

## "The Olympics has been a shot in the arm for the UK Plc" Tessa Jowell MP briefs the Foreign Press Association"

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Following last month's visit to the Olympic Park, the FPA welcomed Minister for the Olympics, **Tessa Jowell MP**, for an update on the 2012 Games, how construction of the sporting venues was going and plans for the sites beyond.

Jowell outlined the importance of London as the host city for 2012. In addition to the UK being a nation who love sport, she claimed the Olympics "accelerated" the development of the East London quarter by 25 years (putting it five years ahead of the original regeneration plans put forward by Ken Livingstone) and that staging the Games would "inspire" the younger generations both nationwide and beyond to take up sport.

Next addressing the hardships of financing the Games, Jowell was adamant that "every single pound of the £6.1 million (budget for the Games) has been made to work hard as part of a joint effort to help the UK out of recession". She followed this statement up by refuting recent claims of her admission that if she had known the country was going into recession London would not have bid for the Games. In fact she said the 2012 Olympics have alleviated some of the country's financial problems. She told journalists that 48% of contracts had been assigned to medium-sized businesses outside the capital and some 8000 jobs in digital and new media were in store at the Olympics' broadcast centre after the Games.

Journalists then heard about construction of the Olympic Park, which was said to be "on time and...under budget". With five new sporting venues and Europe's biggest public park to be in place post 2012, Jowell said that the project would "change the economic profile of five surrounding boroughs" where 40% of the local population are currently without any work skills.

She also announced that the project had reached peak expenditure, with £154 million spent a month, and peak workforce with 11,000 workers. In staging the games, Jowell commended the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games (LOCOG) for its "exceptional" efforts to raise sponsorship.

Concluding with a look at the Games's legacy - Jowell declared London to be so far ahead in this aspect than previous host cities - the project was ensured to have a lasting impact on the UK on two fronts; the redevelopment of East London and transforming young people's attitude towards sport.

With only 23% of children involved in sports in 2002, she charged the previous government of having failed youngsters through motions to divest schools of their sportsfields. As a result of London hosting the Olympics, she told members that 90% of young people now play two hours of sport and by 2012 the aim was to raise this to five hours.

When commenting on the outcome of this year's General Election and its effect on the Olympic Games she said the project stood to be a "an oasis of consensus in a sea of controversy," as all parties have been involved in the decision-making process from the start. Jowell also promised to consult the London mayor in giving foreign press greater freedom to film in the capital in the run-up to the Games.

Photo by Maruxa Ruiz del Árbol/ El Cinco Dias

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