

Media release on behalf of Belfast City Council

4 July 2007

For immediate use

Stadium site selection report confirms council's view

Belfast City Council said today that the publication of the Multi Sports Stadium Site Selection Report by DCAL confirms its view that proper consideration was not given to options other than the Maze for the siting of the stadium.

The council also pointed out that there was no advance explanation of the criteria to be applied in judging the sites and the outcome was not revealed to the council ahead of today's publication of the report.

The council called for the lifting of the 30 June deadline, set by DCAL Minister Edwin Poots, for alternatives to the Maze to be presented, particularly since the council only got official notification of the deadline three days after it had passed.

And it revealed it will have costed, serious options for a Belfast stadium in front of the Finance Minister by the end of this year.

A council spokesman said: "At the time Government advertised expressions of interest, it was said that 60 acres was required for the stadium, but there was no mention of requiring extra land for commercial and enabling development, which has emerged as the key issue in terms of choosing the Maze development.

"If it was simply about finding a stadium they would not have required a site of 60 acres to be submitted for 35-45,000 stadium – the fact is that Croke Park is located on an 18 acre site and has capacity for 83,000 people.

"Musgrave Park, which is no longer an option but was at the time, was ruled out on the basis that "transport would be difficult to solve". It is right beside the M1 and has a number of railway halts within walking distance. That is a clear indication that this report had one aim in mind – to recommend the Maze at all costs.

"The Maze report suggests that the cost/value of the Maze is low, yet a recent report by academics from University of Ulster showed that the 365 acres, not 60 acres, that are now being handed over to private developers for this project is worth up to half a billion pounds. At the same time, Titanic Quarter was ruled out on the basis that site value is a significant issue. Clearly one rule for the Maze and another for everywhere else.

“The North Foreshore was clearly the strongest contender of those considered at the time but ruled out on the basis of ‘ground’ which it describes as adverse. It says contamination is an issue which impacts costs and only limited developable land is available. However, contamination could easily be contained within the development and the council had indicated its willingness to pay for a capping system.

“In terms of the Maze, the ‘ground’ there is also described as adverse, but the ‘scale unknown’, yet it is not regarded as a stumbling block in the summary of the conclusions.

“Only one discussion took place with council officials on the issue of cost of North Foreshore. Despite our willingness to provide information if specific requirements on exact acreage required, which part of the site they wanted to consider and what infrastructure would be provided, no-one ever came back to us and a cost was put on the site which was not agreed with us.

“This report confirms the council’s position. We are calling for the Maze plans to be scrapped and a transparent process put in place to look at all sites in terms of social and economic issues.

“We have expressed a willingness to work in partnership with Government and the private sector to find the solution which best suits the needs of the sports, sports fans and the taxpayer.

“And we can provide real, costed alternatives to the Finance Minister by the end of this year if we are given an undertaking that our plans will be considered fairly this time – all we have ever asked for is a level playing field.”

RELEASE ENDS

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