

NOTE OF A MEETING OF DED OFFICIALS AND SINN FEIN
ON
THURSDAY 14 DECEMBER 1995, NETHERLEIGH

Present: DED

Sinn Fein

Mr Loughran (Chairman)
Mr Robinson
Mr Hanna

Mr Adams
Cllr. Mairtin O Muilleoir
Mr McQuillan

1 OPENING REMARKS

Mr Loughran welcomed the SF delegation and introduced the DED officials.

Mr Adams thanked Mr Loughran for the opportunity to discuss key aspects of SF's economic strategy for West Belfast and hoped that DED would give it their full consideration, as part of their commitment to TSN. He was concerned that the development of Springvale was not living up to expectations and that Government should establish a task force, with an adequate brief and resources, to tackle the enduring economic problems of the area. Cllr O Muilleoir outlined SF's current efforts to establish links with DED businesses on economic development matters.

Mr Loughran welcomed SF's offer of partnerships and said that DED's responsibilities depended upon the co-operation of all interests, not only for attracting investment into the West Belfast area but also for developing investment within it. In pointing out that he would deliver this message to any political party and not just SF, he stressed that economic development involved decisions by people who could choose to invest almost anywhere and a co-operative approach would be particularly helpful in redressing the image problem of West Belfast.

2 SPRINGVALE (GENERAL)

Mr Loughran said that DED were at present the only Government Department who had committed funding to the site with the new training centre and IDB developments. He also confirmed that DED were fully in support of the university campus being established there because it

would complement overall economic development in the area. However the main argument against was that of cost.

Mr Adams said that SF were in favour of the university campus being established in the area provided it addressed all the issues of local employment and local benefit which had been put down in their paper on the matter and sent to Ministers some time ago. He also said that SF would be the easiest political party to persuade on the project but again stressed that their demands needed to be handled sensitively and that their paper on the issue was very much a bargaining position. Cllr O Muilleoir said that he would be pursuing SF's interests on the campus issue with Wallace Ewart.

Mr Loughran felt that if the campus did not go ahead it would make DED's job even harder in the area and was therefore surprised at Mr Adams conditional support for the project. Mr Adams clarified that his support was not conditional but qualified.

Mr Loughran also confirmed that Cllr O Muilleoir would be having a meeting with a Minister on this issue.

3 FAIR EMPLOYMENT

Cllr O Muilleoir said that the round of meetings that he had been having with DED businesses had slipped and that he would be renewing his contacts with a view to addressing inequality issues, particularly in regard to unemployment. Mr Loughran referred SF to the SACHR review on equality and the input that they could make to that.

4 WEST BELFAST JOBS TASKFORCE (NORTH AND WEST BELFAST ECONOMIC WORKING GROUPS)

Cllr O Muilleoir said that he was annoyed at his continued exclusion from the West Belfast group and suggested that an integrated strategy was necessary to tackle all of the issues in the area. Mr Adams added that, in the 'new era' it was unrealistic to continue with quangos which were set up to specifically to ostracise SF. It was therefore likely that the group's strategy would get a cynical reception on the ground.

Mr Robinson confirmed that the West Belfast group's report would be published in due course and that he considered that approach as a sensible way forward in addressing the issues in West Belfast.

Mr Loughran felt that any political party should have the same rights

as any other and with the new EU peace money there were perhaps opportunities to look again at structures which might be more relevant to the needs of the area.

5 SPRINGVALE (IDB)

Mr Robinson confirmed that IDB were actively marketing the Springvale site and, although he could not disclose details of potential investors for the area, he stressed the importance of the marketing potential of Fujitsu, who were already on site. He also said that developments on a replacement tenant for CIS Data were slow but that there were two interested parties and negotiations were at a very delicate stage.

Cllr O Muilleoir said that he would be very keen to get the FG Wilson expansion (Emerson Electric) on to the site and would like Mr Adams, who would be visiting the USA in mid-January, to have IDB's marketing material and help in this matter.

Mr Loughran pointed up the vagaries of attracting inward investment and the competition which IDB faced from other investment agencies around the world and suggested that Cllr O Muilleoir liaise with IDB on this issue.

6 RVH

Cllr O Muilleoir said that he was very concerned at the recent loss of 110 jobs from the hospital complex. Mr Adams added that all the signals were that Government was downgrading the RVH which could only worsen the jobs position in the area. It was therefore rather paradoxical that IDB were trying to increase employment through inward investment whilst another Government department was shedding jobs from the biggest employer in the area. It also added weight to the argument for the task force proposed in SF's strategy document.

Mr Adams also suggested that there should be better liaison between Government departments to avoid issues like this.

Mr Loughran, in noting the point, regretted the job losses and confirmed that there were indeed inter-departmental policy development procedures.

7 MONTUPET

Cllr O Muilleoir was very complimentary of the role of T&EA's employment service in matching potential employees to inward investors.

He asked if Mr Robinson would write to him outlining when it was anticipated that Montupet would have the 1000 new jobs in place and, particularly the first 900, which he understood would be the trigger point for the payment of IDB grant aid. Mr Robinson confirmed that he would do so.

(Action: Mr Robinson)

8 WHITE ROCK INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

Mr Loughran felt that the site would ultimately return to DED management and, although he would welcome the additional land, he felt that larger sites than the 10 acres at Whiterock were probably more suited to IDB's requirements.

9 CONWAY MILL

Cllr O Muilleoir suggested that DED should adopt a more proactive approach to the development of Conway Mill because of the particular difficulties there.

Mr Loughran agreed with Mr Adams that DED's approach was largely a reactive one but, in reality, this was the only approach which actually worked. He also suggested that, with MBW involvement, there could be local community ideas with which DED would help. Mr Loughran also confirmed that he would ask LEDU to look at the site and report back to him on what options could be developed there.

(Action: Mr Hanna)

10 CULTURAL CLUSTER

Cllr O Muilleoir referred to the paper which he had already submitted to the Department for their response. In the meantime he stressed that this was not an independent issue but part of SF's overall economic development strategy which would come within the remit of a dedicated task force. Mr Adams pointed up examples of various economic enterprises which had already been developed and supported by

the local community and which had created jobs. He suggested that this could also be the case with the making and servicing of Irish language television programmes. Cllr O Muilleoir also suggested that if Government responses to Sinn Fein papers were drafted in Irish there would be further potential for job opportunities within NICS.

11 TSN/NITB/IRTU

Cllr O Muilleoir was concerned that NITB did not appear to be as proactive in West Belfast on the TSN issue as perhaps IDB were. Mr Loughran confirmed that NITB, as with any of the other DED agencies, would regard proposals from any TSN area as a priority, provided those proposals fell within the general conditions of grant aid. In that regard he would arrange to send Cllr O Muilleoir a copy of NITB's TSN action plan.

(Action: Mr Hanna)

With regard to IRTU Mr Loughran confirmed that, despite the strong lobby from other areas, he would support the new Manufacturing Technology Partnership (MTP) being sited at Springvale because of its compatibility with other economic and potential academic developments in the area. In response to Cllr O Muilleoir's query on RADIUS he said that there was a small amount of money involved and therefore no substantial employment implications.

12 DUBLIN-BELFAST ECONOMIC CORRIDOR

Cllr O Muilleoir felt that development of this initiative could be of considerable benefit to his constituents.

Mr Loughran referred to Government policy, as outlined in the Framework Document, which suggested that there were advantages in having formal North/South economic development structures. He also said that the biggest single obstacle to this development is the road between Belfast and Dublin and hoped that political representation would take place in Dublin as well on this issue. He also confirmed that there was a wide range of activities already taking place on a North/South co-operation basis.

13 CONCLUSION

Cllr O Muilleoir said that he was very happy with relations with IDB and would like to see partnerships developed for co-ordinated action. Mr Adams stressed his personal interest in the Springvale development and would like DED to come back to him with a comprehensive response to their strategy document, in the form of follow-up discussions. Mr Loughran agreed that a meeting with officials to that effect could probably be held in early January.