

From: Jack Palmer
Head of Sport



Date: 16th January 2005

To: 1. Edgar Jardine [cleared 13/01/06]
2. David Hanson MP
3. PS/Secretary of State

cc. list see below

**INV/262/2005 (SOS/789/05): INVITATION TO AN EVENT TO DISCUSS
POSSIBLE LOCATION OF A NATIONAL STADIUM**

Summary

Issue: Invitation to a dinner from Belfast Chamber of Trade & Commerce to discuss location of the Multi-Sports Stadium and other matters.

Timescale: Urgent – Previous draft submission dated 18/11/05 was not actioned.

FOI Implications: This submission relates to the formulation and development of Government policy and may not be fully disclosable at this stage under Section 75 of the Freedom of Information Act.

Presentational Issues: Sensitive. It is important to make it clear from the outset that the Maze/Long Kesh site is the only option being considered for a Multi-Sports Stadium.

(As agreed with the Press Office)

Special Adviser Views: "I'm happy with the draft if that reflects where we are on this issue."

(As agreed with the Special Adviser)

Recommendation: That the SOS Private Secretary replies declining the invitation and re-affirms that Government's consideration of this matter is focusing exclusively on the Maze. The Private Secretary should also advise that the Minister is willing to explain the

Government's position on the matter at his next meeting with the Chamber.

Detail

Gerald Steinberg, President of the Belfast Chamber of Trade & Commerce has written to the Secretary of State following their meeting at the organisation's Conference showcase. Mr Steinberg notes that he has had very positive feedback from the Secretary of State's speech to the convention from many attendees and commends his commitment to both the Convention and Belfast.

2. Mr Steinberg goes on to refer to his and the Secretary of State's "discussions about the locating of the National Stadium in Belfast" which, he says, "were particularly important." He expresses the hope that, "rather than the proposal for the Maze, our interest in developing an alternative location in Belfast for the National Stadium can make real progress." Mr Steinberg states that the Secretary of State's comparison to Cardiff is "similar to what we envisage for Belfast, ie a stadium located in or close to the City Centre to enable spectators to travel or walk easily to and from the match and also to enjoy, in close proximity, appropriate leisure facilities."

3. Mr Steinberg further states that he believes that, for the Stadium to become the success it deserves, it must be in a location that will be attractive to its potential users. He has invited the Secretary of State to a dinner to discuss Stadium location and other matters. He anticipates a maximum of 12 business people at this meeting. He adds that the Chamber would be delighted to host this private dinner and says he would be grateful to hear from your Private Office with some suggested dates.

Background

Belfast Chamber of Trade & Commerce Showcase Conference and "Other Matters" in Relation to Belfast

4. DCAL did not have a role in the Belfast Chamber of Trade & Commerce Showcase Conference, and no knowledge of the "other matters" in relation to Belfast which he suggests including in the proposed event. While the Department is in the lead on the Stadium, it is not in a position to offer advice on these particular issues.

Multi-Sports Stadium

5. The concept of a premier stadium for major sports first arose in the late 1990's and has been the subject of considerable public interest since. In order to assist the major ball sports in NI (Soccer, Rugby and Gaelic) to plan their future facility requirements, the Strategic Investment Board (SIB), on behalf of the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL), completed an initial business plan in May 2004 on the viability of a Multi-Sports Stadium for Northern Ireland. This report concluded that such a facility could be operationally viable provided the capital costs of construction are met and all 3 sports are engaged. It was also considered that a shared Stadium would send out strong signals about a post conflict Northern Ireland and be a visible representation of the Government's shared future agenda.

6. As a result of this, Ministers asked the SIB, on behalf of DCAL, to see if a suitable potential site could be identified for the possible location of a Multi-Sports Stadium. A public notice was placed in the press in early May 2004, with a closing date by the end of June, inviting landowners, who believed they may have a suitable site for a Multi-Sports Stadium, to notify their interest. In response to the public notice, 12 sites were submitted by landowners for consideration by DCAL/SIB. These included 6 sites in Belfast as follows:-

- Grosvenor Road
- Musgrave Park
- North Foreshore
- Ormeau Park
- Sydenham
- Titanic Quarter

7. All listed sites were assessed against a number of criteria as follows:-

- Acceptability to the 3 sports (Soccer, Rugby and GAA)
- Opportunity/site acquisition costs (ie cost/value of site)
- Transport Infrastructure Cost (ie the cost of providing the necessary transport/utilities infrastructure)

- Site condition costs (ie the estimated cost of associated with preparing the site prior to construction)
- Planning Policy (ie DOE Planning Service view on likelihood of planning policies)
- Economic Development (ie potential for complementary activity to cross-subsidise the Stadium)

8. Following an initial site selection evaluation, the long list of 12 sites, including the 6 in Belfast, was reduced to a short list of 3, ie the Maze/Long Kesh plus 2 Belfast sites, the North Foreshore and the Titanic Quarter. Ministers subsequently decided that an economic appraisal, business case and business planning exercise should be carried out on the Stadium based on the 3 short-listed sites. A Stadium Steering Group comprising DFP, DCAL, the Sports Council of Northern Ireland and the SIB was established to oversee progress on the business plan and economic appraisal. On the basis of work carried out to date, 2 of the 3 short-listed sites (North Foreshore and Titanic Quarter) have been ruled out on both cost grounds and because a Belfast site was not acceptable to the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) due to security concerns. As a result the focus is now entirely on the Maze/Long Kesh site. This was announced jointly by Ian Pearson MP, former Northern Ireland Reinvestment and Reform Minister, and Angela Smith MP, former Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in a press release on 30th March 2005.

9. The Economic Appraisal and Business Plans, recommending the establishment of a Multi-Sports Stadium at the Maze/Long Kesh, were submitted to DFP in September for consideration and approval. DCAL also wrote, at the same time, to the governing bodies of the 3 sports - the Irish Football Association (IFA), Ulster Rugby and the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) - providing them with illustrative business plans showing the projected costs and benefits of participating in the Stadium project at the Maze. The GAA has since responded to the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, David Hanson MP, agreeing, in principle, to participate with DCAL and the SIB in the development of the Multi-Sports Stadium. A key condition was that the Stadium

would be built at the Maze. The Minister subsequently wrote to the GAA, welcoming the Association's decision.

10. DCAL/SIB officials are continuing to work closely with the other sports bodies on specific issues that will require some clarification. David Hanson met with all three Sports in December and has since written to Soccer and Rugby asking them to come to a decision by the end of January. However, a Ministerial decision to proceed with the Stadium will be sought only when DFP approval of the Economic Appraisal has been obtained and all the key sports bodies have submitted their letters of intent. Ministers will, of course, wish to be satisfied on affordability even if all other signals are supportive.

11. It should be noted that, since Mr Steinberg's letter was received, reports have appeared in the media claiming that a number of Belfast City Council councillors, members of Belfast Chamber of Trade & Commerce and business figures have held discussions about two possible locations in Belfast which are being brought forward by developers. These are at Ormeau Park and at the former Maysfield Leisure Centre. These options have attracted considerable media attention although David Hanson made it clear in several radio and television interviews and in writing to the 3 sports that the Government was committed to developing the Stadium at the Maze and was moving forward on that basis assuming the buy-in of the 3 sports and an assessment of affordability. Belfast City Council continue to press for any new Stadium to be located in Belfast and we understand are funding a feasibility study to this effect. There has also been some discussion about the establishment of a stadium at Blanchflower Park in East Belfast to which Glentoran would migrate from the nearby Oval but this proposal, which is at an early stage, is unlikely to have an impact on the Government's proposals for a Multi-sports Stadium at the Maze.

12. Officials have discussed with David Hanson the Belfast Chamber of Trade & Commerce's interest in establishing a Belfast based site for the Stadium and their invitation to the Secretary of State to meet with them. He has advised that he holds regular meetings with the Chamber on other issues relating to Belfast and has indicated that he is willing, if the Secretary of State is content, to explain the Government's position on the Stadium at his next meeting with the Chamber.

Recommendation

13. Minister Hanson and Lord Rooker met in December to take a progress report on both the Stadium and the Maze Master Plan exercise. A number of issues were discussed which will require further work by officials and a further stock-take meeting is planned for February.

14. In relation to the 'National Stadium' issues raised by Mr Steinberg, Government has completed an extensive examination of site options for a Multi-Sports Stadium and, as a result, announced last March that it intends to focus all future consideration on the Maze/Long Kesh site. Since then one sport (the GAA) has now agreed, in principle, to participate on the basis, inter alia, of a Maze/Long Kesh location.

15. It is therefore recommended that the Secretary of State's Private Secretary affirms that Government's consideration of this matter is now focusing exclusively on the Maze/Long Kesh site and that further discussion of the matter would not serve any useful purpose. The Private Secretary should also advise Mr Steinberg that the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, David Hanson MP, is willing, if necessary, to explain the Government's position on the matter when he next meets with the Chamber. An appropriate response, to include in the reply, is attached.

JACK PALMER

Head of Sport

Tel: 02890 258935

e-mail: Jack.Palmer@dcalni.gov.uk

cc.

Lord Rooker
Aideen McGinley
Mick Cory – O/R
Jill Heron
Ciaran Mee
Stephen Kerr
Stephen Grimason –
Tony Whitehead – SIB –
Paul Sweeney- OFMDFM
Alan Maitland-OFMDFM
John Ross -OFMDFM
Claire McCarthy

Philip Taylor

SOS/719/05

Gerald Steinberg
President
Belfast Chamber of Trade & Commerce
Sinclair House
92-101 Royal Avenue
BELFAST
BT1 1PB

January 2005

Dear Mr Steinberg

Thank you for your letter of 1st November following the Secretary of State's recent attendance at the conference showcase. I have been asked to reply.

You refer, in your letter, to a National Stadium and the Belfast Chamber of Trade & Commerce's interest in developing an alternative location based in Belfast. As I am sure you are aware, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) recently completed an extensive site selection evaluation on the possible location of a Multi-Sports Stadium for Northern Ireland involving Soccer, Rugby and Gaelic Games. This evaluation included several Belfast sites. On the basis of the work undertaken, three sites were ruled out and, as a result, Government's consideration is now focusing entirely and exclusively on the Maze Long Kesh.

SOS/789/05

Gerald Steinberg
President
Belfast Chamber of Trade & Commerce
Sinclair House
95-101 Royal Avenue
BELFAST
BT1 1FE

January 2005

Dear Mr Steinberg

Thank you for your letter of 3rd November following the Secretary of State's recent attendance at the conference showcase. I have been asked to reply.

You refer, in your letter, to a National Stadium and the Belfast Chamber of Trade & Commerce's interest in developing an alternative location based in Belfast. As I am sure you are aware, the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) recently completed an extensive site selection evaluation on the possible location of a Multi-Sports Stadium for Northern Ireland involving Soccer, Rugby and Gaelic Games. This evaluation included several Belfast sites. On the basis of the work undertaken, these sites were ruled out and, as a result, Government's consideration is now focusing entirely and exclusively on the Maze/Long Kesh.

The Government's decision on this matter was announced by Ian Pearson MP, former Northern Ireland Reinvestment and Reform Minister, and Angela Smith MP, former Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in a press release on 30th March 2005. (I attach a copy of the relevant press release for your information). David Hanson MP, the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, has recently reaffirmed this decision with the three Sports governing bodies and also publically in the media.

As the issue of site location of a Multi-Sports Stadium has now been decided, the Secretary of State does not feel that further debate on the matter would be useful. He understands, however, that David Hanson holds regular meetings with the Chamber of Trade & Commerce on other issues in relation to Belfast. Minister Hanson has indicated that he would, if necessary, be happy to explain the Government's position on the Stadium at his next meeting with the Chamber.

I trust you find this helpful.

Yours sincerely

Richard Lemon
Private Secretary