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I N T E R O F F I C E M E M O R A N D U M

Date: 07-Dec-1989 17:42
From: Paul Willemen
PAUL WILLEMEN
Dept: F & D
Tel No:

TO: Wilf Stevenson

(WILF STEVENSON)

Subject: Building the Arts into London

Report:

Building the Arts into London - Day.

Date: 6.12.89

Venue: Royal Festival Hall

Organisers: Royal Town Planning Inst. & GLA.

Documents & Programme are attached to this report.

Comment:

Waste of time from a BFI pov. May have been of interest to borough officers and planning personnel in councils.

Full of PR talk with the constant repetition of " great opportunities...challenges...creative people...benefits to the community...corporate planning...art enhances land and property value for the developer...unique heritage...planning gain...partnerships" etc etc.

Individual speakers concentrated on promoting themselves and/or their organisations (Fulham, Terry Farrell, URBED, Sheffield Media Quarter).

N.Falk from URBED let the cat out of the bag by suggesting that it is a good strategy to attract artists to come and live in run down areas that they will improve them, at which point they can then be squeezed out and move to another run down area.

It looks as if the 33 boroughs of London are embarking on 33 Urban Econ Dev plans, all competing with each other and seeking to improve things for people in 'their' borough... The result will then be, IF they are successful, to hike the land values in their areas, thus squeezing out low income families and making London into a solidly Tory area surrounded by a low income twilight zone and masses of homeless people dossing on streets. The social consequences of these policies, pursued by Labour councils as much as by other ones, are terrible to contemplate.

Mercifully, not all boroughs were represented at the meeting, suggesting some are not interested.

Most of the talk hovered around the problem of involving visual artists, architects and landscape architects at the planning stage of public space-projects.

The 'Percent for Art' campaigners insisted that the calculation for aesthetic enhancement should be agreed with the Quantity Surveyor at the beginning of the project.

The Sheffield people left me with the strong impression that the entire Sheffield media development hangs on one single fact: the existence of successful chart topping bands in Sheffield. The bands generate all the rest: recording studios, sleeve jacket designers, promo tapes, photographs, drivers, caterers, etc.

'Film' work was presented as dependent on: C4 Commissions, the BFI and Channel 5.

The most vivid impression I carried away from the day was how

thoroughly the Thatcherite approach had penetrated even into the head of her opponents.

The importance of public transport was not mentioned as parochial little borough went into competition with every other parochial little borough. In the end, we were talking of a third world city in which 'the community' occasionally puts a statue in a square or a mural on some hoardings...while waiting for the bulldozers to move in. Which of course Ridley's policy.