

Think Ahead, Plan Ahead, Go Ahead

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

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'Many things are worth doing; few are worth doing perfectly.' My father-in-law John Garnett did more than most in many fields of life. I hope I realise most of my own mistakes and errors of omission and of commission.

The most frequent are when I sail a dinghy or play my flute. I admire the younger more proficient sailors off the shore between Worthing and Ferring. Admirable too are the skills of the young musicians who play and sing together in the Assembly Hall, given to the town in 1934 by Alderman James Denton, mayor of Worthing. The data base of the Theatres Trust gives a fine description. It is doubtful whether a modern mayor could be so generous. Tim Loughton MP and I provided rather less when together we funded the purchase of the Dome Cinema. The cost? £10.

On Wednesday the Lords and Commons all-party group for Arts and Heritage was welcomed to the British Museum by the director Hartwig Fischer to the Munch exhibition. Forty years ago the group was founded to maintain free admission to some of our great museums. Lottery funding has helped many cultural projects in West Sussex as much as the largest transformations, including the dome over the Reading room which was the British Library until it moved to its own dramatic buildings near Kings Cross.

Hartwig Fischer succeeded Neil MacGregor who is now the founding director of the Humboldt Forum in Berlin. Neil increased the interaction between local museums and the national institution. Last year the BM lent five objects at the Worthing Museum & Art Gallery for the Japanese exhibition *Dressed to Impress: Netsuke and Japanese men's fashion*.

Hartwig asks for ideas on how to make the British Museum more relevant and linked in new ways to people throughout the country. Ideas please.

I travelled to the BM by bus. It could take independent wheelchair-using passengers. This integrated transport, together with the accessible London taxis, come in a direct line from the former local holiday residents Claudia and Michael Flanders. Michael with Donald Swan developed their partnership into the show *At the Drop of a Hat*, including the introduction to the second verse of the Gnu song: 'I had taken furnished lodgings down at Rustington-on sea'.

Michael and Claudia were great and effective campaigners for better access to transport and to theatres for people with disabilities. I worked with Claudia and with Donald Swann: we established the principle of including lifts when rail stations are modified, in addition to the changes to specifications for buses and taxis. I continue to fight for so-called dropped kerbs to pass the marble test. If a marble cannot roll up the slope, action is needed. This is my idea of thinking ahead, planning ahead and going ahead. We could not make an instant change. We could set the course and we have achieved much of value.

As I left the bus in Tottenham Court road, I avoided a free ranging cyclist. Regrettably, I had not noticed that traffic arrangements have changed. The road is no longer one-way. Fortunately, the bus driver coming towards me and I noticed each other: a bye-election was avoided. A collision would have been completely my fault.

Others kindly gave me some credit for the successful Westminster celebration this week of the immense contribution to the interests of residential leaseholders and park home residents by the campaigning charity Leasehold Knowledge Partnership and its founders Sebastian O'Kelly and Martin Boyd. Together we are making substantial progress. I am glad that the Labour MP Jim Fitzpatrick and I can lead 170 members of the Commons and the Lords on the many issues of unfairness and potential exploitation. It takes time. Again, after thinking, we plan and we push forward.