

A088/1575

NOTE FOR RECORD

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CC PS/Sir Terence Heiser

Sir John Bailey

Mr Anson

Mr Wilding

Mr Gray

Thyssen Collection

Sir Robin Butler held a meeting this afternoon to discuss the action arising out of the decision by the Cabinet this morning to make a proposal to the Trustees of the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection. Present were Mr Jefferson, Mr Turner (DOE), Mrs Dayer (Treasury Solicitor's Department), Mr Burr (Treasury), Mr Wilding and Mr Stone (Office of Arts and Libraries).

The Proposal

2. The proposal would be produced in a bound form and incorporating a letter dated today over the signatures of the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Minister for the Arts. Its title would include the description: "A Proposal by Her Britannic Majesty's Government". The Prime Minister's initial reaction that morning was that although the delivery of the proposal to the Baron should be low key, the use of a Queen's Messenger might err on the side of discourtesy. The Prime Minister would be speaking to Sir Peter Smithers to seek his advice on this point. The Prime Minister was keen that the proposal should be delivered as soon as possible (perhaps over the weekend) and if it could be done in good order, it should be with Sir Robin by the following afternoon for him to pass the same day to the Prime Minister for approval.

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The Negotiating Team

3. It was known that Mr Robert Alexander QC was willing to assist in the negotiations, and the Prime Minister had that morning endorsed the suggestion that he should head the delegation negotiating on behalf of Her Majesty's Government. It was important that he should be formally retained for this task and so act for and take instructions from the Government. Mr Wilding would speak to Mr Alexander that evening. The team should also include a member of the Treasury Solicitor's Department and representatives at Grade 7 level from each of the Office of Arts and Libraries and Department of the Environment, who would be expected to be able to speak with the authority of their Ministers. If possible the composition of the team should be agreed in principle in time for Sir Robin's report to the Prime Minister that weekend.

Publicity

4. The Prime Minister had indicated that publicity should be kept to a minimum. But it was only a matter of time before an Arts Correspondent raised questions on the subject and it was necessary therefore to have a defensive line ready. This would take the general form that it was known that the Trustees sought proposals for the future of the Collection and in this connection the Government had put forward some ideas. But that these had to remain confidential while they were discussed. This line was defensible on the grounds that this accorded with the Baron's wishes; that other proposals had run into trouble from premature publicity; and that any proposals were subject to Parliamentary approval. Approaches about both the costs and possible locations could be answered on the same basis. Mr Wilding would let Sir Robin have a suitable formulation for him to include in his note to the Prime Minister.

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Negotiations with Developers

5. It was agreed that the Department of the Environment, without prejudicing the final choice of the site, would seek to get firmer proposals from Mr Reichman for housing the collection in a site at Canary Wharf, since the terms were likely to be more favourable while uncertainty about the preferences of the Trustees remained.

P.C.B.

PAUL CUTHBERT-BROWN

19 May 1988

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