

2012 Clear of recession dangers

Martyn Ziegler

London's preparations for the 2012 Games remain unaffected by the financial crisis that has plunged the world into recession, according to International Olympic Committee inspectors.

The IOC's co-ordination commission said attention still needs to be given to ticketing policy to minimise empty seats, and to finalise the venue for boxing, but otherwise the officials were impressed by progress.

Speaking at the end of a three-day visit, commission chairman Denis Oswald said the London organising committee (Locog) were benefiting from having concluded their major sponsorship deals before the credit crunch struck.

He told a news conference in London: "We can confirm that London 2012 is on the right track.

"We know the world is going through a difficult time but Locog had a very strong commercial policy from the beginning and have been able to secure a high amount of sponsorship before the crisis came and have reached £0.5billion.

"We are very pleased to see that Locog and the preparations of the Games have not been affected by the current world financial crisis."

Oswald said it had been "important" that the Government had put money into the Olympic Village from the contingency fund after private-sector funding failed to materialise so that construction work was not delayed.

He added: "This money will probably come back when the Village is sold again so this is just helping with cash situation."

The IOC went on a tour of the Olympic Park on Tuesday, and Oswald added: "We were really deeply impressed by the progress made in the construction, the stadium is impressive also the Olympic Village and the swimming pool.

"The different venues are coming out of the ground and we know everything is on time and even ahead of schedule in some cases and this gives a very good feeling three years ahead of the Games."

Beijing organisers were deeply embarrassed by swathes of empty seats at some venues and Oswald said attention did need to be given to ticketing policy.

London mayor Boris Johnson has suggested having groups of school children on standby Oswald said: "It's important that you have an opportunity to exchange your ticket if you don't have the right one and can re-sell the unused one.

"Locog are considering a system to have re-sale possible so you do not have empty seats. This has been a problem in the past which has not been resolved."

Oswald would not be drawn on British Olympic Association chairman Lord Moynihan's presentation to the IOC on Tuesday, when he made reference to the fact that £50million of funding for Olympic athletes had failed to materialise and that a disproportionate number of Team GB members came from independent schools because there was enough investment in state school sport.

Oswald said: "This is a national problem. I have noticed the British athletes have been very successful but I do not know enough about the internal distribution of the money to really have a position on that."

London 2012 organisers have been given the green light by the IOC to move boxing to Wembley - but only if they get the agreement of the sport.

Locog want to save £20million by not building a planned temporary venue called North Greenwich Arena 2 and move badminton, rhythmic gymnastics and sitting volleyball to the ExCel Arena.

That would mean boxing moving to Wembley and the IOC co-ordination commission said after this week's three-day visit they back the plan if the sport can agree.

Sporting Life, Inglaterra, 6 maio 2009, London 2012 News, online.

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