



DEPARTMENT OF TRADE
1 VICTORIA STREET
LONDON SW1H 0ET

TELEPHONE DIRECT LINE 01 215 3781
SWITCHBOARD 01 215 7877

*From the
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State*

Ian Gow Esq MP
10 Downing Street
London
SW1

12 April 1983

Dear Ian,

AERIAL ADVERTISING

I was glad to learn from our conversation behind the chair just before the Recess that you are still interested in the question of Aerial Advertising. I very much appreciate the fact that you are sympathetic to our endeavours in this field - though since we are simply trying to carry out the sorts of policies we were elected to carry out, perhaps this is not surprising!

I am writing to you now because we have had a very disappointing letter from Tom King (copy attached) saying that he is not prepared to accept the "deemed consent" procedure (whereby planning permission is assumed to have been given unless the local planning authority decides otherwise) and is insisting on "specific consent" in each and every case. The balloon advertisers have told us - and Tom King - that this is no good to them: the bureaucratic procedures and the inevitable delays would simply make it impossible for advertising to take place at reasonably short notice. So we are in some danger of looking particularly foolish - with the Department of Trade relaxing the restrictions on one hand, and the Department of the Environment putting restrictions back on with the other.

You will see that Tom King attaches great importance to the views of the local authority associations. While I appreciate that they may have some legitimate concern about the effect on the environment, I very much wonder whether they have appreciated the benefits to their own ratepayers. And I doubt very much whether the members of councils - as distinct from their officials - have had any say in the matter at all. I have a nasty suspicion that, as so often happens, the response of the local authorities was primarily the work of association officials, and the local councillors at the grass roots - who might be more aware of the need to nurture business enterprise - have not been properly brought in.



I find it very depressing that we are having to deal with all these obstructions. You will recall that the saga began as long ago as June 1980 when, following exchanges between Norman Tebbit and Marcus Fox, Norman announced by means of a PQ that we would make it lawful to display advertising material on captive balloons. I subsequently announced (in a PQ in July 1982) that there would be a relaxation of the prohibition of advertising on banners towed behind aeroplanes. We are also coming under pressure to extend the relaxation to airship advertising. One would have thought that this Government, in particular, with our concern for wealth generation and the well-being of small businesses, would have moved forward rapidly to remove the entirely inappropriate outright ban on Aerial Advertising which dates from 1960. The position is all the more embarrassing because in most other countries in the Western World there are no similar restrictions.

Although there is a strong environmentalist lobby, there is also a strong body of opinion among the aerial advertisers (and our back-bench Aviation Committee) that we are letting them down very badly. I enclose a sample of the correspondence we have received. Although the business interests are rather badly organised - compared to the well developed environmentalist lobby - I am in no doubt that there will be an enormous fuss if we renege on our undertaking (or if Tom King takes away with one hand what we have given with the other). In recent months I have received over 150 representations from potential aerial advertisers, MPs, and Peers. 133 of these have supported a relaxation in the Regulations; 19 have been against.

You will see that he is suggesting that the matter should be considered by members of H Committee. I will be suggesting to Arthur Cockfield that this is not good enough, and that it would be more appropriate for E Committee - which should have economic interests more at heart - to consider the subject. I do not like the idea of being "stitched up" by environmentalists. E Committee also have the advantage that the Prime Minister is a member.

I should be very grateful for whatever action you can take to get this issue back on the rails. Perhaps we could have another word later this week.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'Iain Sproat', written in a cursive style.

IAIN SPROAT