



Memo



1. Sec ~~19/8~~
2. Mr Jordan
3. Mr Palmer
Jim

From: R B Spence

Your ref:

Our ref: PSE 433/98

*filed
for filing file.*

Tel: (5)41175/6

Date: 17 August 1998

Green 1/9

To: PS/Lord Dubs

cc: PS/SoS (B&L)
PS/Mr McFall (DENI,B&L)
Mr Hamilton
Mr Walker

BELFAST UNITED

Summary

Issue: Relocation of Wimbledon FC to Belfast.

Timing: Routine.

Recommendation: To note the possibility of a visit to Belfast by Mr Sam Hammann.

1. Mr Peter Miller, a Director of Wimbledon FC and a friend of Mr Alastair Campbell, had written earlier about the report of the Secretary of State's interest in persuading a Premier League football club to relocate to Belfast. After a reply from PS/SoS, Mr Miller wrote again on 21 July offering to set up a meeting with Mr Sam Hammann, the owner of Wimbledon.
2. This matter remains at a delicate stage. The Irish Football authorities continue to resist the idea strongly. But the three local newspapers have now welcomed it and Mr Eamonn Holmes has been active in collecting public support. The

RJ 19/8.
NO 248/1

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Lord Mayor of Belfast is also keen to back the idea and has organised a meeting with leading City Councillors on 24 August. If the Irish Football authorities are to adjust their position, it will have to be achieved by local pressure, probably with Government remaining in the background.

3. The consortium developing the concept have reached the stage when they have to start committing significant sums of money towards the costs of detailed design. They are reluctant to do so if IFA objections will stall the process.
4. I think that it would be useful for someone to encourage Mr Hammann to visit Belfast in order to assess the seriousness of his interest, but again it would, I think, be prudent for Government to remain in the background.
5. I planned to talk informally to Mr Miller about all of this, but he is at present on holiday. I have, therefore, sent him, in Lord Dubs' absence, the attached reply in response to his letter to PS/SoS.

R B SPENCE



Department of the Environment
for Northern Ireland

From the
Permanent Secretary

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Your reference:
Our reference: PSE 434/98
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Dear Mr Miller

I am replying to your helpful letter of 21 July to John McKervill about the possibility of a Premier League football club relocating to Belfast.

It would, I think, be very useful if we could have a word on the phone about this matter when you return from holiday. As you appreciate, there are several complex issues involved and a visit to Belfast by Mr Hammann would need to be organised at the right time and to meet the right people.

Yours sincerely

Ronnie Spence

R B SPENCE