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Politics

New Assembly will have final say on future of the former jail grounds

Monday, April 02, 2007

By Noel McAdam

Final decisions on the future of the Maze prison site will rest with the new power-sharing Executive, the Government confirmed today.

As work which could take more than a year began on the perimeter wall of the former Long Kesh, Direct Rule Minister David Hanson compared today to last Monday when Gerry Adams and Ian Paisley met and spoke for the first time together.

"Last Monday a political wall came down, bringing with it a new start to life in Northern Ireland with a new Assembly and power sharing Executive," he said.

"Today we are taking down a physical wall that will open the way to an iconic development that will also be shared by all the people here."

The proposals for the vast site, where the huge H-Blocks have still to be torn down, represent a huge opportunity to show the world that Northern Ireland has changed, he said.

"This site has a long association with conflict. Clearing the site will transform it into a symbol of economic and social regeneration, renewal and growth and is a physical demonstration of the movement from conflict to peace," Mr Hanson said.

"The proposals for the Maze/Long Kesh site represent a unique opportunity to demonstrate to the world all that is best in Northern Ireland in terms of regeneration, sharing the future and conflict transformation."

And he added: "But the final decisions about the future of the Maze/Long Kesh site will be taken by the new Executive and that is how it must and should be."

The Maze/Long Kesh Monitoring Group welcomed the further clearance move. Chair, DUP MLA Edwin Poots, said: "The demolition represents a major stage in the preparation for development of the site, which will benefit growth in the region.

Today marks the first stage in the removal of the prison wall, which so many of us have seen for decades as we pass along the M1. I look forward to a new skyline as we work to complete the task to transform this place.

Vice chair, Sinn Fein MLA Paul Butler, said: "The demolition of the cages, and now the prison wall, is an important step in the delivery of the Masterplan vision of economic and social regeneration agreed by the main political parties."

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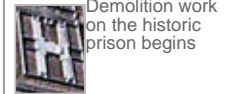
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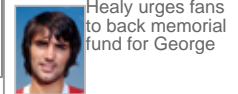


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