



Memo



10 DEC 1997

hc 295
Mr T McCusker)
Mr B McGuigan) without
Mr J Kennedy) booklet
Mr P Waddell)

From: R B Spence

Your ref:

Our ref: PSE 820/97

Tel: (5)41175/6

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Mr Pearson

Date: 9 December 1997

To: PS/SoS (B&L)

cc: PS/Lord Dubs (DOE,DANI&L)
Mrs Brown, DOE

DEVELOPING THE STORMONT ESTATE

1. The Secretary of State asked, at our meeting on 3 December, for a note of progress which she could send to the Prime Minister.
2. I attach a draft which includes reference to the Secretary of State's latest correspondence with Elton John's manager.

R B SPENCE

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ADDRESSEE'S REFERENCE:

FILE NUMBER:

TO: Prime Minister	ENCLOSURES: Booklet	COPIES TO BE SENT TO: cc: PS/SoS (B&L) PS/Mr Murphy (DFP,B&L) PS/Mr Ingram (DED,B&L) PS/Mr Worthington (DENI,DHSS&L) PS/Lord Dubs (DOE,DANI&L) PS/PUS (B&L) PS/Mr Semple NI Permanent Secretaries Mr Thomas Mr Steele Mr Watkins Mrs L Brown (DOE) Mr F Woods Mr Warner Ms Healey Mr V Bull (DOE)
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December 1997

LETTER DRAFTED FOR SIGNATURE BY SECRETARY OF STATE

DEVELOPING THE STORMONT ESTATE

Introduction

1. When I told you recently about our efforts to attract a wide range of events to Northern Ireland, I mentioned briefly the work to attract events specifically to Stormont. This minute reports on the work to create a more inclusive perception of Parliament Buildings and to re-open the Stormont Parklands as a public facility.

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Background

2. Opened in 1932, Parliament Buildings in East Belfast dominates an estate of 300 acres which includes several Government buildings, civil service playing fields and an area of parkland. Commonly known as "Stormont", Parliament Buildings as the seat of the former Northern Ireland Parliament is perceived, by many Nationalists as a symbol of Unionist domination. For the last three decades, it has been encased in tight security which has reduced its use as a park by the general public.

3. Following a major fire in 1995, Parliament Buildings, which is a listed building, has been restored and is now used by the NIO Ministerial team and civil servants from NIO and the Department of Finance and Personnel. The building stands ready physically to be the centre of a devolved administration, but its ethos would not, at present, help to underpin the spirit of a new regional body.

Action

4. I have, therefore, initiated an exercise to explore how we might, over time, change the image of Stormont, starting with measures to make Parliament Buildings and the Stormont Parklands more accessible. The steps being developed include -

Parliament Buildings -

- ◆ controlled access to public areas by tourists and schoolchildren
- ◆ functions for visiting VIPs, charities and public bodies
- ◆ a carefully designed permanent historical exhibition
- ◆ regular public exhibitions
- ◆ mainly classical musical events.

Stormont Parklands

- ◆ classical and popular musical events (including, following your approach to his manager, an Elton John concert in July 1998)
- ◆ other outdoor events, such as a garden party for young people
- ◆ developing the Parklands with a children's play area, jogging tracks, nature walks etc
- ◆ holding special sporting events, including use of the playing fields as a venue for some of Ireland's international cricket matches.

5. Security considerations remain a significant factor and will continue to be borne in mind in general planning and in managing specific events.
6. I need to take the local politicians along with us in these measures. Nationalists are likely to be sceptical and Unionists will be concerned about devaluing the standing of Stormont. Local residents will be apprehensive about events which attract large numbers of people.
7. I am planning to invest a relatively modest amount of public money in providing new assets like the historical exhibition and the children's play area. The aim will, however, be to ensure that musical events are run on a commercial basis, with perhaps the venue being free in the first year.
8. I propose early in the New Year to use a Parliamentary Question to outline my intentions.

Conclusion

9. Attached is a booklet which gives a pictorial account of some of my plans. I would welcome a short discussion to ensure that you are content with the broad direction in which I am seeking to move. Changing attitudes and perceptions about Stormont will be a difficult, medium term task, but I am sure that it is a task which we must address.

MARJORIE MOWLAM