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It's official: No stadium at the Maze

Tuesday, 17 February 2009

Plans for a sports stadium on the site of the former Maze prison have been officially scrapped, Northern Ireland's culture minister confirmed last night.

DUP minister Gregory Campbell told the Assembly he had recommended the Executive drop the plan and said the millions earmarked might be spent on other sports projects.

But the news sparked immediate criticism, with opponents claiming he had effectively wasted the £3.6m spent so far on the plan.

The Belfast Telegraph first revealed that the plans for the Maze stadium were doomed last December.

It had been hoped that a multi-sports stadium on the site of the top security jail which housed paramilitary prisoners during the Troubles would have hosted rugby, soccer and gaelic games.

But Mr Campbell confirmed leaks that he had recommended the idea be ditched were correct.

"In line with the commitment which I gave in the Assembly on January 12, 2009, I forwarded my conclusions on the proposed multi-sports stadium at the Maze to the Executive on January 27," he said.

"In my paper to the Executive I advised that I had reviewed all the evidence available to me, including meeting with the (sports) governing bodies involved and had come to the view that the Maze proposal should not proceed. I also advised that I intended to have a further series of discussions with the governing bodies of the sports involved in order to explore alternatives."

The DUP was said to have been split on the stadium plan, with some members in favour of the investment it would have brought, while others opposed the scheme.

Unionist critics claimed a plan to retain sections of the prison — including buildings associated with the 1981 hunger strike at the jail — would see it become a shrine to republicans.

The plans to develop a conflict transformation centre at the site of the former prison are expected to proceed, with a number of the buildings already listed for preservation.

Mr Campbell reacted to fears that the failure to build the proposed stadium would mean there would be no venue inside Northern Ireland that could now be used for events from the 2012 London Olympics.

"Northern Ireland's capability to actively participate (in the Games) could only be fully determined once a decision is taken on the preferred stadium option or options," he said.

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Amen.

I'm still curious why the GAA only signed up to a new stadium on the principle that it HAD to be the Maze site.....?

Posted by mickey | 17.02.09, 08:56 GMT

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