

**FROM: TONY WHITEHEAD
STRATEGIC INVESTMENT BOARD**

DATE: 16 SEPTEMBER 2004

**TO: ANGELA SMITH
IAN PEARSON**

cc: see below

MULTI-SPORTS STADIUM: SITE SELECTION TECHNICAL REPORT

Issue: Update on Multi-Sports Stadium.

Timescale: Urgent.

Recommendation: That you note:

- (a) The conclusion of the technical report (the Ex Maze Prison site appears to satisfy more of the deliverability requirements than any other site;
- (b) the current views of the three Sports bodies in terms of site acceptability;
- (c) the SIB's advice on recommending the most appropriate site; and
- (d) the timing of the imminent Maze Consultation Panel report

Background

1. In January 2004 the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) was invited by Ministers to commission the preparation of a robust business plan to establish if a Multi-Sports Stadium for Northern Ireland – combining Soccer, Rugby and GAA - was, indeed, a viable option.
2. This stage was completed May and SIB reported that, even on cautious assumptions, the Stadium could be operationally viable providing all three sports were engaged. In light of the outcome of the business planning exercise, Angela Smith announced on 24th May that she had asked the SIB to advance to the next stage of the process, which was to consider the issue of site and funding options.

3. The SIB has since gone on to undertake the site exercise using the following Evaluation Criteria:

- acceptability to all three sports bodies;
- deliverability of site (timescale, cost, planning, infrastructure etc); and
- economic benefits (image, profile, potential spin-off investment)

4. There continues to be considerable press speculation on the matter and this has now increased significantly following the welcome GAA announcement on 8th September 2004 that it is willing to co-operate with the development of the Stadium.

Stadium Technical Site Appraisal

5. The SIB has now completed its technical assessment of all the candidate sites. During the exercise, a long-list of twelve sites was reduced to a short-list of two sites for further detailed consideration (Ex Maze Prison and North Foreshore).

6. Ministers are asked to note the conclusion of the attached Executive Summary Technical Report, which substantially covers the second and third Evaluation Criteria as above, namely: *"the Ex Maze Prison site appears to satisfy relatively more of the deliverability requirements than the North Foreshore site, particularly given the uncertainty regarding the extent of the site contamination issues at North Foreshore and the limited potential scale of adjacent commercial development."*

Site Acceptability to the Key Sports Bodies

7. In recent weeks, the SIB has held confidential discussions on site acceptability with the key representatives of all three sports bodies. In summary, the Irish FA, whilst having a slight preference for a Belfast City location, are happy to be part of a multi-sports Stadium wherever it is based, including the Ex Maze Prison Site. Ulster Rugby have a strong preference for a Belfast City location but confirmed their willingness to participate in a Stadium at the Ex-Maze Prison Site if there was no real alternative. Ulster GAA confirmed that, at the moment, no site could

be considered "neutral". In the short to medium term, they would find it impossible to accept any Belfast City location on "neutrality" grounds but could be willing to accept the Ex-Maze Prison site provided that issues such as direct transport access and security can be addressed.

SIB Advice

8. Given the views of the three sports bodies and the complementary Technical report, the SIB are minded to strongly recommend the Ex-Maze Prison Site as the most appropriate site for the Multi-Sports Stadium (particularly given the potential for enabling development). However, the SIB's advice is to wait for confirmation of precisely what development plans are being recommended by the Maze Consultation Panel in their Final Report (due around the end of September) before any final decisions are made and publicly announced.
9. In the meantime, I understand that it is intended to have a further meeting of relevant officials in the Departments concerned, including DFP and SIB, to agree responsibility for taking forward the preparation of the Business Case and to agree lead accountability should the project proceed.
10. This note has been cleared by OFMDFM and DCAL.

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cc

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