.

The steering group

The chaplaincy is managed by the Greenwich Peninsula Chaplaincy Steering Group, which is governed by a trust deed and is a registered charity (no. 1107892). The members of the steering group, who are the trustees, are: Mr. Saeed Ahmad, the Rev'd Elaine Cranmer (treasurer), Rabbi Tony Hammond, the Rev'd Jeffrey Heskins, the Rev'd Harry Lanham, the Rev'd Mike Leader (Chair), Ms Samantha Leader (no relation), Ms Kuheli Mookerjee, Cllr Jagir Sekhon, and the Rev'd Jim Teeling.

The steering group meets regularly to form policy, and to plan for the future.

The Council of reference

In order to stay closely in touch with the faith communities of Greenwich borough and more widely, the steering group has established a Council of Reference (chaired by the Archdeacon of Lewisham (Church of England Diocese of Southwark) and Monsignor Richard Moth (Vicar General, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Southwark)).

Friends of the Greenwich Peninsula Chaplaincy

If you would like to support the chaplaincy by regular giving and in others ways then please let us know.

We are recruiting some more chaplains

We are looking for a team of 20 volunteer chaplains to work in The O₂ from July next year.

We shall need this many, and maybe more, so that we can adequately serve the spiritual and other needs of several thousand employees at The O₂ and the needs of visitors, employees and residents throughout the Peninsula.

Please discuss this need with your faith community. If there is anyone whom you believe has the listening and other pastoral skills necessary, who has a respected position in their own community, and who will enjoy working in a multifaith team to serve a large entertainment district, then ask them to contact us. And if you want to volunteer, then get in touch.

We shall be collecting expressions of interest until the end of the year and then sending out application packs to be returned by the end of February. Interviews will take place during March or April, and a two-day training course during June so that we're ready for the opening of The O₂ in July.

A temporary building

A temporary building is being planned for the chaplaincy to use as a base for its work on the Peninsula and also for individual faith communities involved on the Peninsula to use for worship. This will be an important provision both for employees at The O₂ and for the Peninsula's visitors and residents of the new homes when they're built.

The longer term plan is to relocate the Greenwich Pavilion from the northern tip of the Peninsula to a new position half way down the eastern side of the Peninsula to provide a permanent base for the faith communities to use for worship, education, dialogue, and community development.

A multifaith approach

This is a multifaith project which means that the different faith communities are doing together everything which they can all in good conscience do together and separately those things which they believe they need to do separately. So we undertake chaplaincy work together, and when a building is available each faith community will worship separately and share in social events and dialogue together.

A possible casino

In July 2005 the Greenwich Peninsula Chaplaincy published a position paper. This explained that some faiths prohibit gambling, that in some there is a diversity of opinion as to whether gambling should be allowed,

but that all faiths have serious concerns about increasing opportunities for gambling because of the damage which problem gambling does to individuals, families and communities.

The recent Gambling Act allows for one new regional casino (a 'supercasino') and a number of new large and small casinos. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has established an independent Casino Advisory Panel to recommend where the regional casino will be placed. They will make their recommendation on the basis of likely regeneration effects and the strength of measures to mitigate social problems.

In August and September the panel conducted Examinations in Public in relation to seven bids.

Greenwich Borough Council and AEG Europe (proprietors of The O₂) proposed that the Rev'd Malcolm Torry, Site Chaplain on the Greenwich Peninsula, should attend the Examination in Public of the Greenwich bid to explain the chaplaincy's work. A somewhat less than perfect summary of the Chaplaincy's July 2005 paper was published on the Casino Advisory Panel's website.

The problem was not so much the content of the summary, which certainly did not sufficiently represent the borough's faith communities' negative attitudes to high-stake gambling, but rather was with the fact that the summary had not been checked with our trustees. Because we are a multifaith chaplaincy it is particularly important that the trustees as a body agree on any policy or position paper, and they hadn't been given the opportunity to do so in this instance.

Malcolm Torry sent an email objecting to the summary and received an immediate apology from AEG which he accepted on behalf of the chaplaincy. His view was that the summary hadn't been checked with the trustees through an oversight and simply because staff had been overworked, and that no malicious intent was involved.

Unfortunately the email exchange was then leaked and appeared on an internet site on which the Daily Mail then found it. Media attention followed during which we stated our position that we didn't regard the imperfect summary of our views to have been maliciously done, that an apology had been received and accepted, and that as far as we were concerned the matter was closed.

Throughout we have reiterated our commitment to provide a chaplaincy service to The O₂, including the casino if one is built – and, constantly, the faith communities' opposition to a regional casino because of the damage it could do.

The Casino Advisory Panel will report its recommendation by January and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will then make her decision. The Chaplaincy Steering Group will be discussing at its next meeting how it will respond when a decision is announced, which is expected early next year.

Whichever borough is granted permission to build a regional casino will then have to agree planning permission and a gaming licence for the proprietor of a regional casino.

We are keen that individual faith communities should discuss their position on whether a regional casino

should be established in The O₂ and that they should make their views known to Greenwich Borough Council.

The Chaplaincy's position remains that outlined in our July 2005 paper.

We are also keen that half-truths should not be told. For instance: it is true that AEG has constructed the floor and the roof-struts in a space allocated for a possible casino. The floor is the roof of the arena service area, which had to be built anyway, and the roof struts had to be completed so that if Greenwich receives permission to grant a casino licence, and Greenwich grants to AEG a licence and planning permission, then the arena won't have to be closed for several months to enable the structure to be attached to the side of the arena.

Also: journalists – and this includes the BBC – have often been heard to say that it is proposed to turn the dome into a casino. The proposed casino, if built, will cover only 8% of the total footprint of The O₂, and the public gaming area only 4%.

We believe that it is essential that telling the truth should characterise debate on whether there should be a casino in The O₂: truth about AEG's proposals, and truth about the chaplaincy's position on gambling.

Our thanks

To Meridian Delta Ltd., Sir Robert McAlpine and McNicholas for all of their help with our current chaplaincy work; to AEG Europe and Kerzner International for helpful consultation over our future work in The O₂; to MDL and the Borough of Greenwich for help with a temporary building; to MDL, English Partnerships and the Borough of Greenwich for useful consultations over the relocation of the Greenwich Pavilion; to the Greenwich Multi-faith Forum, the borough's Ecumenical Borough Deans and many others for help with the recruitment of chaplains; to the Community Development Foundation for a grant towards our work for this year; to faith communities which have released staff for volunteer chaplaincy work; and to all those faith communities and individuals who have supported our work through their co-operation, interest, prayer, and financial contributions.

Further information:

Previous newsletters and our 2005 position paper on the possible casino are available on our website, as is further information about our work and details of the current team of chaplains.

If you would like copies of previous newsletters or of the position paper then please contact us.

Please also contact us if you would like a copy of the recruitment pack for our new team of chaplains either for yourself or for someone else.

Contact The Rev'd Malcolm Torry, Site chaplain, St. George's Vicarage, 89 Westcombe Park Road, London SE3 7RZ Tel. 020 8858 3006, fax. 020 8305 1802 email: Malcolm@mtorry.freeserve.co.uk.