

LONDONASSEMBLY

A damp squib: the Mayor's plans for New Year's Eve

Report of the Culture, Sport and Tourism Committee

December 2002

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Many Londoners are starting to consider their options for New Year's Eve celebrations. No doubt some are wondering what events the Mayor of London will be hosting on 31 December 2002. For those people, the answer is simple – nothing.
- 1.2 Despite a London Assembly report recommending in March 2001 that planning begin for New Year's Eve 2002¹, despite the Mayor stating publicly in May 2001 that he had asked his officers to start looking into the possibilities for New Year's Eve 2002², there will be no large scale event, parade or fireworks with Mayoral support to celebrate New Year's Eve in London in 2002.
- 1.3 To make matters worse for London's New Year revellers, the Mayor announced in late October that Trafalgar Square would be closed on 31 December 2002 for safety reasons and advised Londoners they would have 'more fun at home'.³
- 1.4 The Assembly's Culture Sport and Tourism Committee met with Judith Woodward, the Greater London Authority's Cultural Events Manager, on 20 November 2002 to uncover why no New Year's Eve event will be held this year and what plans the Mayor has for future years.

2. Why has nothing been planned for New Year's Eve 2002?

- 2.1 From our discussions, it seems that the Mayor gave no instructions to his cultural events team that an event should be organised for New Year's Eve 2002. He merely asked his team to look at options and appears not to have pursued the issue further. In effect, he failed to act on the London Assembly's recommendation and has not shown the firm political leadership and vision that his position demands.
- 2.2 Judith Woodward cited the re-development of Trafalgar Square as a further reason for not organising any events in central London. Yet the timing of the Square's re-development was known as far back as 2000⁴ and the planning of a New Year's Event was never dependent on Trafalgar Square being ready. If the Mayor had been truly committed to hosting a New Year's Eve event in 2002, he had ample opportunity to find another location in central London.

We believe that there has been a lack of leadership on the part of the Mayor in organising an event for New Year's Eve 2002. Trafalgar Square's re-development is no excuse for failing to provide Londoners with an organised celebration.

- 2.3 This tacit decision not to organise any New Year's Eve event in central London leaves people to make their own arrangements. Effectively it shifts the focus for the night from event management to crowd management (largely the responsibility of Metropolitan Police and emergency services). As Judith Woodward remarked about one of the traditional centres of celebration

¹ *Future Major Events in London: Final report of the Major Events Investigative Committee*, Greater London Authority, March 2001.

² Mayor's Question Time, 23 May 2001

³ See 'Trafalgar Square closed for New Year's Eve', Greater London Authority, GLA/2002/475

⁴ See for example, Mayor's Question Time, 18 October 2000, Question 325/2000

attracting up to 80,000 revellers, 'Trafalgar Square on New Year's Eve [2002] is not an event; it's a public order problem'.⁵

- 2.4 Because the Mayor has not made clear that there are no formal events, his announcement on 22 October 2002 that 'Trafalgar Square will be closed completely on New Year's Eve' and that 'as an alternative we will be putting planking over the grass at Parliament Square'⁶ appears to have further muddied the waters.
- 2.5 For example, the Committee has brought to the GLA Culture Team's attention at least two websites which direct those coming to London for New Year's Eve to Parliament Square in light of the 'closure of Trafalgar Square'. Judith Woodward made it very clear that there is 'no public entertainment-type event taking place on Parliament Square' or Trafalgar Square.
- 2.6 Adding further to the confusion, we heard that Trafalgar Square itself is not closed but rather inaccessible. As the map at Appendix A demonstrates, although a large part of the Square itself will be inaccessible, the roads around the Square will be closed to traffic but open to pedestrians. Therefore, 'a very large proportion of the people' who would normally go to the Square will still be accommodated. Parliament Square serves only as a contingency should crowds be in excess of capacity. Nonetheless, the costs of protecting both Squares from damage will be over £35,000 (see Appendix A).
- 2.7 Westminster Council has told us that the Metropolitan Police will be issuing a general message to discourage public from coming to Trafalgar Square or gathering outdoors. This message will make clear that the West End is not closed as there are many indoor venues/businesses who rely on access being maintained.
- 2.8 We endorse the Metropolitan Police's concerns about safety. Given the usual risks associated with large gatherings of people and the current heightened sensitivities, we believe people should be made fully aware that no events are organised for central London. This is rightly the responsibility of the police service. However, In light of the confusion surrounding the night, we believe the Mayor also has a role to play in publicising this fact.

We believe that the Mayor has failed to make sufficiently clear that there are no New Year's Eve events organised for central London – particularly in Trafalgar and Parliament Squares.

3. What plans does the Mayor have for future New Years Eve events?

- 3.1 According to Judith Woodward, the Mayor is keen to see a 'New Year's Eve celebration in central London suitable to a world city'. In our view, there are a significant number of Londoners who want to mark the event.
- 3.2 In previous discussions about New Year's Eve celebrations, the Mayor has strongly indicated that he is not in favour of staging celebrations centred

⁵ Minutes of Culture, Sport and Tourism Committee, 20 November 2002. All further quotations are taken from this meeting unless otherwise stated.

⁶ Mayor's weekly press conference, 22 October 2002

around midnight in central London due to the risks from miserable weather, darkness, drunkenness and large crowds.⁷

- 3.3 Pressed last year to describe the kind of New Year's Eve event he would stage, the Mayor talked in terms of an early evening fireworks event for families, possibly in several locations around London to reduce the risk of huge crowds.⁸
- 3.4 From our discussions with Judith Woodward, it appears that this idea is no longer under consideration for the immediate future. Instead Ms Woodward cited two possible contributions from the Mayor for New Year's Eve 2003 and beyond.

24 hour Underground service

- 3.5 We heard that the most important contribution the Mayor believes he can make to New Year's Eve is to have the Tube operating all night for New Year's Eve. Despite tentative discussions, the Mayor has not been able to secure 24-hour Tube operation for New Year's Eve 2002.
- 3.6 According to London Underground, all night running of the Underground has occurred only three times in the system's history⁹ and requires considerable forward planning. Once the Mayor takes control of the Underground, the PPP contracts will allow for an all-night service three times a year on special occasions, such as New Year's Eve.¹⁰ Since this may now not occur until 2006, he will need to start talking to London Underground, other transport operators, emergency services and potential sponsors as soon as possible if he is to achieve 24 hour Tube operation for New Year's Eve 2003.
- 3.7 It is disappointing that the Mayor has not yet managed to deliver this 'most important contribution' to London's New Year's Eve celebrations. In our minds, this raises an important question about the impact of his role.

We support the Mayor's attempts to organise 24 hour running of the Tube on New Year's Eve.

We are disappointed that he has been unable to achieve it for New Year's Eve 2002 and recommend that he start work now if he is to achieve this for New Year's Eve 2003.

Visual celebration

- 3.8 The other proposal for future New Year's Eves is a 'visual mechanism which is suitable for London as a world city' but does not encourage large numbers of people into the centre of town. We heard that this is likely to involve the lighting up of certain bridges and buildings in London. Judith Woodward made clear that a celebration of this kind would have to be funded primarily through sponsorship.

⁷ See for example Mayor's Question Time, 15 November 200 & 21 November 2001.

⁸ See for example, Mayor's Question Time, 15 & 27 November 2001

⁹ For Jubilee Weekend, Millennium Eve and the coronation of King George VI

¹⁰ See 'Mediawatch: London shows what can be done', www.thetube.com/content/mediawatch/default.asp?vid=99

- 3.9 Initial planning commenced in September this year but no discussions have yet been held with potential sponsors. If GLA 'seed' funding is to be available for an event for New Year's Eve 2003, that funding should be identified as part of the budget process in February 2003.

We are concerned that planning, identification of GLA 'seed' funding, and securing of sponsorship for 2003 celebrations does not match the recommended 18 month lead-time suggested by previous reviews.

We are also concerned that the Mayor's vision for future New Year's Eve events is too limited and does not match the aspirations of many Londoners for a safe event at which they can gather to celebrate the New Year.

4. Conclusion

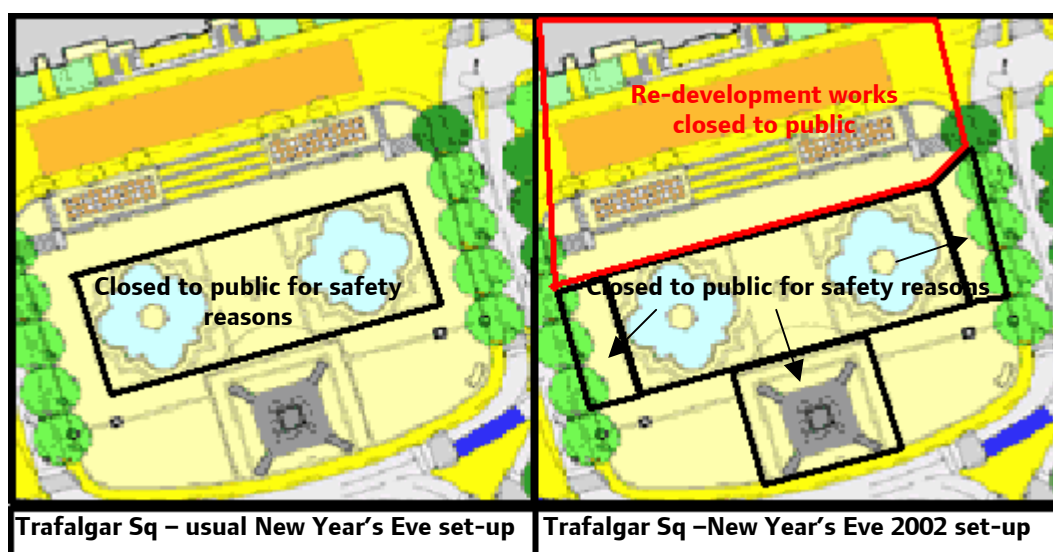
- 4.1 We are very disappointed that the Mayor has not put his weight behind organising celebrations for New Year's Eve 2002. In failing to do so, we believe he has disregarded not only the recommendation of the London Assembly but also the wishes of Londoners.
- 4.2 Significant numbers of people in London want to gather to celebrate New Year's Eve and would like to have an event to mark this occasion. There will always be an issue about managing the crowds who gather spontaneously in Trafalgar Square, Parliament Square, Leicester Square and Covent Garden at midnight. We believe the Mayor has a responsibility to look beyond these gatherings and offer Londoners some alternatives.
- 4.3 In the case of New Year's Eve 2002, the re-development of Trafalgar Square, which has been planned for some time, is an insufficient excuse for not organising an event. However, given that no event has been organised this year and the heightened concerns about safety in central London, the Mayor has a responsibility to highlight this fact and make certain that Londoners are not under the mistaken impression that an organised event has been moved to Parliament Square.
- 4.4 We support the Mayor's plans to secure all night services on the Underground for New Year's Eve. It is unfortunate that he has not been able to provide at least this contribution to Londoners' celebrations for New Year's Eve 2002.
- 4.5 We remain concerned that the Mayor's vision for future New Year's Eves may not match the aspirations of many Londoners. The GLA Cultural Events team has considerable resources at its disposal¹¹ and we believe more could be done to explore creative options for New Year's Eve 2003 and beyond. If anything at all is to be achieved for New Year's Eve 2003, work must progress rapidly.
- 4.6 The Mayor has successfully thrown his support behind St Patrick's Day Festival, Chinese New Year, the Notting Hill Carnival and several London festivals. On behalf of Londoners, we ask that he extend this support to giving London a New Year's Eve celebration befitting a world city.

¹¹ A budget of approximately £750,000 and a staff of six people.

Appendix A: Trafalgar Square arrangements for New Year's Eve 2002

The re-development works on the north side of Trafalgar Square mean that a large section of the Square will be inaccessible to the public for safety reasons on New Year's Eve 2002. As is usually the case for New Year's Eve, the fountains in the Square will also be off-limits.

We are informed that the Metropolitan Police consider that the remaining narrow flanks of the Square either side of the fountains could pose a risk to crowd safety. Therefore, these sections and the base of Nelson's Column will also be off limits to the public.



Please note that this diagram¹² is intended to be illustrative only. It is based on advice to the Committee from the Cultural Events team in November 2002 and may not reflect final arrangements.

Costs for protecting Trafalgar and Parliament Squares

Over £35,000 will be spent to physically protect Trafalgar and Parliament Squares from damage on New Year's Eve 2002.¹³

The cost of boarding up statues and putting up hoarding in Trafalgar Square last year was £13,600. Despite a larger area of the Square becoming inaccessible this year, the cost is expected to be roughly the same.

Protecting Parliament Square is more costly. In light of the extra numbers of people expected, it is estimated that £42,500 worth of damage could be done to the Parliament Square Garden by New Year's revellers if no protection is put in place. Returfing the grass in the Square alone could cost £39,000. The Mayor has agreed to spend £21,600 on protecting the grass, flower beds and statues in the Square.

Protection of both Squares is funded through the GLA's 'World Squares' budget.

¹² Taken from Transport for London map (www.londontransport.co.uk/streets/map_wsfa_plan.shtml)

¹³ All figures taken from 'New Year's Eve 2002 – Trafalgar and Parliament Squares', report to the Mayor's Management Board, 21 October 2002.