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REVISED OLYMPIC BUDGET TO HAVE A MASSIVE IMPACT ON HERITAGE FUNDING

DOES THE THIRD SECTOR HERITAGE LOBBY NEED TO BE STRONGER IN ITS DIALOGUE WITH THE GOVERNMENT?

The announcement on 15th March that the revised budget for the Olympics will mean £90m less funds for the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), and thus for heritage projects, signals the vulnerability of the heritage lobby in relation to other parts of the voluntary sector. In making the announcement the government made it clear that the Big Lottery Fund would be ring-fenced, but the HLF was not.

The Olympic announcement came just at the moment when the White Paper has signalled that heritage is a positive force, that the profile of heritage needs raising and that clearer policies should be put in place to ensure that there is an equitable balance between heritage and development, including better protection for World Heritage sites. The squeezing of heritage funding to deliver the Olympics seems to suggest that the heritage sector, however, is still seen as a non-essential sector.

In responding to the Olympic announcement, the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) put out an announcement that, as a result of strong campaigning, the third sector's level of funding had been protected. Ed Milliband was said to have responded to strong concerns from the voluntary sector up and down the country when he announced that the '... the voluntary sector will get the same level of resources from the Big Lottery Fund that they would otherwise have received. ... the Olympic transfer will come from that portion which was expected to go to statutory agencies.' And the NCVO (National Council of Voluntary Organisations) thanked everyone for their support in achieving a result which they said reflected the growing influence of the Office of the Third Sector within government.

The reality is rather different: only part of the voluntary sector has been protected and that part does not include heritage.

The heritage sector is clearly not sufficiently influential in the Third Sector in Government. Why have the many voluntary organisations that are delivering much needed projects and services in the heritage sector not had the same impact as those working within the ambit of the Big Lottery Fund?

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A cut of £90 million for the HLF will impact negatively not just on the heritage assets, including World Heritage sites, but also on many voluntary organisations that would have serviced projects and the local communities and volunteers associated with them.

ICOMOS-UK considers that it is essential that the voluntary sector joins forces to press for the £90 million cut in HLF funding to be restored.

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