RESPONSE 16

Wilkinson, David

From: John Davidson
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RESPONSE BY JOHN DAVIDSON (CHAIRMAN) ON BEHALF OF

THE NORTHERN IRELAND FEDERATION OF CLUBS.

We welcome the opportuniy to conrtribute to the consultation process and following some deliberation on what is a highly important issue, I wish to make the following comment.

In respect to the £600m outlined as being raised via commercial rating, it is important to consider that sports and recreational clubs, other than CASC registered clubs, provide a sizeable proportion of the figure outlined.

In regard to the aforesaid contribution, those same clubs provide facilities equal, and in many cases substantially more than those provided by CASC's, particularly in respect to sports grounds, quite independent of the social club dimension.

When meeting the Minister, Mervyn Storey MLA, representatives of the N.I. Sports Forum, the Northern Cricket Union, the GUI and the N.I. Federation of Clubs, highlighted the financial difficulties faced by their sector members, stating that a number are hanging on by a thread.

It is quite unfair to compare a registered sports club to a commercial outlet, such as a hotel or public house, as one is understandably established for profit, which naturally we accept should be the case, whereas the other is established as a not for profit organisation, which provides sporting and recreational facilities to its members and guests, to include visiting individuals and teams.

We do not, and never sought rating relief for the social club aspect of a club, but rather relief on the sports grounds. We consider this would we a small contribution in comparison to the huge benefit provided by such sports clubs, not to mention the benefit to the Northern Ireland economy through sports tourism.

When one considers that an estimated £750k will be allocated to provide rates relief for CASC compliant clubs, and the additional amount required to fulfill our request being similar, surely the benefit to the sporting ethos of the province would see this as being a small price to pay.

The sporting world recognises that Northern Ireland punches well above its weight, which appropriatly underlines the importance of our request.

As already outlined, the facilities afforded by a CASC registered club, and the ground facilities provided by a number of registered sports clubs are essentially no different. While a registered sports club has a social club, this is often insufficient to finance the associated sports facilities, particularly as most remain to suffer the affects of the economic recession, from which they have not recovered. Indeed a number of such clubs are closing on days throughout the week, yet their sports grounds remain available for members and guests/visiting players and teams.

When appointed at the new Legislative Assembly, we would welcome the opportunity to meet the Minister to elucidate on our proposals.

John Davidson

Chairman

Northern Ireland Federation of Clubs

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