

Mayor's Office

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**Date:** 17 August 2010

Dear Ron

It was very useful and informative to meet you last week to discuss your thoughts on the proposals to devolve management of the Royal Parks from central government to the Mayor. As promised, I've outlined below our position on the points you raised in your letter of the 21<sup>st</sup> July, which I hope clarifies the Mayor's position on the issues you raised.

With regard to future governance arrangements, the precise nature of these will require detailed discussion with Government. However there is broad agreement with John Penrose, the Minister for Tourism & Heritage, that the responsibilities for management of the Royal Parks should be devolved to the Mayor. As you know, it was a commitment made prior to the election by Jeremy Hunt, the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport. Whilst various legal and legislative arrangements, and the timeline, need to be resolved, we don't consider these a barrier to devolution.

It is our intention that revised management arrangements would:

- provide for local representation, to ensure responsiveness to local concerns
- ensure the national importance of the Royal Parks are recognised
- ensure the wide range of interests in the Parks (for example the nationally important ecological interests of Richmond Park) continue to be balanced and valued
- ensure the highest standards of park management are maintained

Although we believe that the Royal Parks Agency does an excellent job, there are strong arguments to ensure that it is more accountable to Londoners, and responsive to the concerns of Londoners. We would oppose the breaking up of the Royal Parks.

Clearly the national identity and character of the Royal Parks underpins their importance to local residents and visitors. The Mayor is committed to ensuring the quality of the Royal Parks and the associated brand and image is maintained and enhanced where possible. Links with other relevant bodies involved in managing open spaces would be maintained and, as necessary, improved.

The financial constraints being placed on central government departments are likely to impact on the Royal Parks Agency's future budget settlement regardless of future governance arrangements. The Mayor has made it clear that he will only take on responsibility for the Royal Parks if an adequate funding settlement is secured.

Clearly, funding of the Royal Parks is important if their quality and status is to be maintained. The Mayor's intention would be to explore a range of options that help increase income, whilst ensuring the identity and character of the Royal Parks is not compromised. However, it is premature for us to give detailed consideration to the options – such as your proposal for a toll charge – as we are only just starting negotiations with the government about the future of the parks.

I'm keen we continue to have a constructive dialogue on the devolution proposals as they develop, and I look forward to meeting you again at the Royal Parks Friends Forum on 11<sup>th</sup> September.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Browne', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Anthony Browne,  
Chairman, GLA Royal Parks working group

Cc Zac Goldsmith, MP for Richmond Park