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'DUP needs to sort out Maze row'

(William Graham, [Irish News](#))

Sinn Féin has suggested that the row over the Maze site which has put sports minister Edwin Poots under pressure is something that DUP members "need to sort out amongst themselves".

Paul Butler, the Sinn Féin assembly member who represents the same Lagan Valley constituency as the DUP's Mr Poots said it was important to get back to the proposals put forward by the all party monitoring group.

Mr Butler said that as far as he was concerned there was agreement by all of the parties who were on the Maze/Long Kesh Monitoring Group.

The two main proposals "joined at the hip" were, he said, for a multi-sports stadium and a centre for conflict transformation.

"Our view is that all of this [current row in the DUP] is something the DUP need to sort out amongst themselves."

It has been made clear all along that such a stadium should be built and run by private investment and that funding should not be coming out of the public purse.

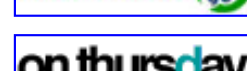
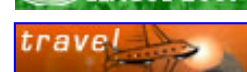
Earlier yesterday (Thursday) Mr Poots faced calls for his resignation amid reports that he had bowed to party pressure over the proposed stadium.

UUP assembly member David McNarry said he was deeply concerned about claims Mr Poots had watered down his endorsement of the stadium's location on the former Maze site near Lisburn and said if they were true the DUP representative should go.

He is demanding urgent clarification on the matter after senior DUP figures admitted lobbying the minister.

"The minister should be accountable to the sports committee and the assembly as a whole and we have the impression the minister has been got at [by his own party]," Mr McNarry said.

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"If that is true I feel he should be considering his position, rather reluctantly because he has to date proved that he has the makings of a first class minister."

Strangford DUP assembly member Jim Shannon has come out against the plan to build the stadium at the former prison.

Mr Shannon made his views clear to the minister and DUP enterprise minister Nigel Dodds has also expressed concern about the decision to site the stadium at the Maze.

Mr Poots has said he is open to alternative proposals but imposed a deadline of June 30 for submissions.

There have been none which meet the needs of the three sports involved – football, GAA and rugby – and there have been independent reports favouring the Maze.

Belfast City Council has spearheaded a vigorous lobbying campaign supported by football fans to have a venue within the city.

Last night there was no comment from the DUP about the latest exchanges over the new stadium but it appears clear there is no question of the minister contemplating resignation.

Mr Poots was still on holiday in Florida yesterday and unavailable for comment.

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