

TEMPORARILY RETAINED J. Gray 28/7/16

One Minute F cc BSp

THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL IS
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT
Ref. A088/1326

I am sure that
this is the right way
of handling this if we are
to get the collection for the
UK. N. C. U.

PRIME MINISTER

Thyssen Collection

Mr Bearpark's letter of 26 April asked me to prepare, in 27.4 consultation with interested Departments, urgent advice on how to carry forward the work in preparing a bid for the Thyssen Collection.

2. I understand that the main dates in the timetable are as follows: the Trustees are expecting to have a meeting in June, at which they would expect to take a decision. By that date we need to have a fully worked up project available. Baron Thyssen has said that he would like to hear from us in May about what we have in mind.

3. There are two main aspects to our bid. The first is the building, on which, as you know, the Department of the Environment have made considerable progress in identifying possible sites. Since this would be a very attractive acquisition in whichever location it is placed, there is a prospect of getting some private contribution to the provision of a site. The second factor, on which we are less well advanced, is the structure of the organisation which might exhibit the pictures and the terms of agreement with the Thyssen Trust about the acquisition of the pictures and the terms on which they would be held and exhibited.

4. We will have to work very fast indeed to work up a proposition in the time available which will both commend itself to the Trust and be defensible to Parliament and public opinion



here. We will certainly need expert help in doing so and we are considering how that can be acquired. We are unlikely to have reached a final conclusion by mid-May, and the furthest that we can hope to get by then is to indicate to the Baron the outline of our approach in a way that emphasises how seriously we are taking this issue.

5. With all these considerations, I think that the best way of handling this may be to set up an informal group of Ministers under your chairmanship, including the Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Minister for the Arts. This would be supported by an official group which I would chair, including officials from the same Departments. I have commissioned papers on the building, the terms of the agreement and handling which could be ready for consideration by the group under your chairmanship in the week beginning 9 May. This would make it possible to decide what could be said on an interim basis to the Baron in mid-May, and on the advice to be given to the Prince of Wales in time for his dinner with the Baron, and pave the way for preparation of a worked up bid in time for the meeting of the Trustees in June.

6. I should be grateful if you would let me know whether you would be content with this way of proceeding.

7. I am copying this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Minister for the Arts.

R.F.B.

ROBIN BUTLER

27 April 1988

CONFIDENTIAL

file 15



10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBIN BUTLER

THYSSEN COLLECTION

The Prime Minister discussed with you this morning your minute of 27 April about the arrangements for carrying forward the work in preparing a bid for the Thyssen collection.

The Prime Minister said that she was content with the arrangements described in your minute. It was clearly important to make rapid progress on the lines that you indicated with a view to a meeting of Ministers under her chairmanship in the week beginning 9 May.

I am sending a copy of this minute to the Private Secretaries to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Minister for the Arts.

N. L. W.

N. L. Wicks

28 April 1988

CONFIDENTIAL

116