

Smith, Rae

1352/01
A06/HB

From: Karen Feeney [K.Feeney@nitb.com]
Sent: 17 September 2001 15:44
To: Private Office (E-mail)
Cc: private.office@doeni.gov.uk; Maria McQuoid (E-mail); Greg McConnell (E-mail); Malcolm Briant (E-mail); Ray Hayden (E-mail); Gareth Kirk (E-mail)
Subject: INV/876/2001
Importance: High



Ian Paisley Jnr -
Seymour Swee...



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for info.
20/9/01*

for Feeney.

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Background

- 1 The purpose of this submission is to provide the Minister with advice and a draft reply to a letter from Mr Ian Paisley Jnr MLA asking a meeting to discuss the proposed development of an Arts, Craft and Cultural Centre on the site of the Giant's Causeway. Mr Seymour Sweeney, a local property developer, and promoter of the development will also be present at the meeting if the Minister agrees to the request.
- 2 At present the NITB has no direct knowledge of this proposal. In addition to property development Mr Sweeney also has a tourism portfolio consisting of six self-catering cottages and a wine bar in Portlaoise and was a previous owner of the Bayview Hotel in the village. At present Mr Sweeney has lodged an application for financial support with the NITB in relation to the development of further self-catering units in Portlaoise and Ballinacorney.
- 3 Under the current NITB investment support policy no financial assistance is available for the funding of new visitor attractions. NITB is however currently reviewing the policy, which will consider the merits of providing financial assistance towards the type of development being proposed by Mr Sweeney.
- 4 The Minister has received a number of briefings in relation to the process being adopted and the issues concerning the redevelopment of the Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre and the preparation of a Management Plan for the area. The Minister is aware that Mr Sweeney recently received planning permission for the development of a licensed premise in 'The Nook', 48 Causeway Road, which is a building situated near to the existing Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre. This property has recently been placed on the market for sale.

cc: PS/Minister, DoE
Mr Robinson
Mr McConnell
Mr Briant
Mr Hayden
Mr Kirk
MC

17 September 2001

To: PS/Minister

From: David McAuley

REQUEST FOR THE MINISTER TO MEET WITH IAN PAISLEY JNR AND SEYMOUR SWEENEY

Introduction

- 1 The purpose of this submission is to provide the Minister with advice on and a draft reply to a letter from Mr Ian Paisley Jnr MLA seeking a meeting to discuss the proposed development of an Arts, Craft and Cultural Centre on land in the vicinity of the Giant's Causeway. Mr Seymour Sweeney, a local property developer, and promoter of the development will also be present at the meeting if the Minister agrees to the request.

Background

- 2 At present the NITB has no direct knowledge of this proposal. In addition to property development Mr Sweeney also has a tourism portfolio consisting of six self-catering cottages and a wine bar in Portballintrae and was a previous owner of the Bayview Hotel in the village. At present Mr Sweeney has lodged an application for financial support with the NITB in relation to the development of further self-catering units in Portballintrae and Ballintoy.
- 3 Under the current NITB investment support policy no financial assistance is available for the funding of new visitor attractions. NITB is however currently reviewing the policy, which will consider the merits of providing financial assistance towards the type of development being proposed by Mr Sweeney.
- 4 The Minister has received a number of briefings in relation to the process being adopted and the issues concerning the redevelopment of the Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre and the preparation of a Management Plan for the area. The Minister is also aware that Mr Sweeney recently received planning permission for the development of a licensed premise in "The Nook", 48 Causeway Road, which is a building situated near to the existing Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre. This property has recently been placed on the market for sale.

- 5 NITB understands that the Planning Service received an application for outline planning permission, for the erection of an Arts, Crafts and Cultural Centre complete with ancillary facilities and customer/visitor car parking on land adjacent to the Giant's Causeway, on 16 August 2001 (Ref: E/2001/0302). The application is currently incomplete. Further information was requested from the applicant on 21 August 2001 to assist the Department in making a determination whether or not an Environmental Statement is required. The applicant has advised Planning Service that the requested information will be submitted on 13 September 2001.

Advice

- 6 Until such time that the NITB can ascertain what the overall planned development entails it is probably premature for the Minister to meet with Mr Paisley Jnr and the promoter at this stage. It is therefore recommended that the Minister reply to Mr Paisley Jnr indicating that the proposal is outside the current NITB support policy but that Mr Sweeney should be encouraged to contact Mr Gareth Kirk, NITB's Director of Investment to discuss the proposal in detail. A draft reply is attached for the Minister's consideration.

DAVID MCAULEY
Acting Chief Executive

Enc.

SIR REG EMPEY MLA
Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

DRAFT

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr MLA
256 Ravenhill Road
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

Thank you for your letter dated 28th August 2001 in relation to the proposed development by Mr Seymour Sweeney of an Arts, Crafts and Cultural Centre which is to be located in an area close to the Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre.

Unfortunately the current NITB investment support policy precludes the provision of financial assistance towards the development of new visitor attractions. The policy is however currently being reviewed by the NITB which will consider the merits of providing financial assistance towards the type of development being proposed by Mr Sweeney.

I understand from speaking to colleagues at the NITB that the proposal has not been raised or discussed with them. I have also been informed that on 16th August the Planning Service received an application for outline planning permission for the erection of an Arts, Crafts and Cultural Centre complete with ancillary facilities and customer/visitor car parking on land adjacent to the Giant's Causeway. I believe that the application was incomplete with the applicant being asked to provide further information.

I consider that a personal meeting would be of little value at this early stage of the development. I would however suggest that before progressing the matter further Mr Sweeney should contact Mr Gareth Kirk, NITB's Director of Investment, to outline and discuss the details of his proposal and at the same time to receive any relevant market intelligence the NITB may have.

It is important that all developments within the area are undertaken in a manner that is wholly sustainable. I recently met with Mr Sam Foster MLA, Minister of the Environment, to discuss the replacement of the Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre and other developments in the area. Subsequently, Mr Foster announced that work would begin immediately on the preparation of a Management Plan for the Causeway Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) that will establish a sustainable approach to the future use of the Causeway and the AONB. Clearly any development will need to be in accordance with the Plan.

SIR REG EMPEY MLA
Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment