



FROM THE PRIVATE SECRETARY
TO THE Rt. HON. MICHAEL ANCRAM QC DL MP
MINISTER OF STATE

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3 JAN 1997
TMC 13/1

DATE: 24 December 1996

- cc PS/Michael Ancram (DENI, B&L)
Mr Carvill
Mr Spence
Mr Cowan
Mr Holmes
Mr Jordan
Mr Warburton
Mr Allister
Mr Palmer
Ms Sloan
Ms McGivern

UNDER
SEC
- 6 JAN 1997
CENT SEC

ASST DC 13/1
SEC - 7 JAN 1997
CENT SEC

Mr McCusker

to see and
provide advice &
information as per
para 12
DD
2/1

To: PS/Mr Moss (DOE, DHSS&L)

CASEMENT PARK/PAISLEY PARK

1. Our Ministers met at Stormont Castle on 19 December to discuss your Department's proposals for the development of sports facilities at Casement Park and Paisley Park in West Belfast under the Making Belfast Work initiative. Officials present were Mr R Jordan, Mr T McCusker and Ms M T McGivern. Ms Johnston and I were in attendance.

2. Michael Ancram began by indicating that he continued to have concerns about these projects in the context of the recent PES outcome, during discussions on which Ministers had been persuaded that MBW should be allowed to retain the capacity to begin new projects because of the initiative's impact on targeting social need. My Minister said that he had difficulty in seeing how the two projects under discussion would directly address social need.

3. Mr Moss explained that he supported the proposals mainly on regeneration grounds: he believed that they had potential to exert a significant multiplier effect on their surrounding areas. Michael Ancram responded that, nonetheless, had the funding of these projects been raised in the context of PES, the cuts to MBW might have been greater.

4. Mr McCusker explained that the Paisley Park and Casement Park proposals had been under consideration by MBW for some time, both having been mentioned in the initiative's 1996 Annual Report. He believed that they could be important elements in a balanced MBW programme. The



Paisley Park proposal in particular would capitalise on one of the few development opportunities in Protestant West Belfast and he feared an adverse political reaction if it was not funded. In TSN terms, however, there were strong arguments for both schemes as contributors to a balanced regeneration policy, which would assist to normalise the area and attract visitors from outside: international precedents showed that sports facilities could be used to stimulate regeneration.

5. **Mr McCusker** went on to draw an analogy between the Casement Park/Paisley Park proposals and Michael Ancram's decision to preserve the position of the Arts, Museums and Sport Programme in the PE Survey. **My Minister** responded that he had put the argument very clearly to his colleagues that expenditure on this programme yielded benefits which were disproportionate to the funds involved; the case for MBW expenditure, however, had been argued solely in TSN terms.

6. In response to a question from Michael Ancram, **Mr McCusker** confirmed that Paisley Park was the more important of the two projects in regeneration terms. Casement Park, on the other hand, was viewed by the local community as a litmus test in terms of creating an equal city and therefore carried a high political priority.

7. **Michael Ancram** asked whether either or both of the projects could be staged in such a way as to require relatively small amounts of funding over the next three years. **Mr McCusker** explained that, while this could be done in the case of Paisley Park, it might be necessary to agree the overall funding package for the Casement Park project at the outset, given the requirement for a substantial contribution (around £2-£2½ m) from the GAA and other sources (eg European and Lottery funds).

8. **Mr McCusker** went on to explain that the two projects had been presented in PES discussions as among those on which decisions were due this year. Within the overall MBW budget, the Action Teams' budgets were to be reduced by £1.5m as part of a shift to a more strategic approach to MBW activity, of which these projects formed a part.

9. **Michael Ancram** suggested that **Mr McCusker** might be able to say to those promoting the Casement Park and Paisley Park projects that Ministers were prepared in principle to consider a staged approach to the developments. He believed that it would be difficult to present a decision to



grant substantial funds to two major sports capital projects given the levels of cuts to areas such as the Youth Service and Universities - though he stressed that it was other, more clearly TSN-focused, MBW projects that he saw as benefiting from any funds released by adopting such an approach rather than other Departments' budgets.

10. **Mr McCusker** said that, if a decision was taken to fund these two projects, it would be announced as part of an overall MBW package. He went on to explain that it could become more difficult to fund the projects after 1997/98, when the level of EU funding would begin to reduce. He also suggested that further delay in consideration of the projects could be seen as another "not yet" from Government, and that unfavourable parallels could be drawn with the handling of the Springvale university campus proposal.

11. **Mr Moss** asked how my Minister would view development of Casement Park and Paisley Park in his capacity as Minister for Sport. **Michael Ancram** responded that he was content in principle with the approach suggested and had no difficulty with the GAA receiving Government funding - his reservations were purely a result of the tight PES round. **Mr Jordan** said that the work required at Casement Park was similar in scale to that which was required at other major sports grounds in Belfast, such as Glentoran's Oval Football Ground. If work was undertaken at Casement Park under a DENI banner, this would raise expectations of similar work at other sports grounds, to secure health and safety improvements which constituted DENI's top sports capital priority. **Mr McCusker** said that legal advice indicated that the Casement Park and Paisley Park projects could be taken forward by DOE as regeneration projects.

12. It was agreed that officials should investigate further the scope for staging expenditure at both Casement Park and Paisley Park in a way which might allow small elements to be taken forward on a stand alone basis if necessary and that the individual phases should be prioritised within this. **Michael Ancram** indicated that he could not take any definitive view about what level of expenditure might be affordable in advance of receiving this information. **Mr McCusker** indicated



that it should be possible to complete this work within a month, and it was therefore agreed that his submission to the Secretary of State should not be forwarded until the further information had been considered by both our Ministers.

Colin Jack

C D JACK

