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## **Allister dismayed DOE Minister refuses to delist Maze**

**21 November 2007**

**Statement by Jim Allister MEP:**

"Back in June I wrote to the Minister for the Environment, Arlene Foster, calling upon her to delist the Maze raising a number of concerns about how the matter had been dealt with. My primary concern was that the listing was politically motivated rather than the result of any real historical or architectural merit.

After four months I received a reply telling me that Mrs Foster could not comply with my request because the proper process in relation to listing had been followed and citing the architectural and historical significance of the buildings as the reason for their listing.

However, through the Freedom of information Act I obtained documentation which reveals that on the 21st January 2005 the Historic Building Council voted 5 to 1 **against** listing any of the buildings on the Maze site because they did "*not feel that the buildings in the complex were unique nor had they any special architectural value*". At a subsequent meeting of the HBC this decision was reversed because the Chairman "*suggested there was a need for members to focus on the criteria for historic interest rather than special architectural interest*".

The Department's Listing Criteria makes it clear that a building will not have to meet all of the criteria *"but a listed building will normally meet several"*. The buildings at the Maze patently do not qualify under "Age" or "Architectural Interest" and are said only to qualify in respect of "Historic Interest". However, Mrs Foster's own Listing Criteria expressly states *"usually a building will meet other criteria as well as being of historic interest. Where this is not the case the historic associations must be strong."*

Of course, it is interesting to note why the listed buildings at the Maze were considered to be of historical interest.

The consultant's report states that H-Block 6 is of interest because it *"was one of three involved in the Dirty Protest. It was also the H-Block from which 38 inmates escaped in 1983, the biggest escape in British Penal history"*. The escape referred to here was, of course, the infamous breakout in which Mrs Foster's ministerial colleague Gerry Kelly shot a prison officer in the head. The report also states that *"the hospital has historical significance due to its role in the hunger strike protest where numerous prisoners died"*.

Little wonder that the original request for listing came from Sinn Fein/IRA's Paul Butler – a man who served time in the Maze for killing an RUC officer!

When Mrs Foster was challenged with this information she asserted that the architectural interest of these ugly buildings was relevant to the listing. I am sure that most people, like myself, will be mystified by this statement.

Mrs Foster has also revealed to me that the decision to list the buildings was not equality proofed. I am appalled. Section 75 is quite specific. It bestows on the DOE a statutory duty in carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. Anyone at all acquainted with Northern Ireland would know that to elevate the site of the highly politicised "dirty protest" and IRA hungerstrike to listed status is inescapably divisive and capable of provoking equality consideration. Yet, bizarrely the decision was not equality proofed, yet Mrs Foster seems unconcerned.

Those who suffered at the hands of the IRA will be aghast at Mrs Foster's defence of a decision which flies in the face of common sense and does not sit comfortably with the DOE's own guidelines. The initial decision to list the buildings was made under direct rule. However, devolution makes it her responsibility.

It is a matter of grave regret that a Unionist Minister is perpetuating the listing of the Maze, knowing that it will be a site of pilgrimage for republicans glorying in their violent and blood-stained history."

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- [May 2007](#)
- [April 2007](#)
- [March 2007](#)
- [February 2007](#)
- [January 2007](#)
- [December 2006](#)
- [November 2006](#)
- [October 2006](#)
- [September 2006](#)
- [August 2006](#)
- [July 2006](#)

- [June 2006](#)
  - [May 2006](#)
  - [April 2006](#)
  - [March 2006](#)
  - [February 2006](#)
  - [January 2006](#)
  - [December 2005](#)
  - [November 2005](#)
  - [October 2005](#)
  - [September 2005](#)
  - [August 2005](#)
  - [July 2005](#)
  - [June 2005](#)
  - [May 2005](#)
  - [April 2005](#)
  - [March 2005](#)
  - [February 2005](#)
  - [January 2005](#)
  - [December 2004](#)
  - [November 2004](#)
  - [October 2004](#)
  - [September 2004](#)
  - [August 2004](#)
  - [July 2004](#)
  - [June 2004](#)
  - [May 2004](#)
  - [April 2004](#)
  - [March 2004](#)
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- [Top](#)
  - [Home](#)
  - [Accessibility](#)