

Ref. A04440

MR. PETERSON

The Pope's Visit to the United Kingdom

I understand that you are representing the Prime Minister at official meetings on the subject of the Pope's visit to the United Kingdom next year.

2. I also understand that the visit is a Pastoral visit to the Roman Catholic Church in this country and not a State or Official Visit.

3. I have recently received an approach from my predecessor, Lord Hunt of Tanworth, who is concerned with the preparations being made by the Roman Catholic Church in this country for the Pope's visit. He tells me that the costs are likely to be very considerable, that they will have to be borne by the Roman Catholic Church and community in this country, and that they will represent a heavy burden for a church which has not the resources in this country that it has in other countries. The purpose of his approach was to discover whether there might be any possibility of a helicopter of The Queen's Flight being made available to the Pope for one of the journeys which he will be obliged to make by helicopter if he is to carry out the full programme envisaged for him.

4. There are two such journeys which seem at first sight to be possible candidates: the journey from London to Cardiff and back on the first day, and the journey from London to Canterbury and back on the second day.

5. If the idea were to be acceptable in principle, I think that it would be easier in relation to the first day - the visit to Cardiff - than in relation to the second day - the visit to Canterbury, which will be a wholly ecclesiastical (though ecumenical) affair. The Pope will be lunching informally at Buckingham Palace on the first day, before his journey to Cardiff, and it would be an entirely reasonable and justifiable courtesy to another Head of State that, in order to facilitate his coming to have lunch with The Queen, she should offer him the hospitality of The Queen's Flight for his journey to Cardiff (and back). He could then helicopter straight out of the garden at Buckingham Palace (into which only The Queen's Flight can fly); that could save him a significant amount of time, quite apart from the financial saving. There could also be security benefits: the Pope's visit to Buckingham Palace could well give rise to demonstrations at the Palace gates by extreme Protestant and Paisleyite groups - perhaps even by Dr. Paisley himself.

6. I have ascertained that the Ministry of Defence would be prepared to provide a helicopter of The Queen's Flight for this purpose, and to bear the costs of the journey.

Passage deleted and closed, 60 years,
under FOI Exemptions. @Wayland
20 October 2011

7. I should be grateful if you would let me know whether the Prime Minister would think it reasonable that the Pope should be offered the use of a helicopter of The Queen's Flight from London to Cardiff and back. If she is content, the formal approach to the Palace will be put through The Queen's Flight channels.



ROBERT ARMSTRONG

12th March, 1981