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The prospects of a multi-sports stadium being built at the Maze appeared doomed today after a new deal between Sinn Fein and the DUP ruled it out for another four years, The Belfast Telegraph can reveal.

However, the two parties have agreed that a Conflict Resolution Centre will be built on the former prison site near Lisburn.

According to senior Stormont sources, the deal surrounding the Maze blueprint will rule out a stadium for at least another four years, casting serious doubt over whether it will ever be built. Instead, early in the New Year, Sports Minister Gregory Campbell will confirm that a major refurbishment of Windsor Park will go ahead.

The business plan for the stadium will include the building of a new 4,000 seat capacity stand.

There will be a commitment from the minister to re-visit the issue of a

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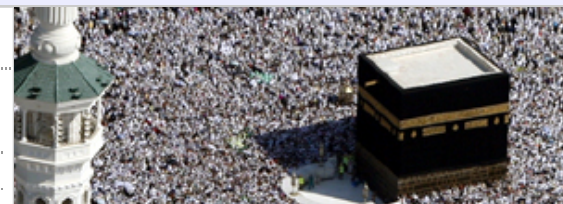
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Pilgrimage to Mecca

national stadium once the overall world and local economic situation improves.

What are these?

But there will be significant additions to the overall infrastructure of the Maze site to help with the projection of a united political front between the DUP and Sinn Fein.

However, DUP Junior Minister Jeffrey Donaldson today denied that a final agreement about the development at the former Maze Prison had been reached.

"The current situation is that discussions are ongoing between departments about the development of the Maze site and while some progress has been made, no decisions have been made yet in terms of either the Conflict Transformation Centre or the Stadium," he said.

But the Telegraph has learned that final touches to the redrawn Maze master plan were discussed during the visit to the United States earlier this month by Peter Robinson and Martin McGuinness.

The changes were central to talks held with potential investors.

According to the government source, part of the package will include a reappraisal of the needs of the three main sports. It will include individual deals being struck or a link up between two of the sports. The most likely option is that a smaller stadium to cope with the requirements of soccer and rugby will be developed.

As the strongest supporter of the Maze stadium the GAA continues to refuse to speculate publicly on its alternative option choice.

The funding of the controversial Conflict Resolution Centre will come from various sources including the European Community. The prospect of additional funding from the United States is also on the cards.

The agreement between the two main political blocs in relation to the Conflict Resolution Centre was a necessary marriage of convenience in order to break the long running Executive logjam and the funding from outside sources will help protect the DUP's against allegations being directly involved with a "shrine to terrorism."

Despite comments from Junior Minister Gerry Kelly that there would be no political deal unless the Maze Stadium went ahead at the original site, the Telegraph understands that from a Sinn Fein perspective the "building of a sports stadium was always secondary to the Conflict Resolution Centre being a pivotal part of the redevelopment programme".

Mr Campbell will address the Department of Culture, Art and Leisure committee tomorrow morning. His agenda will be the issue of Sports Stadia Safety legislation and its implementation across the province. However, the legislation will be tied-in with a decision to go ahead with the scheme at Windsor Park. The pressing need for spectator safety at the home of international football will be used as justification for the project going ahead.

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👍 This country has a long enough history of wasted money without a new stadium to add to it.

Posted by neil | 10.12.08, 14:32 GMT

👍 a Sinn Fein perspective the "building of a sports stadium was always secondary to the Conflict Resolution Centre being a pivotal part of the redevelopment programme". As usual the real issue is pushed aside for tribal nonsense... Ni needs a national stadium but not at the maze, it needed a multi purpose multi sport stadium- (but why do the GAA need a stadium up here they have Croke park- a stadium that is the envy of many!) there are so many narrow minded people in this country that this wouldn't go ahead- i refer to the quote.

Posted by Neill C | 10.12.08, 13:48 GMT

👍 In preperation for the 1990 world cup the Italians built a gargantuan stadia in Turin outside the city and Juventus moved there the result some twenty years later is the best supported team in Italy can sell all thier away ticket allocations at face value and thier home tickets are sold for a euro each just to get people to go Juve are moving back to thier old stadium in the city now

Fact is that even international football games and major rugby matches will attract crowds of 15 to 20 thousand and that has to be against top opposition

Have been to a couple of the International rugby games in Croke park and have to say I will not be back not because there is anything wrong with the stadium I just found the dimensions of the pitch took the game too far away from the spectators and therefore found myself in the ludicrous situation of sitting in the stands with a very expensive ticket watching proceedings on the big screen.

It is a case of three into one does not work

Posted by Robert | 10.12.08, 13:23 GMT

👍 As a Gaa Follower disappointed that the north of Ireland will have no quality stadium. Still shows we are a backward wee country where scoring political points is more important than improving sporting stadia. Sinn Fin have proved that all they wanted was a conflict resolution centre all along and have no interest in the GAA or improving the norths sporting facilities!! All well Linfield gets an upgraded stadium, will rugby and the gaa get dally all after over million spent on consultants looking at economic viability.What odds another consultation on it next year. More money wasted.

Posted by Wildweasel | 10.12.08, 13:19 GMT

👍 Huge numbers will be interested in a conflict resolution theme park, you'd probably the fingers on both hands to count them all!

Posted by Michael | 10.12.08, 13:15 GMT

👍 As a Linfield fan I can't say I'm overjoyed Ryan. We don't want a bigger stadium so more seats lie empty on a Saturday. Bottom line is that the IFA tried so hard to find a loophole to jump from this 104year contract. They couldn't find it and after the shambolic idea of the Maze, no other option than Windsor is open to them.

Posted by Aaron | 10.12.08, 13:05 GMT

👍 As if it was ever a secret that Campbell would plough money into Windsor Park. The only surprise is that he hasn't offered millions to Mickey Mouse Institute FC in Drumahoe.

This is further slap on the face to nationalist football fans in Northern Ireland.

Posted by Faithful | 10.12.08, 12:49 GMT

👍 Flatten the dump now.

Posted by windy | 10.12.08, 12:39 GMT

👍 Happy days. The stadium belongs in Belfast.

Posted by Paul | 10.12.08, 12:32 GMT

👍 As a resident who has no interest whatsoever in local tribal NI sport, I am pleased that the stadium will not be built.

It would cause major traffic chaos. Traffic at Sprucefield is bad enough as it is.

A conflict resolution theme park seems a complete waste of time.

The site is unsuitable for domestic building as the Maze was built on sand!

Posted by bert | 10.12.08, 12:24 GMT

As usual it's Soccer (which is second rate in this country) GAA & Rugby. What about a Mary Peters stadium? Or a sailing & Equestrian Academy?

The latter are non sectarian, but sure we wouldnt want that.

Posted by Dave | 10.12.08, 12:10 GMT

I agree 100% with Ryan.
Its one place I stepped in a few years ago and felt really uncomfortable in it and was looking forward to going to see N. Ireland play in the new ground where ever it was going to be.
It would have made all supporters feel the same and not like we were standing in the village area.
So looks like I will just carry on watching on TV. :-(
Linfield done well again out of it

Posted by Big Joe | 10.12.08, 12:03 GMT

I am glad there will be no stadium at the maze.
Belfast is the only place where it could and should be built. Having it out in the middle of nowhere was never really a viable option. Just because the land was cheap does not make it the best place to put it.
The stadium should be a reflection of Northern Ireland offering the best facilities and attractive transport and leisure options.
The reality is that nowhere else in Northern Ireland offers any facilities that would be able to support the arena.
Imagine being a foreign visitor to the stadium, looking arond you and seeing pretty much nothing. The nearest place of any interest around here is the shoddy international airport so the tourists can make a quick exit after the maTCH.

Posted by steven | 10.12.08, 12:01 GMT

The Trash Factor and constant reporting on the "singers" makes me yawn - this is joining the list! Now will follow a list of comments about GAA, supposedly Protestant Football et al! So Bored!!

Posted by Yawn | 10.12.08, 11:47 GMT

Well put Ryan. I agree 100% with every word you say. But what else do you expect from tribal politicians

Posted by Tony | 10.12.08, 11:41 GMT

Ryan if Windsor Park was situated in the middle of the Falls you would still have very few people from that side of the divide going to Northern Ireland matches. This is just a poor excuse for not upgrading windsor, the home of Northern Ireland.

Maybe you should take your goggles off and see that upgrading Windsor is the most practicle cost effective thing to do, that wont cost the Tax payers a 10th of what the Maze or any other development.

Posted by Steve | 10.12.08, 11:39 GMT

Shambles, it's being blamed on the economic crisis yet has been discussed for years, long before there was any sign of a recession. Previously the alternative being discussed was a stadium in Belfast City Centre. Now, instead of a forward thinking, multi-sports arena that would celebrate and attract fans from all sides of the divide, we'll carry on with the 'us and them' attitude where rugby and football look after themselves and the GAA do the same separately. Meanwhile, Northern Ireland continue to be seen as the joke of the British Isles' footballing sides with a jazzed up, still substandard stadium. The ground will still reside in a loyalist heartland which will continue to dissuade Catholics from supporting and the side, and after all these years, all the money spent, all the deliberating, arguing and stupidity, who's ultimately going to benefit from this?...Linfield Football Club. Well done gents, you've done yourselves proud.

Posted by Ryan | 10.12.08, 11:05 GMT

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