

PRESS RELEASE

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## **Maze/Long Kesh Monitoring Group welcomes Master Plan**

THE MAZE/Long Kesh Monitoring Group has welcomed the launch of today's Master Plan detailing the multimillion pounds investment on what could become the largest building site on the island of Ireland.

Monitoring Group chairman, Edwin Poots, said he looked forward to seeing development begin on the ground as soon as was practicable.

He said it is important that the government, including the Strategic Investment Board and other related public bodies, process the various stages of the Master Plan without undue delay and hopefully to its ultimate implementation.

Implicit in that, he added, is a challenge for the private sector to engage with the project, as it has a vital role to play in making the plan come to life.

"This is an exciting, multi-faceted plan which, if implemented, will provide world-class facilities on a site accessible to all the people of Northern Ireland and agreed by the four main political parties," he said. "Funding and related issues around affordability remain to be resolved but if they are then those in opposition to a £1bn investment should understand our commitment and share in the challenge that can benefit society as a whole.

"The entire development, if successful, will acknowledge our shared past but build firm foundations for our collective future.

"The development of the Master Plan has not been easy as the monitoring group tried to accommodate many and varied interests, political, social and economic but we believe a balance has been struck between recognising heritage in the form of the International Centre for Conflict Transformation and embracing a

dynamic future symbolised by the multi-purpose sports stadium and other developments.”

Monitoring Group deputy chair, Paul Butler, said, “The International Centre for Conflict Transformation symbolises where we have come from in this society and points us in the direction of where we want to go, towards a society which looks outward in hope and not inward in fear. It is not a cliché to say this is really about turning swords into ploughshares.

“Our vision for the centre is strong and purposeful and we hope it will be a global beacon for peace and reconciliation. Sitting alongside that is a sports stadium and related facilities, supported today by the three main sporting bodies, the GAA, the IFA and the Ulster branch of the IRFU. Their presence here today is significant.

“However issues of funding and affordability remain and must be resolved before this plan can become a reality. It is our collective hope that this can happen.”

The Monitoring Group believes the Master Plan provides strong direction for the development of the site.

When work begins employment for up to 6,000 will be created. The Master Plan includes land for industrial development and inward investment, housing, retail, leisure and entertainment, an international exhibition centre, an equestrian centre and a centre for rural excellence.

The Maze/Long Kesh Monitoring Group was set up once the former Maze Panel had reported early last year. The original panel was established in 2003 by Ian Pearson MP, who at that time was the Minister responsible for the former security sites transferred to Northern Ireland by the government for regeneration.

## **Ends**

**For further information contact Carlton Baxter at Carlton Baxter Communications on 028 90 320 663**

## **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

### **The Regeneration and Reform Initiative (RRI)**

The RRI was announced on 2 May 2002 by the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the then First Minister and Deputy First Minister. The groundbreaking initiatives is intended to provide for a new momentum for reinvestment and reform never before seen in this region. As part of the initiative, the government agreed to transfer to the Northern Ireland Executive, without charge, some exceptionally significant security assets including the Crumlin Road Gaol, the Maze Prison including Long Kesh, security force bases at Magherafelt, Malone Road in Belfast and the Ebrington Barracks site in Londonderry.

The Maze/Long Kesh site – 360 acres, embracing both the 90 acre army base at Long Kesh, and the 270 acre former top security prison itself – is an exceptional, and extensive “brownfield” estate, extremely well placed strategically in Northern Ireland and on the island of Ireland. At the junction of the main East-West and North-South motorway systems and close to major rail and port facilities, it offers many possibilities for significant economic and social regeneration. It is seen as having not only regional but also national – UK and Ireland – and international importance.

Extracts from the keynote speeches at the time convey the importance of the sites initiative:

*The Prime Minister said:*

“... there is a great symbolic importance in what we are doing today. We are handing over to the Northern Ireland Executive installations that belonged to the bad old days. Resources that were once tied up in guns and barbed wire can now help create social and economic wealth.”

*The Chancellor said:*

“Ex-army bases and prisons scar Northern Ireland’s landscape and symbolise the period of conflict. We want these sites to symbolise peace and prosperity and become the engine of economic and social regeneration in local areas. In place of the symbols of the old conflict and despair, there will be symbols of the new progress and hope – barracks and prisons of the past replaced by business and prosperity for the future.”