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ARTS + AMENITIES: National Portrait Gallery, Aug 86

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From the Minister for the Arts

OFFICE OF ARTS AND LIBRARIES
Horse Guards Road
London SW1P 3AL
Telephone 01-270 5929

Prime Minister

To see the house's

bid for a new site

18 July 1988

C88/3719

The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP
Secretary of State for the Environment
2 Marsham Street
LONDON SW1

Dear Nicholas,

*for the National Portrait
Gallery. W.C.U*

THE THYSSEN COLLECTION AND CANARY WHARF

Now that the Thyssen negotiations have been brought to an end, I believe that Canary Wharf could still offer a major opportunity for enhancing the attractions of London Docklands which it would be a great pity to miss. ^{18.7}

As you know, Mr Reichman, the developer, was enthusiastic about making a site available for the prospective Thyssen Gallery and indicated that he would probably be ready to make a substantial contribution to its construction. This would be in keeping with his experience of making a large financial contribution to community projects in his New York development. I suggest therefore that we should explore whether the possibility of providing for an art gallery in Docklands at an advantageous cost is still open, rather than simply let it go by default.

The National Portrait Gallery has outgrown its building in Trafalgar Square and has for some years been seeking a new home. No suitable existing building has been available and the cost of providing a new one has seemed prohibitive. The Gallery has therefore fallen back on a much less than optimal plan for spilling over into some buildings in Orange Street, and hopes shortly to launch an appeal to raise funds for that purpose.

In fact a new purpose-built Gallery in Docklands (which the trustees would welcome) would provide a much better setting for this major national asset and tourist attraction. In addition the present building in Trafalgar Square could then be used to relieve the considerable pressures of space that confine our other national museums and prevent them from showing their collections to full advantage.

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Work would clearly have to be done to establish what such an initiative would cost, and how we could maximise the private sector contribution. I suggest that we should now agree to explore this without any commitment at this stage, to see whether it is worth pursuing. The key point here would be to establish whether this is an opportunity not to be missed.

Copies of this letter go to the **Prime Minister**, Nigel Lawson, John Major and Sir Robin Butler.

RICHARD LUCE

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