



# LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL

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**PRESS BUREAU**

## DUKE OF EDINBURGH VISITS CRYSTAL PALACE NATIONAL RECREATION CENTRE SITE

At 11.50 a.m. on Thursday 24 November the Duke of Edinburgh will operate the crane which will lower into position the first of the columns which will support the superstructure over the first 120 yards covered practice running track in this country. He will thus help to build the first purpose-built National Recreation Centre which the L.C.C. is providing on a 36 acre site at Crystal Palace at a cost of about £2 million.

The Centre was designed in the department of the Architect to the Council, Mr. Hubert Bennett, F.R.I.B.A., the Central Council of Physical Recreation being the technical planning advisers. The main contractors are M. J. Gleeson (Contractors) Ltd. When completed in three years' time it will be run by the Central Council of Physical Recreation with financial help from the Ministry of Education, the L.C.C. and other organisations. Its aim will be, by training of coaches and leaders and providing competition facilities of Olympic standards, to encourage young people to take part in a wide range of sports and athletics.

The superstructure over the covered running track will form the raised footway approach to the central public concourse of the main sports hall. This concourse will extend right through the spine of the building with, on one side, a large gymnasium hall with retractable seating for 1,320 spectators and, on the other side, the swimming hall with racing and diving pools to Olympic dimensions, a teaching pool and upper and lower galleries with seating for 1,700 spectators. A fuller description of the building and the facilities it will provide is included in the attached notes on the scheme, which give particulars of its other features, viz., the stadium catering for all track and field events, designed to Olympic standards, with stand accommodation for 12,000 spectators, the eleven storey King George VI memorial hostel, the sports pitches and the covered and open-air practice areas.

The Crystal Palace project was mentioned in the report of the Wolfenden Committee on Sport and the Community which referred to the unquestioned success of the existing National Recreation Centres (the three in England and Wales are run by the C.C.P.R.) and the unique value of the training they provide.

### THE CEREMONY

The Duke of Edinburgh will be welcomed on the site at 11.30 a.m. by the Lord Lieutenant of Kent, Lord Cornwallis, the Right Hon. the Chairman of the L.C.C. (Mrs. Florence Cayford, J.P.) and the Chairman of the Penge Urban District Council (Mr. S. P. Bailey, J.P.). After

presentations the Chairman of the L.C.C. and a representative of the Central Council of Physical Recreation will speak and, after replying, His Royal Highness will take the place of the crane operator in the driving cab and will lower the column into position. Then, escorted by the Chairman and a small party including the Council's Architect and representatives of the contractors, the Duke will inspect the work in progress on the site of the main sports hall. Before he leaves he will see in an adjoining marquee an exhibition of models and plans of the Centre.

#### PROGRESS OF THE WORK

The contractors started construction in May of this year and the work has progressed despite extremely bad weather conditions.

The basement areas of the Sports Hall have now been excavated and will contain the boiler rooms, fuel stores, filtration rooms and space for mechanical ventilation plant. Approximately 20,000 cubic yards of earth have been removed from this area. Adjacent to this excavation 255 piles have been sunk which will finally support the three swimming pools.

The existing bowl for the stadium has been hollowed out and shaped preparatory to concreting the stepped seating which will commence when weather permits.

A large amount of earth-moving has taken place generally to soften the existing contours and when completed approximately 100,000 cubic yards of material will have been excavated, the majority of which is being used within the Crystal Palace grounds for filling, levelling and forming terraces.

Between the Sports Hall and the Stadium a 24 foot high retaining wall is under construction which will form the rear wall of a covered practice area and the concrete columns have been cast at ground floor level, which will later support a restaurant over part of this area.

The excavations for the 110 foot high hostel block have been completed and the majority of the 104 piles have been sunk.

The 86 reinforced concrete piles to support the columns of the elevated footways and bridges have been completed and it is the first of a series of these columns which on 24 November The Duke of Edinburgh will place in position to carry the elevated footway over the covered 120 yard sprint track.

During excavations a number of large cast-iron pipes and brick culverts have been unearthed. The pipes originally served to bring water from the artesian well at the Penge entrance via a steam pump to the two towers of the old Crystal Palace where water was stored to give adequate supply and pressure to the vast fountain display. The brick culverts carry surface water from the upper parts of the site and have been diverted where possible or linked into the new drainage system.

## CONTRACTORS' REPORT

At the planning stage of this contract the main contractors, M. J. Gleeson (Contractors) Limited, decided to programme the contract for a period of 2½ years, which is six months within the contract period, the six months being kept in hand to give tolerance in case of bad weather, etc.

The contract was divided into four sections, one general foreman and one engineer to each section, with a sub-agent, and each section is responsible to the agent supervisor.

Approximately 120,000 cubic yards of muck has been moved by motor scrapers and large excavators at the rate of 500 cubic yards per hour. Later, this method had to be changed and caterpillar tractors with 18 yard boxes had to be used because of the abnormal weather conditions.

Great difficulties have been encountered and a lot of flooding has taken place because of the old existing culverts installed approximately 100 years ago, and which could not always be traced. Large bore immersion pumps are being used to remove the excess water.

500 tons of sheet piling have been driven to a depth of 45 feet and approximately 300 concrete piles have been cast in situ to depths ranging from 40 to 60 feet.

The Sports Hall is being serviced by 2 of the latest concrete Batching Plants and 2 large Tower cranes. When the main shell of the building has been completed, the tower cranes will then be used to hoist the 150 ft. span steel roof trusses and roof finishes, working their way out of the building to a position where they can be dismantled.

The main boiler room will be in the basement of this building from which concrete ducts will convey all services to hostel and stadium.

The Stadium, 12,000 seats, contains 21,000 ft. of pre-cast concrete seating, each section weighing 16 cwt. Large mobile cranes will be used to place these in position. The concrete base to the seating will be placed by conveyor belts. Unfortunately work in this area has had to be suspended due to the bad weather conditions.

Gleeson are progressing with the two bridges spanning the race track which will be completed by Easter 1961.

Work on the hostel and staff houses is proceeding according to plan.

At present Gleeson estimate that because of the adverse weather conditions work is approximately 6-8 weeks behind target and that a larger labour force will have to be employed when conditions improve to bring the contract up to programme.

## CONTRACTORS' WORKING MODEL OF MAIN SPORTS HALL

A working scale model of the Sports Hall (photograph available) has been made by the main contractors, chiefly because of the complicated design and to enable all the men working on the building to understand fully the construction.

The model can be taken apart section by section, leaving the whole of the excavation area free of obstruction, then put together as each operation is being constructed.

The base of the model is designed to represent the excavation and each part of the model is representative of a phase of construction and can be dismantled to correspond with the actual progress at any point. A colour code is used on the ducts to allow each duct to be traced through the building, and the floors in the model are transparent to facilitate viewing.

The Gleeson agent, at his weekly progress meetings with all foremen, explains with the help of this model the work he requires to be completed during the coming week.

THE CRYSTAL PALACE NATIONAL RECREATION CENTRE -  
DESCRIPTION

The centre will occupy over 36 acres of the old Exhibition grounds with access from Crystal Palace Low Level station or from the Penge entrance of Crystal Palace Park. The site is undulating and use has been made of its contours in the location and design of the various features of the centre.

THE MAIN SPORTS HALL

The main indoor sports arena, the gymnasium and other facilities for indoor training and instruction, the swimming pools, general changing rooms and spectator seating for events and competitions will be contained in a single large Sports Hall covering an area 266 feet by 284 feet (nearly 2 acres) and 70 feet in height. The hall is openly planned on basically 3 levels excluding the basement areas and will appear externally as a simple crystal and marble walled structure on a heavy blue-black podium 11 feet in height. The roof, geometrically undulating, springs from a central concrete spine frame structure. The hall will be approached by a bridge continuing the old central avenue of the Crystal Palace across the main outdoor sports and practice area; below the bridge will be a 120-yard covered running track. The public will approach the sports hall from this bridge, and will then enter the central public concourse and viewing space extending right through the spine of the building. On one side there will be a large gymnasium hall, which will have retractable seating for 1,320 spectators and can be divided by hanging nets into three separate gymnasiums; on the other side there will be the swimming hall, with racing and diving pools to Olympic dimensions, a teaching pool, swimmers' changing rooms, an upper gallery with seating for 940 spectators and a lower gallery for 750. The building will also include practice rooms for cricket and lawn tennis, squash courts, a lecture theatre, a first aid room, changing rooms for the indoor and outdoor practice areas, together with provision for press telephones, commentator's box and small coffee bar.

THE STADIUM, SPORTS PITCHES AND PRACTICE AREAS

The sports hall will be surrounded by open-air games pitches and practice areas, with a stadium partially excavated from the hillside in the part nearer to the Crystal Palace Low Level station. This will have a stand (centre portion covered) to accommodate 12,000 spectators. The stadium, catering for all track and field events, is designed to Olympic and National Playing Fields Association specifications and will have a running track with seven lanes (9 on the straight) lit by low level lighting units. Inside the track perimeter there is space for an Association or Rugby football pitch, with floodlighting provided for evening games. Elsewhere there will be pitches for cricket, hockey, basket-ball and football, and four hard lawn tennis courts.

### RESTAURANT AND COVERED PRACTICE AREA

Between the stadium and the main sports hall will be the restaurant seating 150 people overlooking the practice pitches and supported on columns. The space below provides an extension of the larger covered practice area 40 yds x 25 yds, both having a special sports surfacing.

### KING GEORGE VI MEMORIAL HOSTEL AND OTHER RESIDENTIAL ACCOMMODATION

The centre will include an eleven-storey brick-built hostel block 110 feet high with 46 single and 46 double rooms, linked to a two-storey building containing a common room, dining room, and kitchen. The hostel building also contains flats for a bursar, an assistant bursar and a secretary, and five houses provide living accommodation for the rest of the residential staff. The whole group stands on sloping wooded ground, slightly detached from the sports hall and practice areas. The hostel and its associated buildings, for which the King George VI Foundation have contributed £100,000, are planned as a memorial to the late King.

### HOW THE CENTRE WILL BE USED

The many uses envisaged for the centre include courses (residential and non-residential) for training coaches and leaders, and courses for young people who wish either to improve their standard of performance in some activity of which they have already had experience or to learn a new one; conferences for officials, coaches and others concerned with the development of a particular sport or with after-school physical recreation in general; displays, demonstrations, film and television shows; amateur sports meetings and matches; and the reception and training of overseas teams visiting this country. Some of these facilities will also be available at times for general public use.

The centre is being provided by the London County Council as a service to Londoners, and as a major step in making the Crystal Palace once more a place of national significance and repute. It was designed by the L.C.C. Architect in accordance with specifications worked out in consultation with the Central Council and other national bodies.

### HISTORICAL

After the Great Exhibition of 1851 Paxton's glass palace, a landmark in the development of architectural practice, was re-erected as a national show place on a site of about 200 acres at Sydenham. It became a favourite venue for exhibitions, entertainments and outdoor sport. In 1895 the F.A. Cup Final was played at the Crystal Palace for the first time to inaugurate a new 17-acre sports arena. Just before the first world war funds were raised to save the whole 200 acres from being cut up and built over. Fire destroyed the famous old glass building on the last night of November in 1936, and after the war the grounds remained in an almost derelict condition for some years.

Under the terms of the London County Council (Crystal Palace) Act, 1951, the L.C.C. took the Crystal Palace over from the former Trustees as "a place for education and recreation and for the promotion of industry, commerce and art". This was at once a responsibility and an opportunity which called for worthy ideas. Sir Gerald Barry, who had been Director-General of the Festival of Britain, was appointed to advise on the development and use of the site. The idea of setting up a training and demonstration centre for amateur sport was submitted in his first report and accepted in principle by the Council in 1954.

In time the new Crystal Palace centre should influence the development of amateur sport and other forms of physical recreation throughout the country.

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