

Open letter to Boris Johnson, Mayor of London, regarding the planned redevelopment of Earls Court Exhibition Centre

Boris Johnson
Mayor of London
Greater London Authority
City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

6 October 2011

Dear Mr Johnson,

I am writing this email as the Managing Director of Diversified Business Communications UK, an international organiser of trade exhibitions, and I want to raise my serious concerns about the likely redevelopment of Earls Court Exhibition Centre. Along with the rest of the industry, I am absolutely appalled by the prospect of losing this important venue, our only major international venue in Central London, due to private interests and property speculation. Yes, it is in need of modernisation and investment and could do with being redeveloped – but not as housing! In other countries, major exhibition and conference venues are seen as a crucial platform for business and a way to showcase products and facilitate business, but in this country, somehow, nobody really seems to care.

I recall a BBC *Money Programme Special*, broadcast a couple of months ago and presented by Evan Davies, in which Mr Davies posed the question of where, in this new age of outsourcing and increasingly little manufacturing, the jobs will be found in the future and to consider in which areas we are world leaders with competitive advantage. The two top sectors were 'financial services' (no surprise there) and as a 'meeting place for the world', where he considered us to be particularly well placed, due to language, airports, our trading heritage and London as a city. Yet the reality is that business people increasingly prefer to do business in other countries with much better conference and exhibition facilities, which, in the UK, are generally considered amongst the worst of any major international city.

Most major international cities have learned from the German model, where state-of-the-art exhibition centres form a fundamental part of the infrastructure of the cities and support commerce, and just look how successful Germany is today! They provide the single most important facility to promote a country's products to the wider world, they are a source of pride, they generate significant income and employment, and they provide a place for people from around the world to do business. Yet here nobody seems to care, and those that should seem to be trying to make life for the commercial world, that powers the UK economy, as difficult as possible. It's a bit like asking us to run a rail network without providing the stations.

The exception in the UK is, of course, ExCeL, which rightly I know you are a great supporter of, and it is a fantastic venue for certain types of events. But it doesn't work for all and is too far from Central London, and Heathrow, to be considered a viable alternative to a central London venue for many events. It is not a question of one or the other but that both have a place and that London needs a top international facility in the centre of the capital. It's a huge issue for our industry and you simply cannot force people to go to a venues they don't want to go to – they choose another country!

People from outside the UK are incredulous at our general facilities and the lack of vision and planning, and I really feel it is about time we take stock and consider our priorities. We in the UK are world leaders as trade show organisers and we have the demand, yet we have the worst facilities of any major modern city. As a result, most major UK organisers – and yes, our companies are international leaders in this field – now focus on organising trade shows abroad, supporting foreign economies, rather than our own UK economy. We can afford to spend billions on an Olympic Games, which nobody seems interested in, yet, where we still have an opportunity to not just maintain but create something which will have a positive long term impact on the UK economy, we turn a blind eye, as if supporting the real world and encouraging commerce in the UK, is just a little too dirty to get involved with. I can't imagine any other major economy taking the same stance. It is extremely depressing and reminds me of how we treated our motor industry.

I would very much welcome the opportunity to meet you in person to explain how other countries treat this important industry, to show images of their facilities and to discuss why we quite simply, for the sake of our nation, can't allow this to happen.

It's not too late and I appreciate your understanding of what lies before us. Please, as someone so passionate about changing our priorities and focusing on the long term, I urge you and your party to get involved and help to fight for this important cause.

Thank you. I have sent letters to Hammersmith & Fulham Council and Chelsea & Kensington and I have also communicated my concerns to Mr Cameron.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Carsten Holm
Managing Director
Diversified Business Communications UK

120 Church Street, Blenheim House, Brighton, BN1 1UD

Email: cholm@divcom.co.uk

Tel: +44 (0)1273 645114

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Notes:

Slightly adapted versions of this letter have also been sent to the Rt Hon David Cameron MP, Rt Hon Ed Milliband MP, Rt Hon Vince Cable MP and Ken Livingstone.

Diversified Business Communications UK is the event organiser of Natural & Organic Products Europe, office, lunch!, the Independent Health Store Conference, camexpo, and the Service Desk & IT Support Show. The company also publishes Natural Products magazine and the Natural Beauty Yearbook.*

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