

RESTRICTED

w/a Jordan

CULTURE AND RECREATION DIVISION

From: R Jordan

29 June 1998

To: PS/Minister

BELFAST UNITED/NORTHERN IRELAND EVENTS COMPANY

Summary

Issue: Follow-up to the Minister's meeting with the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Sports Council on 26 May, when the Minister undertook to speak to Lord Dubs about the tensions in role between the NI Events Company and the Sports Council

Timing: Not time-critical, but useful for the Minister to consider this submission before we meet on 30 June

Recommendation: That the Minister does not need to speak to Lord Dubs immediately, but should do so when clearer proposals are available on a sports stadium for Northern Ireland.

Background

Mr Spence, Permanent Secretary of DOE, wrote recently to his Minister (see Tab A) to advise him of the latest position on the possible development of a major sports stadium in Belfast, with an English Premier League club such as Wimbledon as anchor tenant. He notes the press coverage of the issue (see Tab B) and recommends that Lord Dubs writes to the GB Sports Minister, Tony Banks, to bring him up to speed - a draft letter is provided with the submission.

RESTRICTED

1

A B
RESTRICTED

Sports Council Position

The Chairman of the NI Sports Council, Don Allen, and the Chief Executive, Eamonn McCartan, met the Minister on 26 May to express their reservations about DOE's handling of this issue and more generally about the overlap in role between the NI Events Company (chaired by DOE) and the Sports Council. Mr Allen's particular concerns about the Wimbledon issue were that the feasibility of the current proposals was doubtful, as was the potential benefit to sport, and particularly soccer, in Northern Ireland.

The Minister agreed to take a suitable opportunity to speak to Lord Dubs about these matters and as a preliminary, I undertook to bring together Mr McCartan and the lead DOE official, John Walker, to try to ease the apparent tensions. That meeting took place on 3 June and was helpful in clearing up some gaps in knowledge and misunderstandings and in agreeing steps to achieve a more harmonious and productive future relationship in relation to both the NI Events Company and the sports stadium project. Progress on the latter subject was consolidated by a further meeting on 12 June which in addition involved Ronnie Spence and Don Allen. That established the shared objective (identified in paragraph 5 of Mr Spence's submission) of reaching a joint view, as soon as possible, on whether a viable proposal exists to build an international standard sports stadium in Belfast which is capable of hosting a Premier League football team.

I believe that the tensions which had built up between the Sports Council and DOE have now eased and, for the time being at least, there is a sense of common purpose.

RESTRICTED

2

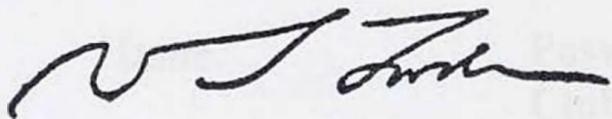
A

B

RESTRICTED

Minister's commitment to speak to Lord Dubs

Given the progress which has been made, I do not think that a discussion with Lord Dubs is immediately pressing. There will be a natural opportunity to take stock when the consortium exploring the stadium options puts forward more definitive proposals, probably during July. This would seem to be an appropriate occasion for both Ministers to discuss how to move forward to ensure the meshing of regeneration and sports objectives.



R J JORDAN

 **Ext 59212**

c.c. ***Secretary**
***Mr Holmes**
***Mr Palmer**

***without attachments**

RESTRICTED

3



COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE



Internal Memo

From: R B Spence
Permanent Secretary

Your ref:
Our ref: PSE 311/98

Tel: (5)41175/6

Date: 22 June 1998

To: PS/Lord Dubs

cc: See distribution list below

Summary

Issue: Possible relocation of English Premier League Football Club to Belfast.

Timing: Pressing, but not time critical.

Recommendation: Minister should alert the Sports Minister to the possibility.

BELFAST UNITED

1. This minute provides an update on progress about the possible development of an international standard sports stadium, on a site on the north foreshore in Belfast, and the prospects of attracting an English Premier League club, ie, Wimbledon, as an anchor tenant.
2. The project has moved forward significantly since the Minister met with the private sector promoters in March, and a final decision on the viability of the project may be possible over the next few weeks. In broad outline, Government would transfer ownership of the site on the North Foreshore to a charitable trust; the trust would lease a part of the site to the football club; the

RJ	24/6
NO	224/10

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE



COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

club would build the stadium; the trust would receive an income from the land; this income would be used for the benefit of sport in Northern Ireland.

3. If a viable project can be delivered, the benefits to be secured are significant and exciting for Northern Ireland:-

- we could have a modern 40,000 seater stadium, the building of which would be financed by the private sector through an investment of up to £50m;
- the facility could accommodate other sports, in a manner which could complement the Sports Council's long cherished goal for a national stadium and associated facilities;
- there would be significant opportunity for local employment in the construction, running and maintenance of the stadium;
- the stadium plus supporting sports and commercial facilities would give a massive boost to our regeneration work in Belfast;
- properly negotiated and managed, the introduction of a Premier League club to Belfast could be a major stimulus to the sporting and general image of NI and to the future health and development of soccer in NI.

4. There remain, however, major issues to be resolved and success is far from certain. Indeed, the odds are probably still against a successful outcome since success depends upon:-

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE



COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

- 4.1 a Premier League Club being willing to relocate to Belfast; Wimbledon has, for example, other options to pursue including staying in London or moving to Dublin;
 - 4.2 the private sector being able to put together a £50m funding package; and
 - 4.3 the football authorities in Northern Ireland, England and Europe being able to agree to the proposal.
5. The Chairman and Chief Executive of the Sports Council have expressed reservations about the viability of the current proposals and their suitability in relation to the needs of Northern Ireland sport. The Chairman has raised these points with Tony Worthington. The issues were discussed further, at a meeting which I arranged with the Sports Council and DENI on 12 June. We have agreed the way forward based on a shared objective to reach a joint view, as soon as possible, on whether a viable proposal exists to build an international standard sports stadium in Belfast which is capable of hosting a Premier League football team. We have also agreed arrangements for future discussions between all of the parties involved.
6. As you know, this subject has already been raised in Parliament; and there was some press coverage earlier in the year in The Sunday Life. An earlier draft of these papers was leaked to the Belfast Telegraph and published on 17 June; a leak inquiry has been initiated. The leak has given the impression that the Secretary of State is backing the proposal and this seems, in fact, to have been very well received; a Belfast Telegraph editorial (copy attached) supported the

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

B



COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

concept and a readers poll over two days has showed that 65% of over 3,500 voters supported it.

7. Mr Roger Casale, MP for Wimbledon spoke to me on Friday evening about the press reports. I explained that, contrary to press reports, the Secretary of State had not as yet written to the Prime Minister; that there had been no contact between Ministers or officials and Wimbledon; but that we were very interested in attracting a Premier League side to Belfast as part of the regeneration effort in the city.
8. The Minister and I have discussed, prior to the leak, whether the Secretary of State should now write to the Prime Minister or whether it would be sufficient for him to write to Mr Tony Banks. He felt that the latter was appropriate. I think that that remains a valid conclusion, even though the leak has left the Northern Ireland public with the belief that the Secretary of State has written to the Prime Minister endorsing the project.
9. A draft letter for the Minister to send to Mr Banks is attached.

R B SPENCE

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

B



COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

- cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L)
- PS/Mr Murphy (DFP,B&L)
- PS/Mr Ingram (DED,B&L)
- PS/Mr Worthington (DENI,DHSS&L)
- PS/PUS (B&L)
- PS/Mr Semple
- Mr Carvill
- Mr Watkins
- PSG
- Mr J Walker
- Mr R Jordan
- Mr T Kelly
- Mr B Parker

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

DRAFT LETTER FROM LORD DUBS TO:

Tony Banks MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
Minister for Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
LONDON
SW1Y 5DH

I am writing to let you know about a proposal which is being developed by a private sector consortium to build a new international standard sports stadium in Belfast and to attract a Premier League football club as the anchor tenant. You may already know something of this from PQs tabled by Keith Simpson earlier this year, which associated Wimbledon Football Club with the proposal.

I understand that the consortium expect to be in a position to finalise their proposal over the next few weeks. This will be a period of fairly intense activity and there has already been public debate in Northern Ireland about the possibility. I thought, therefore, that I should inform you of my general attitude to the project.

I would regard attracting Premier League football to a new purpose built stadium in Belfast as offering significant benefits in terms of securing a sizeable capital investment by the private sector, making a positive impact on Northern Ireland's image and providing a welcome opportunity for substantial cross-community participation. As such, I would view the project as assisting in the development of a number of our objectives in Northern Ireland.

However, I recognise that success is very far from certain and that there are significant hurdles to be overcome.

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

My officials, and those from other relevant statutory authorities (including the Sports Council for NI), have to date had no direct contact with Wimbledon or any other Premier League Club. They are working with the consortium to ensure that any emerging proposal is viable, in financial terms, in terms of our existing strategy for sport in Northern Ireland and the response which the proposal is likely to receive from a range of sports governing bodies.

It is clear, for example, that the consortium will need to have early, formal discussions with the relevant football governing bodies at local, national and possibly international levels.

I hope that this letter provides sufficient background in the event of this matter being mentioned to you.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister and Chris Smith.

LORD DUBS

COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE

B

Belfast Utd

FOOTBALL PLAN: *Premiership soccer in Ulster is an exciting prospect*

WHILE all eyes are on France '98 at present, tentative moves are taking place behind the scenes to put soccer in Northern Ireland onto a new plain. The Secretary of State has given her backing to a campaign by a secretive private sector consortium which is trying to woo a top English club to Belfast. Part of the plan is a new multi-million pound stadium which would host regular Premiership games involving headline teams such as Manchester United and Liverpool.

The most likely candidate for such a move is Wimbledon, which is still attempting to set up shop in Dublin. Belfast is a more logical location, given the stronger footballing tradition of the city, and the fact that it is part of the UK. With busloads of fans already trekking over to England every weekend in winter, there is no doubting the attractions of Premiership football for local fans.

Most importantly, a new Belfast United team would catch the mood of renewed hope which is abroad in Northern Ireland at present. This province has an opportunity to break free from the past, and put itself back onto the international map. Economically, the visiting fans of Premiership teams would be a major boost for the hospitality sector. Vested interests must be put to one side, and soccer fans throughout the province must give the initiative a fair chance.

BELFAST TELEGRAPH 18 JUNE 98



First picture of Louise Woodward after yesterday's

Baby's parents in new law suit

LOUISE Woodward and her family were facing a fresh legal nightmare today as the au pair anxiously awaited the go-ahead to fly home to Britain.

The parents of Matthew Eappen, the baby Woodward is convicted of killing, launched a multi-million dollar law suit claiming damages for the death of their son.

Doctors Sunil and Deborah Eappen, whose eight-and-a-half-month-old child died in Woodward's care, issued writs against the 20-year-old au pair as she was cleared to come home by the Supreme Judicial Court in Massachusetts in a split decision yesterday.

With their huge appeal fund now dwindling the Woodward family, from Elton, Cheshire, could be plunged into a new long and costly legal battle.

Her United States defence lawyers are already making fresh moves to clear her name by demanding documents concerning the resignation of the pathologist who conducted the controversial post-mortem examination on Matthew, over his handling of an autopsy in an earlier case.

The Eappens have launched two civil suits.

One is to try to ban Woodward from profiting from the case and another claims damages over Matthew's death.

Eappen family lawyer Frederic Ellis said: "The purpose of this lawsuit is to ensure that Louise Woodward does not become a millionaire because she killed an eight-month-old baby."

Woodward is expected to be told tomorrow she can fly home after legal hold-ups are removed.



Mo Mowlam: Draft letter.

Mo backs soccer transfer

EXCLUSIVE

By Steven Beacom

SECRETARY of State Mo Mowlam is set to throw her weight behind a multi-million pound bid to bring English Premier League football to Northern Ireland.

In a draft Government letter to Prime Minister Tony Blair and Sports Minister Tony Banks, Dr Mowlam signals her intent to support a private sector consortium bid to attract a top English club to a new international sports stadium in Belfast.

In the letter, obtained by the Belfast Telegraph, the Secretary of State said the project would bring new investment to Northern Ireland and boost its image on the international stage.

Dr Mowlam's letter also suggested that Wimbledon — the Premier League club which is still attempting to set up in Dublin — could be tempted to switch its attentions north of the border.

The move has infuriated local football authorities who believe it could kill off the game in Northern Ireland.

Full story: back page

B
17/6/98
TELEGRAPH
EAST

rompt fears

heating.
of the sharp leap in
on-year rate of pay
nts came just 24
after official figures
a jump in inflation
year high.
headline inflation up
and the underlying
strong at 3.2%.
ove Chancellor

With inflation rising, there are concerns employees will aim to negotiate higher pay deals to compensate.

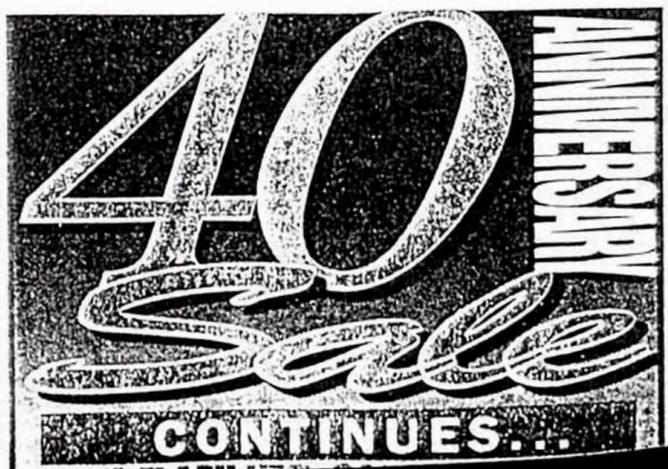
The possibility of a further rate rise sent the pound soaring, causing further problems for the UK's hard-pressed exporters.

Mr. George

long time, looking at the economy as a whole."

His message that the latest inflation figures made uncomfortable reading was seen as a warning of a more hawkish stance.

it prompted speculation that the Bank's panel may



THE BIG PAPER WITH THE BIG COVERAGE... TODAY'S NEWS TODAY

EXCLUSIVE: SECRETARY OF STATE BACKS BELFAST PREMIERSHIP PLAN

IFA VERSUS MOWLAM

Premiership plans to affect Windsor lease

NORTHERN Ireland are likely to find themselves playing internationals away from Windsor Park should the ambitious plan to bring an English Premiership side to Ulster go ahead, writes Steven Beacom.

That's because with a Wimbledon style team will come an international standard stadium based in Belfast.

And that could mean not only Liverpool and Manchester United playing Premiership games in the new ground, but also our international side as well.

At the moment a long term lease signed in 1980 ties Northern Ireland down to playing home games at Windsor Park.

The agreement between the Irish FA and Linfield, who own Windsor, lasts for a period of 98 years.

It is a contract the Irish FA are unable to detract themselves from, due to the cost — but there is a school of thought that government backing for an English side here would put a

completely different slant on the subject.

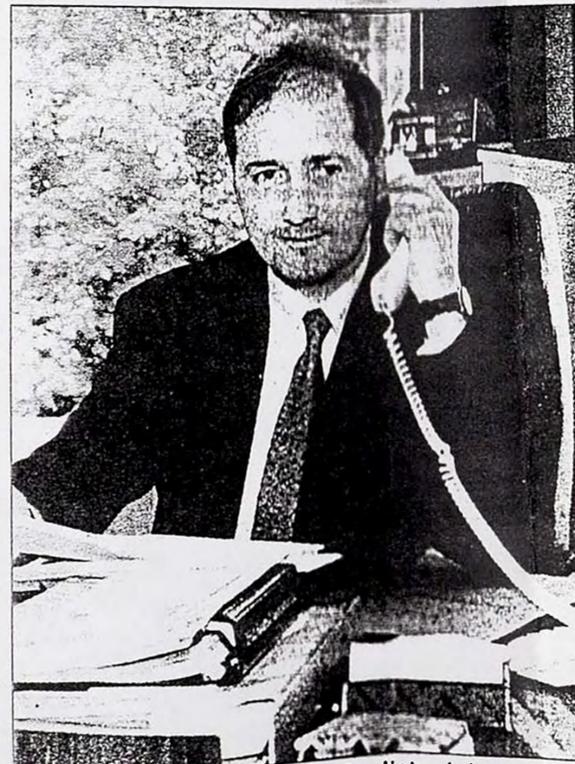
Irish FA general secretary David Bowen said: "I admit this part of the United Kingdom is seriously disadvantaged and could do with a national stadium and the facilities it brings, but we do have a long term agreement with Windsor Park."

In a draft business proposal the consortium state they would like to meet the IFA with a view to the lease.

John Walker from the Northern Ireland Development of Environment confirmed today: "We know that a group of businessmen are developing a proposal to build an international stadium with the intention that an English Premier League side would play in it."

"This group has held meetings with government officials."

At present Wimbledon, who do not have a ground of their own, are the only Premiership side which could feasibly set up in Belfast. They have continually investigated the possibility of relocating to Dublin, so far without success.



David Bowen: against an English club coming to Northern Ireland

FOOTBALL STEVEN BEACOM

NORTHERN Ireland Secretary of State Mo Mowlam is set to support a multi-million pound bid to bring English Premier League football to the province.

But the prospect was today vigorously opposed by the Irish Football Association and FIFA, the most powerful organisation in world football.

In a draft government letter, leaked to the Belfast Telegraph, Mowlam issues her intent to inform both Prime Minister Tony Blair and Sports Minister Tony Banks of her support for a private sector consortium attempting to attract a top English club to a new sports stadium in Belfast.

Mowlam states that the project would offer significant benefits to Northern Ireland in terms of capital investment and international image as well as underpinning the peace process.

The letter also includes suggestions that Wimbledon — whose bid to set up in Dublin has so far been thwarted — could be tempted into switching their attentions north of the border.

Not surprisingly the football powers here have acted angrily.

The success of this project is far from certain. There remains significant hurdles to be overcome, but a successful outcome would offer significant benefits to Northern Ireland in terms of capital investment by the private sector, positive impact on its international image and opportunity for substantial cross-community participation. As such, I would view the project as the type of development that we need to underpin the peace process.

IFA general secretary David Bowen said: "We are not interested in Wimbledon FC playing in Belfast every other week."

"Our mandate is to promote the game in Northern Ireland at all levels and having an English Premier team here would not do that."

"I am disappointed with the government attitude over this. We have not spoken to them about this issue although there has been one meeting with the entrepreneurs and they know where we stand."

Irish FA President Jim Boyce added that a motion passed at a recent FIFA congress in Paris would make such a proposal very difficult to implement.

The motion unanimously passed by every one of the 191 FIFA delegates states: "A club domiciled in the territory of any one association shall not be

permitted to play in competition on the territory of another association on a regular basis."

"Exceptions to this ruling may be made by the federation (FIFA) only if extraordinary circumstances (eg a trans-border geographic region) justify such an exception and only if the two associations concerned have given their consent."

Boyce said: "I will be calling a full meeting of the IFA council should we be approached by the government on this matter."

Mowlam's draft letter to Blair and Banks states: "I am writing to you concerning a proposal, which is being developed to build a new international standard sports stadium in Belfast and to attract a Premier League football club as the anchor tenant."

"You will already know something of this from the Parliamentary Question's tabled by Keith Simpson earlier this year, which

associated Wimbledon FC with the proposal.

"Since then, further developmental work has been undertaken by a private sector consortium, who expect to be in a position to finalise their proposal over the next three to four weeks."

The letter continues: "The success of this project is far from certain. There remains significant hurdles to be overcome, but a successful outcome would offer significant benefits to Northern Ireland in terms of capital investment by the private sector, positive impact on its international image and opportunity for substantial cross-community participation."

It goes on that support would be required from both the IFA and Football Association in England. Support which at the moment is far from forthcoming.