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## Maze is the least attractive option

(Editorial, [Irish News](#))

Developing a state-of-the-art multi-sports stadium, as a symbol of Northern Ireland's confident new future, was always an excellent idea in principle.

Unfortunately, the practical difficulties and major disagreements which have arisen at every turn mean that allocating huge sums of public money to the original project will now be extremely difficult to justify.

The two most basic unresolved issues associated with the stadium are its location and its size.

A detailed proposal that it should be built on what is officially referred to as the Maze/Long Kesh complex outside Lisburn did not lack imagination but has simply failed to attract any degree of consensus.

Most supporters of the Northern Ireland international soccer team have made it abundantly clear through a series of campaigns and surveys that they do not want to go to the Maze under any circumstances.

Ulster rugby administrators are committed to retaining Ravenhill as their headquarters and, while they may be prepared to stage some games at the new venue, have said bluntly that its planned 35,000-plus capacity is massively in advance of their requirements.

GAA officials have taken a pragmatic approach to date but it is common knowledge that ordinary GAA followers regard the Lisburn scheme with complete disdain.

Political support has also been less than enthusiastic, with the open split which has just emerged among senior figures in the DUP providing a particularly negative context.

The other main parties hold equally mixed views, while Sinn Féin's commitment to preserving part of the former H-blocks prison for historical reasons could be maintained without any sporting development there.

If private investors are prepared to cover the total cost of the Maze stadium, something which is far from certain, it could

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yet be constructed in a scaled-down format.

Full clarifications are urgently required on a number of fronts and there should certainly be no question of an early decision in favour of the Maze while so many doubts and contradictions remain in place.

The fear must be that taxpayers will ultimately be left to foot most or all of a final bill, which may approach £400 million, and the authorities need to give full consideration to the other options which exist.

A site in Belfast, as the main centre of population and with a full infrastructure already in place, would be much more in line with established trends in other countries.

Allocating significant grants to the three main sporting bodies for the upgrading of their existing facilities also has to be regarded as a compelling alternative.

The massive gamble which the Maze scheme represents makes it the least attractive offer on the table at the moment.

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