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Johnson is accused of hiding from TV debates

Pressure grows on Tory frontrunner to take part

Francis Elliott Political Editor

Boris Johnson is under intense pressure to debate with his rivals for the Tory leadership on television after all the other candidates agreed to take part.

Mr Johnson, the frontrunner, secured an emphatic win in the first round of voting yesterday that put him firmly on course for No 10.

He was backed by well over the number of MPs needed to guarantee a place in the final two, with 114 of 313 votes. Jeremy Hunt, in second, had 43.

Last night Mr Hunt and the five other candidates still in the race against Mr Johnson committed themselves to joining in debates due to take place on Sunday and Tuesday. In a joint statement Michael Gove, Dominic Raab, Matt Hancock, Sajid Javid, Rory Stewart and Mr Hunt said that the debates would help to "shape and define" the competing visions for the country.

Mr Johnson was the only one holding out against participating. A spokesman for the former foreign secretary said that his campaign team was in discussions with Channel 4, which will show Sunday's debate. A source at the broadcaster said that he would be represented by an empty podium if he refused.

Mr Hancock was last night understood to be considering pulling out of the race entirely and throwing his support behind another candidate. The health secretary met Mr Javid, the home secretary, but it is understood that it did not result in any agreement. Mr Hancock is thought more likely to back Mr Gove or Mr Hunt.

One report said that he could announce he was pulling out as early as

today. A campaign source said that Mr Hancock, Mr Stewart, Mr Raab and Mr Javid had to consider how to win the 33 votes to get past the next round.

Mr Johnson's safety-first campaign has limited media access to a bare minimum. He allowed only six questions at his official launch on Tuesday.

Conventional political wisdom that TV debates offer only risk to a front-runner was reinforced in the 2010 general election. Sir Lynton Crosby, Mr Johnson's informal adviser, was critical of David Cameron's decision to take on Gordon Brown on TV. The events gave a platform to Nick Clegg and Liberal Democrat support surged to deny the Tories an overall majority.

However, Mr Johnson's failure to submit himself to scrutiny raised fears that the Tories would again fail to test an incoming prime minister.

His rival candidates said: "We are at a critical moment for our country and our party. The next Conservative leader, and prime minister, will have the crucial task of uniting Britain behind a new vision — not only to deliver Brexit, but to define what comes next."

"This leadership contest provides an important opportunity to debate, to shape and to define the ideas which will underpin those competing visions. That is why we are committed to taking part in the Channel 4 televised debates this Sunday and the BBC programme next Tuesday."

Mr Johnson was told by Amber Rudd, the work and pensions secretary, that it was his duty to debate with his rivals. "All of the candidates get out and do the TV debates. The party has to remember

Continued on page 2, col 3



Guess who The Elephant Family ball, held at Clarence House last night in aid of conservation, has the royal seal of approval

Alarm over decline in outstanding schools

Rosemary Bennett Education Editor
Nicola Woolcock

Parents have been told that many "outstanding" schools are no longer worthy of the accolade after more than four in five of those re-inspected in the past year were downgraded.

The proportion keeping the top rating after the latest inspection has halved since last year. Inspections are being stepped up amid fears that many ratings, which can raise house prices as families compete for places, are invalid.

At present one in five schools is judged to be outstanding. Such schools no longer have to undergo Ofsted

inspections under changes introduced by Michael Gove as education secretary. The watchdog is allowed back in only if concerns have been raised about standards or child safeguarding.

However, there are fears among parents that some outstanding ratings are so old that they are meaningless.

Amanda Spielman, chief inspector of schools, disclosed yesterday that 256 of the 305 outstanding primary and secondary schools re-inspected this academic year lost their top rating, equivalent to 84 per cent. Fourteen went to the bottom rating of "inadequate".

Downgrades by Ofsted, which was allowed to increase the number of out-

standing schools it re-inspected after seeking special permission from the government, have accelerated. Last year a third of schools that were re-examined kept their top rating, compared with 16 per cent this year so far.

Ms Spielman said that the system was not "properly meaningful" and the exemption should be scrapped. Robert Halfon, chairman of the Commons education committee, agreed and said that a number of schools were "trading on reputations won a while ago".

While the sample of schools re-inspected may be biased in favour of those with emerging problems, others

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IN THE NEWS

Abortion record

The number of abortions has reached a record high, driven by older women and mothers. Some 200,608 were performed on women living in England and Wales last year. Page 4

Inquiry into acid joke

The police are investigating Jo Brand over allegations of incitement to violence after she joked about throwing battery acid at Brexiters on a BBC Radio 4 show. Page 5

Coach parking ban

Tourist coaches face being banned from parking in central London because of the fumes they emit while idling. Electric charging points could replace their bays. Page 12

Gulf tankers attacked

A second attack in a month on tankers in the Gulf has raised fears of a conflict in the region. No one admitted responsibility but the United States blamed Iran. Page 28

Kier to sell off assets

Kier, one of Britain's biggest contractors, is preparing to sell its housebuilding unit for up to £150 million amid growing evidence of financial pressure on the group. Page 35

Ailing Froome 'wins'

Chris Froome regained consciousness in hospital after his crash to discover that he may have won another grand tour after a Spanish rival was found guilty of doping. Page 72

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A square deal for Mayfair residents

Grosvenor Square will once again be a fashionable address for the well-heeled, reports Carol Lewis

Grosvenor Square in Mayfair has a dynamic vibe: office workers criss-cross the open square on their way to meetings while around them builders frantically

race to complete hotels and apartments. The transformation of this garden square, built in the 1700s by Sir Richard Grosvenor, from offices and embassies back into a fashionable residential address is almost complete. The Grosvenor estate is rejuvenating the square, while international investors and developers are revamping the buildings.

The first to complete in the present phase of this makeover is No 20 Grosvenor Square, owned by an international consortium and developed by Finchatton. The finishing touches have just been put on its two show apartments. The building acted as the military headquarters of General Eisenhower during the Second World War. It was also the European home of the US navy until 2007 — a 4,000-piece mosaic of the floor plaque of the Commander-in-Chief United States Naval Forces has recently been restored and turned into an impressive table displayed in the lobby of the block.

Alex Michelin, one of the founders of Finchatton, says the development has sold all but 12 of the 40 apartments (priced from £175 million) off plan, including the penthouse for an undisclosed sum. He hopes that now that the show apartments are ready, the final dozen will sell swiftly. "It has been very popular with Americans because of the history," he says. "We are very happy with the way sales have gone. It is in the



The remaining 12 apartments at No 20 Grosvenor Square start at £175 million through Finchatton, the developer (20gs.com), Savills and Knight Frank

best location: south-facing, with amazing finishes and amenities. The currency situation, with a low-value pound, has helped." Currency fluctuations have been a boon to those with dollars (or dollar-pegged currencies) to spend.

The development is the first stand-alone Four Seasons serviced apartment block in the UK and residents have access to hotel-style amenities and services, including a 25m pool, gym, spa, crèche, yoga and Pilates studio, games room, cinema, residents' lounges, wine-tasting room and room service.

There are two show apartments: one is 5,500 sq ft, with five bedrooms, on the first floor overlooking the garden square for about £35 million and the other is 3,500 sq ft, with four bedrooms, on the fourth floor for £22 million. Everything is high-spec, from the Wolf appliances in the kitchens to the Toto bathtubs in the bathrooms.

The development overlooks 22 Grosvenor Square, where the boutique Grosvenor Square hotel is taking shape.

Just beyond this lies the vast London Chancery building at No 24, which has been stripped to a concrete shell for its £1 billion transformation from US embassy to a 137-room Rosewood hotel, funded by Qatari Diar, part of the Qatar Investment Authority.

Before being at No 24, the American embassy was housed across the square at No 1. This building too is under wraps as workmen rebuild the facade brick by brick. The building, owned by Lodha, an Indian property group, is being turned into 39 lateral flats and five duplexes — the vast penthouse sold last year for more than £100 million. Its oval room, modelled on the White House's Oval Office and built for Joseph Kennedy, the American ambassador in London at the time, will be kept as a common room.

President Trump may rue the US's decision to move the embassy and cut its almost 200-year association with the garden square last year — John Adams established the first "American mission to the Court of St James's" here in 1785. For the rest of us, Grosvenor Square is very much on-trend.

ASK THE EXPERT

Q We have been told the rear extension of the house we are buying lacks planning permission and building regulations approval. Is it too risky to go ahead with the purchase?

A A number of different time limits apply to local authority action for breaches of planning or building control. Under section 171B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 a council usually has four years to take planning enforcement action involving unauthorised building works, and ten years to act where there are other breaches of planning controls. Prosecutions for breach of planning controls under section 35 of the Building Act 1984 may only be brought within two years of the work being completed, and section 36 planning contravention notices can only be given up to 12 months from completion.

In conveyancing it is increasingly common for buyers to take out indemnity insurance when there might be a risk of something going wrong with the purchase. A number of policy types are available. Breach of covenant indemnity insurance covers a property that breaches a restrictive covenant. Absence of easement insurance deals with the situation when a property lacks an obvious (but essential) express legal right over neighbouring land, such as a

right of access or drainage. Cover is also available when the neighbour might claim its own easement or rights across the land. But probably the most popular insurance provides an indemnity for lack of planning permission/building regulations approval. The policy covers any financial losses suffered by a buyer if the local authority takes action for breach of planning or building regulations.

It is only usually available for work carried out at least 12 months before and it is not, of course, a substitute for carrying out a proper survey of the property.

Indemnity insurance is relatively inexpensive and buyers often insist that the sellers cover the cost.

There may therefore be a risk of enforcement action for breach of planning or building regulation controls, but you can take out inexpensive legal indemnity cover against it.

Mark Loveday
The writer is a barrister with Tanfield Chambers. Email your question to: brief.encounter@thetimes.co.uk

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