

Beacons of legacy for 2012

The IDeA's Olympic and Paralympic Games legacy conference brought the five local authorities serving as beacons of legacy good practice to Wembley to explain how it could be done. The Leisure Review was on hand to report.

When it comes to the London 2012 legacy, the numbers are going to be important. This was a point not lost on Chris White, chair of the Local Government Association's culture, tourism and sport board, as he opened proceedings at the Olympic and Paralympic Games Legacy conference hosted by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) at Wembley stadium. It will very shortly be three years until the London Olympic and Paralympic Games opens for business, Councillor White noted, and five years, give or take a week, since London were awarded the games. This Wembley event was part of the IDeA's beacon learning exchange programme and White acknowledged that while many local authorities across the UK had already done a great deal of work on the delivery of an Olympic legacy over the past half-decade there was still much to be done. With the help of the five local authorities selected as beacons of Olympic legacy delivery, he was confident that much can still be achieved and the size of the audience, which numbered around the two hundred mark, suggested that there are plenty of people still keen on getting something out of the Olympic experience.

Sebastian Coe was not short on numbers himself. Looking confident, polished and at ease with the size of the task before him, Coe pointed out that the London Olympic Games will start at 7.45pm on 27 July 2012, exactly three years from the very next week or, if you prefer, in 158 Wednesdays time. There will then be eighteen days in which to transform London from an Olympic host city to a Paralympic city and then another eleven days of sport. The scale of the job in hand was, he explained, equivalent to organising 26 simultaneous world championships with the eyes of the sporting and much of the non-sporting world upon you. LOCOG's £2 billion budget for the staging of the Games was fixed and unchanged, he claimed, and half the money had, thanks to its commercial partners, already been banked.

Mindful of his audience and his brief, Coe saluted the role of local authorities in delivering the power of the Games to all parts of the host nation. "We [LOCOG] could not ask for better support from local authorities," he said. "From the very moment I joined the UK Sports Council over twenty years ago I recognised more than most that the longest and truest friend and sponsor of sport in this country has consistently been the organisations represented in the room today. I'm deeply grateful for the efforts you've made to support our efforts in drawing attention to the extraordinary power the Games has to engage and excite all our communities." He had, he assured them, travelled across the UK to be witness to many local initiatives and had seen many and varied examples of excellence. He offered particular congratulations to the beacon councils, all of which have "grasped the opportunities to excite young people", and offered his own memories of being inspired by the Mexico Olympics to turn up at "a scrubby track in Hillsborough" to join his local athletics club. He recalled finishing ninth in his first ever event, and would have finished tenth had the additional competitor turned up, but a life was thus transformed. He was confident that many other lives would be similarly changed by the arrival of the London Olympics and the work of local authorities around the UK.

He ran through some of LOCOG's projects, initiatives and structures to date, including the work of the LOCOG nations and regions group, preparation camps, the Compete 4 procurement process, the Personal Best skills programme, the 21 live screening sites, the Get Set programme for schools and the cultural Olympiad. However, Coe acknowledged that the legacy process cannot be driven from the centre.

"You know what your communities need better than we do," he said. With so many ways for local authorities to get involved in the 2012 Games, he urged his audience to go back and challenge colleagues about how they can engage the process for the benefit of people in their communities. "It's a once in a lifetime opportunity," he said. "This is everyone's Games. This is our time. Let's not squander it."

With teams from the five beacon councils – Greenwich, Kent, Hackney, Dorset, and Essex – lined up to deliver expository workshops, elected representatives took to the stage to explain what the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games had meant to them and their communities. Michael Hill, cabinet member for community services at Kent County Council, urged his fellow councillors to look at the Games as a project beyond a few years of sport. Kent had been clear that it wanted to use the Games as a means to embed the cultural sector into the authority's work and raise the profile of culture across the county. A legacy inspired by the Games will be delivered for the people of Kent and local government has to play the lead role in getting people involved and

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Seb Coe: finding Wembley all the way from Stratford

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Cllr Sylvia Dunkley: Sheffield's Lighting the Flame for Sport

inspired. However, political leadership will be required.

Councillor Guy Nicholson, cabinet lead for regeneration and Olympic/Paralympic Games at Hackney, stressed his borough's emphasis on partnership and change. "We quickly realised the scale of opportunity and change that could be brought about by the Games," he said, "but we realised that we would need to create partnerships." This has been done by the five host boroughs, many of which are looking to bring benefits to some hard-pressed communities. Much can be achieved through effective partnerships but, he argued, these have to be confident partnerships. Hackney is now into year two of the cultural Olympiad across East London and the borough is beginning to map and measure participation and engagement. The arts are recognised as a gateway into the Olympics and the East End is ready to reach out to other communities for collaboration and change.

Councillor Sylvia Dunkley, cabinet member for culture, sport and tourism with Sheffield City Council, reminded a by now departed Lord Coe that he would not find a scrubby stadium now were he to pop down to visit the city's facilities. A new strategy – Lighting the Flame for Sport – will see 2012 becoming a platform for sport in the city and Sheffield is working closely with regional and sub-regional structures and partners. To create legacy, Dunkley argued, all local authorities have to seize the opportunity now. Sitting back and letting things happen will not work and real legacy will only come when the Games are integrated into other strategies. Sheffield is clear about its vision and its priorities – increasing participation, coaches and volunteers, top-level level sport, major events, the cultural Olympiad and business development – but she urged fellow elected representatives to recognise the need to tell people about what their council is doing and the need to set targets and measure achievements.

Mark Phillips, head of London 2012 brand marketing with Adidas, explained some of the commercial realities of the Olympic movement, explaining how his company will be defining their achievements as a Tier One sponsor of the London Games. "2012 has a lot to offer sponsors," he said, "but it needs to, given the amount of money we have paid." Paralympian Ade Adepitan offered a rather more edifying perspective of the Olympic journey, in his case from Lagos-born child with a fashion disability inflicted on him by his mother's bizarre notions of appropriate schoolwear (purple checked flairs and a full Afro) through to dedicated athlete able to share the pinnacle of the world's sporting stage thanks to the medium of wheelchair basketball. "Sport makes an inner contribution," he said and urged his audience to do all they could to make sport accessible to all make the most of the opportunities provided by legacy. "The solution to all our problems is usually right in front of us," he said. In this case, 158 Wednesdays in front of us.

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Ade Adepitan: Paralympian and inspiration

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