



Shaun Woodward

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13:49:07

Woodward: 'No shrine at Maze'

There will be no shrine to terrorism beside a £55 million multi-sports stadium proposed for the site of the former Maze Prison, Shaun Woodward

has insisted.

In his first Question Time as Northern Ireland Secretary, Mr Woodward quoted Sinn Fein Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness` s comments that a conflict transformation centre planned for the site would be exactly that.

Democratic Unionist MP Sammy Wilson told the minister there was almost unanimous opposition among Northern Ireland football supporters to the siting of the new stadium in the Maze.

Mr Wilson added: "He will also be aware of the total opposition by unionists to the provision of a shrine to hunger strikers at the Maze - something which is already happening and which is being promoted by Sinn Fein.

"Will the minister give an assurance that no agreements made in the past by direct rule ministers or actions taken by direct rule ministers in the future will limit the ability of the executive and the Assembly in Northern Ireland to be the final arbiters of what happens to the Maze site and where the

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national stadium is located?"

Mr Woodward assured the East Antrim MP the stadium issue was a matter for the executive and it would be their final decision.

However he reminded the MP that when Northern Ireland Office ministers were responsible for the issue there was extensive consultation and the stadium was supported by the three main sporting bodies in soccer, rugby and Gaelic Games.

He added: "In respect of his observations about what some have described this being which is a terrorist shrine, can I say there is no question of this being a terrorist shrine.

"Frankly to do so, as I think he knows, denigrates the work done by the Maze Consultation Panel.

"They came up with proposals. They came up with a way forward on all of this.

"I think he would be best to remember the words of the Deputy First Minister yesterday when he said: `I am not arguing for any kind of shrine. If we want a conflict transformation centre then it has to concentrate on how we resolve conflict."

Stormont ministers are examining plans for a 35,000-seater stadium on the site of the Maze, outside Lisburn in Co Antrim.

However it is also proposed a conflict transformation centre will be built there, maintaining one of the Maze`s infamous H-Block wings which housed some of Northern Ireland`s most notorious paramilitary prisoners and the hospital wing where 10 republican hunger strikers starved to death in 1981.

It is also envisaged the 365 acre site will contain an indoor arena, an agricultural showground, houses and cafes.

In the face of opposition from some of his own Democratic Unionist colleagues in the Assembly, Stormont Sports Minister Edwin Poots vowed yesterday he would not bring forward any plan for the stadium if it was linked to anything which glorified terrorism.

However during a visit yesterday to Brussels, Mr McGuinness insisted no one who was advocating the conflict transformation centre was calling for a terrorist shrine.

He said: "People are making arguments around something that simply does not exist.

"The whole issue of a stadium on the Maze site is down to the Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister. He had to decide on that.

"Everything else on the Maze site will be decided by the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister.

"As Deputy First Minister, I am not arguing for any kind of shrine and the First Minister Ian Paisley knows that."

Mr Woodward was also pressed by Northern Ireland-born Labour MP Kate Hoey to release every document relating to the stadium to the public to avoid fans having to make use of the Freedom of Information Act.

The Northern Ireland Secretary said he would do so, where it was appropriate.

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FILM: WAITRESS

DIRECTOR: Adrienne Shelley.

STARRING: Keri Russell, Nathan Fillion, Adrienne Shelley, Jeremy Sisto.

DETAILS: US / 107mins (15A)

RATING: ★★★★★

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