



Northern Ireland
Assembly

**COMMITTEE
FOR THE OFFICE OF THE
FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY
FIRST MINISTER**

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)**

**Maze/Long Kesh Development
Corporation**

14 October 2009

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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FOR THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND
DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**

Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Danny Kennedy (Chairperson)

Ms Martina Anderson

Mr Alex Attwood

Mr Tom Elliott

Mr Barry McElduff

Mr Francie Molloy

Mr Stephen Moutray

Mr George Robinson

Mr Jim Shannon

Mr Jimmy Spratt

Witnesses:

Mr Kyle Alexander) Strategic Investment Board

Mr Alan Maitland) Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Ms June Wilkinson)

The Chairperson (Mr Kennedy):

I welcome the witnesses and thank them for joining us to talk about the Maze/Long Kesh (MLK) development corporation and the proposed statutory rule. The session will be recorded by Hansard; therefore, please switch off mobile phones. I invite the witnesses to make an opening statement before answering questions.

Mr Alan Maitland (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):

I am head of the strategic investment and regeneration division in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). My colleagues are June Wilkinson, head of the regeneration sites team taking forward the Maze/Long Kesh project, Ilex and other developments; and Kyle Alexander, from the Strategic Investment Board (SIB). Kyle is programme director for the Maze/Long Kesh development.

I am very glad to attend the Committee again; it has been quite a while. Without further ado, Ms Wilkinson will provide an update on the legislative position.

Ms June Wilkinson (Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):

Following the First Minister and deputy First Ministers' joint statement on 8 April, the Department wanted to move the Maze/Long Kesh programme forward. It is a site of regional significance, the economic development potential of which we want to fully exploit, particularly in the current economic climate. The Ministers guided us in their April statement to establish a development corporation to take work on the site forward, very much building on the efforts of OFMDFM and the work of the all-party Maze/Long Kesh consultation panel. Therefore, we were mindful that we were not starting afresh; we were picking up on the existing good practice.

Maximising the economic, historical and reconciliation potential of the site is the goal of this work, working closely with all the bodies that had already expressed an interest in working on the site. Following the statement in April, OFMDFM moved to tie up any procurement issues that needed resolving in relation to the site, and to obtain legal advice on how to develop the secondary legislation. Hence the statutory rule, which we have been able to share with you today.

The statutory rule is a very simple, factual paper. It provides for the establishment of a development corporation through the powers that are conferred to OFMDFM under the Strategic Investment and Regeneration of Sites (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, subject to the affirmative resolution procedure of the Assembly.

As required, OFMDFM provided the Committee with an SL1 notifying you of our intention to create the legislation. The Bill will be laid in the Business Office in October, and there will be technical scrutiny by the Examiner of Statutory Rules. It will be confirmed to the Committee in November. Ministerial approval for the motion in the Assembly will also, hopefully, be given in

November, so we hope that the Assembly debate will take place on 30 November. However, that is to be confirmed. We aim to make the Order in December and have the development corporation legislatively created on 1 January. That is the time frame that we are aiming to work to. We are delighted to be able to move forward on this significant project, and we are determined to make real progress on the ground for the benefit of all.

The Chairperson:

Thank you very much; that is very helpful. How does the model that you have outlined compare with, for example, that of the Laganside Corporation, which was highly successful? Is this a lift from that? Is it an exact lift, or are there any changes?

Ms Wilkinson:

It is seen as a lift of the good practice of the Laganside Corporation, but we are mindful that we want to learn and move on. Every organisation has its downside, and we are taking that on board to make sure that the new corporation learns from that.

The Chairperson:

Such corporations in other parts of the United Kingdom have planning regulatory powers. Those powers were absent from the Laganside Corporation; are they equally absent from this proposed development corporation?

Ms Wilkinson:

They are absent at this stage of the proposal, but we are looking at all the options for best developing the Maze/Long Kesh site. Any changes in planning would have to be looked into in great detail before moving forward.

Mr Maitland:

We are fortunate enough to have the former chief executive of Laganside Corporation with us as the Maze/Long Kesh programme director.

Mr Kyle Alexander (Strategic Investment Board):

One aspect of the proposal that is not the same as with the Laganside Corporation is that OFMDFM owns all of the land, whereas the Laganside Corporation owned some land, but had to work with the Harbour Commissioners and the council. That is a key point. In a sense, the new

corporation will have the same powers as the Laganside Corporation, but the land is owned by OFMDFM, so we are much more in control. Planning powers were not part of the Laganside Corporation's brief. Obviously there were times when we would have liked to have those powers so that we could have sped things up. We would welcome those powers, but that is the next stage that we want to consider.

The Chairperson:

So June is not sure, but Kyle would welcome it.

Mr Maitland:

The Ministers do want to look at this, because we are very conscious that some development corporations have very sweeping planning powers. For example, Dublin Docklands Development Corporation has some very effective powers which it has used well in working alongside Dublin City Council. It is a parallel process. However, we did not want to carry out research, advise Ministers, and then hold up the creation of a development corporation for MLK.

The Chairperson:

At this stage, what level of consultation has there been with Lisburn Borough Council? Has there been a comparing of notes? Mr Spratt will be interested in that.

Mr Spratt:

What about Lisburn City Council?

The Chairperson:

Sorry; Lisburn City Council.

Mr Maitland:

Under the 2003 Order, Lisburn City Council has to be consulted about places on the corporation. A couple of months ago, the Minister had a pretty good engagement with key stakeholders in Lisburn City Council.

The Chairperson:

So Lisburn City Council is aware of what is being proposed? OK.

Ms Anderson:

Will the formation of a development corporation allow you to take things forward over the next few months? I would like a bit more clarity about the role and remit of the development corporation. What influence will the public sector retain? I am thinking, for example, of the regeneration process that we are involved in in Derry. The social requirements should be built into any regeneration process through procurement at the initial stage, and the benefits from the site should be accrued by the people who are most in need, particularly in the adjacent area. Never mind the Laganside Corporation; we all know that the gasworks was sold to the people of south Belfast, but brought no benefit to the area in which it was located.

Mr Alexander:

We are aware that the development corporation will have a role in both economic development and social development. We are also aware of the work that has been done with Ilex. One of the first things that we plan to do is some baseline work to see what the needs of the local community are. We want to do that work at the start, so that it can inform the work that we go on to do in the master plan.

We have done some work in looking at the site. Although folks may perceive the site as being “somewhere down the M1”, there are 750,000 people living within a 30-minute drive time of the site. We will want to look at the needs within that, and we will want to make sure that, as the plans come forward, that is taken account of in the work that we do.

Ms Anderson:

What about in the short term?

Mr Alexander:

In the short term, before the development corporation is formed, I am working as part of a programme delivery team in OFMDFM. We are starting to do some scoping work. That way, there will be quite an easy transition to the work of the corporation. In a sense, that work is under way now.

Mr Shannon:

With such a potential development plan for the MLK site, can I assume that Lisburn City Council’s role will be greater than normal? As the governing council, no doubt it will have a plan

that it would like to see put in place. I think that Lisburn City Council will have a very important role.

What role do you see for Lisburn City Council in the establishment of the development corporation? From talking to Members who also sit on Lisburn City Council, I understand that it has a specific plan that it wants to see used for the development corporation. I am conscious that, as the governing council, Lisburn City Council should have an important role in the core issue of taking things forward.

Mr Maitland:

Lisburn City Council will be a statutory consultee for any planning proposals. Legislation requires that the Department consult Lisburn City Council on the members of the development corporation. I imagine that the council will want to be represented on the corporation.

A number of briefing meetings took place on the 2006 master plan with the planning committee of Lisburn City Council and with the council, which wanted to know what was going on and took regular reports. I do not that imagine that being any different with the new proposals, because the council is a key stakeholder. The site is a regional resource, and I imagine that we will have a lot of contact with other councils and many others.

Mr Shannon:

Will Lisburn City Council have a financial input into the MLK site? Do you see it making a financial contribution? I am not playing the role of guardian for Lisburn City Council — far from it. However, I am conscious of the fact that it may see a role that is greater than that which the Department has seen. I am keen to see whether that has been explored.

The Chairperson:

Perhaps that question is premature. We are discussing the enabling legislation that is required to create the corporation. Among the next stages will be consultation and the job description for the MLK corporation. I do not wish to spend a lot of time on such issues.

Mr Shannon:

I am just keen to explore this one point. If Lisburn City Council wished to make a financial contribution to the project, should its role be greater than is anticipated?

Mr Maitland:

Ministers would have to consider any questions to do with financial contributions. There is currently no provision for that.

Mr Attwood:

I am mindful of the Chairperson's comment that we must not get ahead of ourselves, but I may do that a wee bit. Given the publicity about the cost of getting the Maze site to where it currently is — *[Interruption.]*

The Chairperson:

I hope that I do not hear mobile phones.

Mr Shannon:

That sound is coming from outside. That is not my mobile phone.

The Chairperson:

That is all right. Sorry, Mr Attwood.

Mr Spratt:

You are very defensive, Jim.

Mr Shannon:

It was not even my ringtone, for goodness' sake.

Mr Attwood:

We do not want to get ahead of ourselves too much, but it would be useful to have indicative figures on what it will cost to set up the development corporation, what its staffing complement will be, what its annual overheads will be and what the anticipated cost of consultants might be. I am sure that, given the adverse publicity and comment, the Department is projecting a way forward and working all of that out.

Can the legislation include a provision for the recruitment of unemployed people in the award of contracts under the development corporation? As far as I am aware, the only public contract in

the North in which unemployed people are recruited as a matter of contract is the £9 million contract for the footbridge in Derry. One person is employed for every £1 million that is spent. Whatever we think about that ratio, can the legislation for the development corporation, which will involve the award of contracts for hundreds of millions of pounds in the next while, include such a statutory requirement to at least jump-start the issue and begin to put it into the mainstream of public contracts?

I am aware of what the balance of membership was on the board of the Laganside Corporation. Do you have any early thinking about what the balance of membership will be on the Maze board in respect of community, business etc? There could be a problem, because the reorganisation of government very shortly after that time could see the politicians being squeezed.

The Chairperson:

We are beginning to jump ahead. Mr Maitland, do you have a response to any of those questions?

Mr Maitland:

Ministers have not yet come to any conclusion on what the membership of the corporation should be, but your point is well made. Budgets and a forward timetable are things that Mr Alexander, as programme director, will be taking very seriously. We take your point on board, and will brief the Committee when we have figures.

The point about the employment of unemployed people is very close to our Ministers' hearts. They were very concerned that, as you indicated, we specify a fixed number of apprenticeships and the recruitment of unemployed people in the contracts for the big project for the bridge in Derry. It is not well known, but the central personnel directorate of the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) has a policy on that. We are trying to promote the uptake of that policy, so that the massive expenditure of government procurement does something additional to alleviate social deprivation. I assure you that OFMDFM, through its powers under the 2003 Order, will ensure that the development corporation takes that on board. I know that Mr Alexander has plans already, and we have had good discussions with other development corporations about it, and we intend to do that in strong measure.

Mr Attwood:

My point was to put it on statute. Although DFP and central procurement have guidelines, besides the Derry situation, there has been no application of them — none.

The Chairperson:

Is it correct that that would be a ministerial decision?

Mr Maitland:

It would. I think that the point of your question will be met by the existing provision in the 2003 Order for OFMDFM to specify direct requirements for the corporation. A further point, which is not particularly helpful but is relevant, is that if we add any more provisions to the statutory rule, the process will end up being a lot longer. As we have the bones of the development corporation — all the basic powers are set out in the 2003 Order — our instructions are to proceed, under the Order, to set it up by a quick rule. I assure you that your point will be taken on board.

Mr Spratt:

Alex made a very valid point about apprenticeships. It is important that, in respect of public money, provision is laid down that not only those who get the contract but subcontractors as well should be employing apprentices. That is imperative, and it is certainly something that I was keen to see during my period on the Committee for Employment and Learning.

First, will the legislation give the potential for other sites to be included in the work of the corporation in the future? Secondly, as I understand it, the Dublin docklands project that has been mentioned has been held up in relation to planning powers. Will the legislation tie down issues around planning to ensure that there are no major hold-ups like that?

Mr Maitland:

I will go back to what Mr Alexander said earlier. Due to the fact that the MLK development corporation will be based on the tried and tested powers that were available to Laganside, a lot can be achieved within the existing powers. If Ministers decide that they want to have something similar to what exists in Dublin or to some of the development corporations across the water, that will have to be considered separately. If we were to do that in this Order, it would hold up the establishment of the development corporation. Our instructions are to consider these things, but to set up the development corporation right away.

On the first question, I understand from the lawyers that the 2003 Order allows us to set up a development corporation for one or more sites. I know that you have only just received a copy of an early draft of the statutory rule, but it refers to the proposed development corporation as the Maze/Long Kesh development corporation. It was not intended, at this stage, that it would be anything other than an MLK development corporation. If, however, Ministers decide to expand it, that is something that can be done — technically, at least. However, there are lawyers here.

Mr Elliott:

Is there anything that says that whatever development is built on the site has to be of strategic importance? Can it be a more locally focused development? Does the 2003 Order stipulate that any development must be of strategic importance?

Mr Maitland:

No. That said, however, Ministers and, I think, all of the parties that were involved in earlier discussions on this regard Maze/Long Kesh as a site of regional and strategic importance, given not only its location at the top of the A1 and across the east-west M1, but also its size. It is the biggest regeneration site in the region; it is approximately the size of Belfast city centre and twice the size of the Titanic Quarter. Furthermore, under the existing planning rules, the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan has designated MLK as a site of strategic regional importance. Under the existing rules, we have to take that into account.

Mr Alexander:

There will be debate around that. To me, it is the transformation of the MLK site that is of strategic and regional significance. The view of the Planning Service may be that it wants to look at each of the uses that are part of the whole transformation; it may say that each use has to be of regional strategic significance. Therefore, for instance, if Invest NI wanted to develop some land on the site, the Planning Service might well say that it can only do that if the development is of great significance and not a standard Invest NI development. There will be a debate around what is meant in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan by sites and uses “of regional significance”.

Mr Elliott:

I asked that question because article 21 of the 2003 Order allows for the disposal of land to anyone who is deemed fit; that means that it does not have to be kept for development of strategic

importance. The corporation may dispose of land to a person or a body for financial benefit, perhaps to develop another portion of it. In view of the importance of the site, that is a concern.

Mr Molloy:

I have two points. I regret that, when we should be taking direct control of these situations, we are setting up another quango to manage this. The review of public administration was to remove quangos, but we are adding to them. I am also concerned at how long the process will take. We acknowledge that the politicians had their chance first of all and failed to deliver. Maybe this is the only way of dealing with it.

The other issue is about the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS) and the Balmoral Show. What will that process entail? Will it slow up the process that you envisage, or will it open up opportunities for RUAS to develop this site at an early stage?

The Chairperson:

I must remind the Committee that we are not here to build it.

Mr Maitland:

Ministers are conscious of creating another quango or non-departmental public body. It is a decision that they have made, and their 8 April statement is the key to all this. That said, the work that Mr Alexander's programme development unit is doing will be completed in a very economic way. That is the development corporation in waiting, so to speak. Because we do not want to lose any time, Mr Alexander is doing preparatory work in close co-operation with OFMDFM and colleagues in SIB. The intention is to co-operate, share and try to reduce the costs of what would otherwise be a separate organisation. That is something that we have to bear in mind.

Mr Molloy:

What of the RUAS?

Mr Alexander:

I will address that, but first let me make a general comment.

I see what is required at MLK as a twin-track approach. First, we have to maximise the potential of the site, and that means that we need to spend time on a master plan to see what the

real potential is. Secondly, the key to the site is to show some early wins. With a lot of master plans for sites — and this is where we were with MLK before — is that you got into a situation where it is all or nothing. There is one large plan, one large scheme. In the present context, while we want to aspire to the overall plan, we need to move ahead to get things done.

I see potential with RUAS. It could well be one of the items or aspects that we could move ahead with. There are a number of other early wins. We want to establish an office on the site, so as to be based there. We want to do some work to the entrance to the site to make it much more attractive. In the last year we have removed all the razor wire and the large military-style gates. A lot of that is under way.

RUAS was obviously a key part of the last master plan; it was welcomed in the consultation, and there still appears to be widespread support for their moving to the site. Since last spring, I have met RUAS and I have asked it to come back to OFMDFM with a concept scheme. We want to explore whether we can create a situation whereby RUAS could move to the site at an early stage. That will not constrain what we do with the rest of the site, but it will start to create momentum. The site needs that to get things under way. I am working with RUAS, and I want to come back to Ministers and tell them that there may be a good chance. We have to explore terms and the way it might be done. That is something we are looking at and which we want to explore.

The Chairperson:

It seems that some people will not recognise it when they see it next.

Mr G Robinson:

My question may be premature. What will the name of the site be, and who will name it?

Mr Maitland:

Sorry, I am not with you.

Mr G Robinson:

What will be the official name of the site when everything is in place?

The Chairperson:

We have built part of the stadium, and now we want to name it? That is a matter for the future.

Mr G Robinson:

It is premature.

Mr Maitland:

The Ministers agreed with the other parties some years ago to call the site “Maze/Long Kesh”. That has been proposed in the Order.

Mr Shannon:

Do you know how many jobs the corporation will create in construction and so on? You must have some ideas.

Mr Maitland:

Sorry, I did not hear the first part of the question.

Mr Shannon:

Sorry; I have a bit of a cold. How many jobs will be created during the construction of the MLK site, and how many will result when it is built?

Mr Maitland:

I am a little hard of hearing.

We will not know for sure until we have a master plan. As Mr Alexander said, if the corporation takes a flexible approach, it is possible that RUAS could obtain initial use of the site and that employment prospects could ensue. If the necessary infrastructure is tackled at an early stage, construction jobs could result. However, as we said earlier, we are getting ahead of ourselves a wee bit.

This is such a huge site; the 2006 master plan envisaged thousands of potential jobs. If the corporation can come up with the right mix of ideas and be a beacon for investment, who knows what the prospects could be. Although it is a huge site, the corporation must focus on how it impacts on the whole community. We will be looking at that before making investments. We will want to know that significant expenditure will achieve a return that benefits both the economy and society. Employment will be a key feature.

The Chairperson:

For the benefit of your press release, Jim, you can say that it has potential to create thousands of jobs.

Thank you for attending; we look forward to seeing you again in the future.