

FROM: MARION McKEE
Sport and Recreation Branch

DATE: 27 March 2001

To: PS/Minister

**MEETING WITH LINFIELD FOOTBALL AND ATHLETIC CLUB TO
DISCUSS NATIONAL STADIUM: FRIDAY 30 MARCH 2001, 3PM,
INTERPOINT.**

The Minister has agreed to meet with Linfield Football and Athletic Club to discuss the provision of a National Stadium for Northern Ireland.

I attach briefing as follows:

- A. background notes
- B. line to take
- C. contentious issues
- D. agenda
- E. delegation, including key personality notes

Jack Palmer and Lynda Lister will attend the pre-brief and the meeting.

M McKee

M McKee (Miss)
Ext 58959

cc **Secretary**
Mr Carson
Mr Palmer
Mrs Lister
 Mr Mee

MEETING WITH LINFIELD FOOTBALL AND ATHLETIC CLUB TO DISCUSS NATIONAL STADIUM: FRIDAY 30 MARCH 2001, 3 PM, INTERPOINT.

Background.

1. National Stadium

In 1999 the then Minister, John McFall, established a Working Group led by the Sports Council to consider the need for, and feasibility of, a national sports stadium for Northern Ireland and to provide an indication of the capital and revenue costs associated with such a project. This work culminated in a report, in July 1999, by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC), the Consultants appointed by the working group, which indicated that the project could succeed under certain conditions and recommended that further consideration should be given to opportunities to harness private sector support. There are, however, crucial issues to be addressed, including the potential usage of a stadium and securing the significant capital (c£80m) and revenue funding (c£2m).

Subsequently the Minister decided that the next step in progressing consideration of the proposal was to carry out a soft market test to examine the prospects of developing a national stadium for Northern Ireland through private sector investment. PWC was appointed by DCAL in February 2000 to conduct this exercise and made a presentation to the Minister in June 2000 which revealed potential for support from the private sector, although there are a number of crucial issues still remaining, not least of which is the degree of support and usage the key sports are prepared to commit. The private developers approached by PWC also pointed up the need for a strategy for sport, particularly for soccer.

To enable the Minister to progress that matter further, he chaired a meeting, on 25 October 2000, with representatives of the 4 main sports (soccer, GAA, rugby and athletics) to discuss the case for a national stadium for Northern Ireland. Although the IFA (the governing body for soccer) confirmed that its policy is to pursue the provision of a national stadium, the meeting was inconclusive insofar as the overall commitment by **all** the sports to a national sports stadium was concerned, and highlighted a number of obstacles that would have to be overcome. The location of the stadium would be a key factor.

Further consideration of the national stadium issue was put on hold pending further developments in the context of the Soccer Strategy initiative

2. Soccer Strategy Conference

At the Soccer Strategy Conference Workshop in Newcastle in February, considerable support emerged for a multi-sport national stadium to provide a new venue for staging international football matches, as well as other events. It was generally agreed that the current venue for international games, Windsor Park, is unsuitable on the grounds of poor facilities and its location being unattractive to the community as a whole.

The Department is now working in consultation with the Soccer Strategy Advisory Panel on detailed proposals for taking forward all the issues which emerged from the Conference, including the national stadium proposal. Detailed consideration has yet to be given on how to progress the national stadium issue but this is likely to include:-

- a site options study;
- an appraisal of stadium options for the 4 sports - Soccer, Rugby, GAA and Athletics;
- the degree of commitment and level of usage by the 4 sports;
- funding requirements and options for securing the necessary level of investment, capital and recurrent.

It is hoped to be in a position to present proposals and options to the Minister to enable him to make a statement of intent by Autumn 2001, to coincide with the publication of a draft Soccer Strategy document for public consultation.

3. Use of Windsor Park for International "A" Matches

The discussion of the proposal for a national stadium at the Soccer Strategy Conference was a cause of concern to Linfield FC. Under the terms of an agreement drawn up in 1984 between the IFA and Linfield Football and Athletic Club, the IFA leases part of the Windsor Park Stadium for International "A" matches. This provides a considerable source of income for the Club - it receives 15% of the gate for every game, as well as a share of the proceeds from ticket sales, advertising and TV. In a good year this could average £300k but in a year when low key matches are played the proceeds could be as low as £50k. Nevertheless, the potential loss of income should the international matches be transferred to a new national stadium is of serious concern to the Club. The implications of terminating such an agreement is a matter in the first instance for the IFA in consultation with Linfield. No detailed assessment of the cost of terminating the agreement has been made but it is believed that the cost would be significant.

4. Centres of Excellence and Football Academies

This issue will be considered in the context of the Soccer Strategy and may be considered at the meeting with the IFL and IFA on Friday morning. Mr Palmer and Mrs Lister will brief the Minister on this matter before the meeting with Linfield.

MEETING WITH LINFIELD FOOTBALL AND ATHLETIC CLUB TO
DISCUSS A NATIONAL STADIUM: THURSDAY 19 MARCH 2009, 11.30 AM
INTERPOINT

5. **Line to Take**

- no conclusions have yet been reached on the viability and sustainability of a national stadium for Northern Ireland;
- further work is required on the scope for a national stadium before a decision can be reached;
- the Minister should welcome this opportunity to take on board Linfield's views on the implications of a new national stadium for the Club.
- the Minister should listen to what the delegation has to say on the matter of Centres of Excellence and Football Academies.

**MEETING WITH LINFIELD FOOTBALL AND ATHLETIC CLUB TO
DISCUSS NATIONAL STADIUM: THURSDAY 29 MARCH 2001, 2-3 PM,
INTERPOINT.**

Contentious Issues

The main issue of contention in this matter relates to the implications of terminating the agreement between the IFA and Linfield on international matches if the proposal for a new national stadium were to go ahead.

1. National Stadium

- (a) development of Windsor Park
- (b) economic impact on South Belfast

2. Setting up by Clubs of Centres of Excellence and Football Academies

MEETING WITH LINFIELD FOOTBALL AND ATHLETIC CLUB

3.00 PM, FRIDAY 30 MARCH, INTERPOINT

AGENDA

1. National Stadium

- (a) development of Windsor Park**
- (b) economic impact on South Belfast**

2. Setting up by Clubs of Centres of Excellence and Football Academies

DAVID CRAWFORD:

Honorary Treasurer of the Club for approximately 15 years. Has represented the Club in the Irish League and the Irish Football Association. Currently a member of the Senior Clubs Committee and the International Committee.

DEREK BROOKS:

Secretary of the Club for over 20 years. Prior to this he was a Grade 1 referee on the FIFA list for three years. Has previously worked for Belfast City Council.

**MEETING WITH LINFIELD FOOTBALL AND ATHLETIC CLUB TO DISCUSS
NATIONAL STADIUM: FRIDAY, 30 MARCH 2001, 3.00 PM AT INTERPOINT**

DELEGATION (incorporating Key Personality Notes)

BILLY McCOUBREY:

Club Chairman for the past 7 years.
Vice-President of the Irish Football League (IFL).
Has represented the Club at the IFL for the last 10 years.

PETER LUNN:

Vice-Chairman of the Club for over 10 years. Owns a prominent jewellers in Belfast.

DAVID CRAWFORD:

Honorary Treasurer of the Club for approximately 15 years. Has represented the Club at the Irish League and the Irish Football Association. Currently a member of the Senior Clubs Committee and the International Committee.

DEREK BROOKS:

Secretary of the Club for over 26 years. Prior to this he was a Grade 1 referee on the FIFA list for three years. Has previously worked for Belfast City Council.