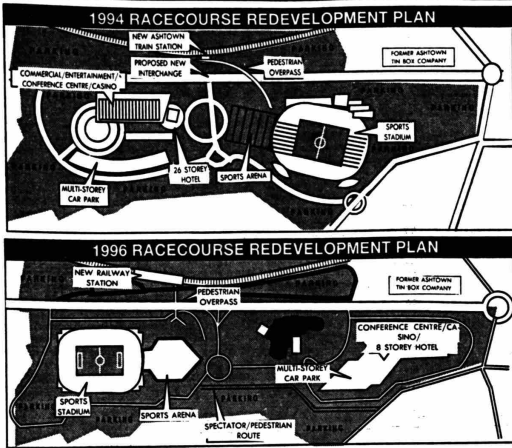
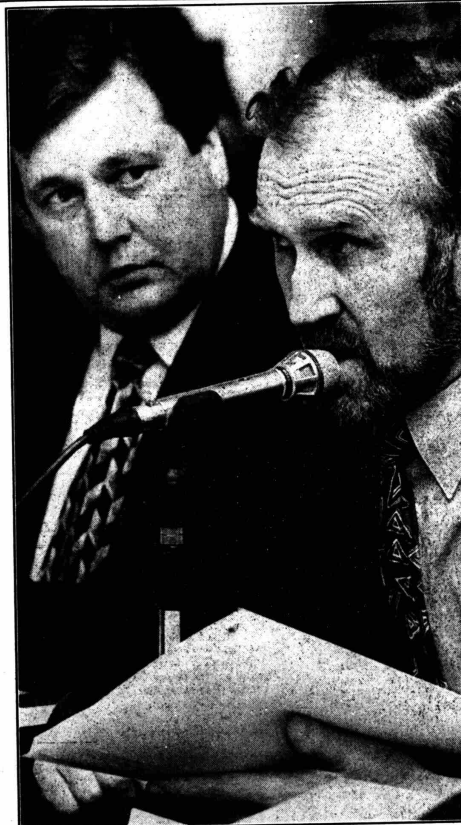


Phoenix Park complex planning appeal — Day One



On left are the development plans for the Phoenix Park Racecourse submitted in 1994 and 1996 and, on right, Norman Turner, chief executive officer, Sonas Centre Ltd speaking at the planning appeal in Wynns Hotel, yesterday, with planning consultant Brian Meahan. Picture by Sean Doran O'Reilly



Expanded Civics to be a fixed part of syllabus

A NEW compulsory subject called Civic, Social and Political Education will be introduced into all post-primary schools and students will be obliged to take the subject as part of their Junior Cert exam. The new subject will replace civics and at least one class period per week will be allocated to the three-year course of the Junior Cert programme. The main aim is to prepare students for active citizenship.

By JOHN WALSH Education Editor

There will be a written terminal exam at the end of the third year of the course which will be worth 40pc of the marks. The remaining 60pc will come from either a report on an action project carried out by the students or else from coursework assessment.

Students will have to undertake at least two action projects. For example they might undertake a survey of attitudes amongst students in the school to a particular issue or they might research, organise and invite a guest speaker to the class on a particular topic.

The syllabus will be sent to schools in the next month with the recommendation that it be introduced from next September. However, it will be mandatory for all students from the start of the 1997 academic year.

The four units of study will cover the Individual and Citizenship, the Community, the State-Ireland; Ireland and the World.

Casino, hotel complex 'to set up 3,000 jobs'

A JOB-CREATION boost for Dublin bigger than any recent new industry in the capital was promised yesterday by the promoters of the £400m Sonas Centre, to be built on the old Phoenix Park racecourse.

They claimed 3,000 permanent and part-time jobs would flow from the massive complex with its 63,000 seater stadium, 12,000 seat arena, 2,000 person conference centre, 350-bed hotel and casino.

Building the complex would result in another 3,000 jobs during the three-year construction period, while the Sonas Centre project would provide a direct injection to the country's Gross National Product (GNP) of some £170m and over £400m indirectly.

By TONY O'BRIEN Environment Correspondent

The claims were made on the opening day of what is expected to be a lengthy planning hearing into the plan by Sonas Centre Ltd to build the complex on the site of the old 116-acre Phoenix Park racecourse in west Dublin.

The controversial plan was rejected by Fingal Co Council, but has now been appealed by the developer and others. Almost 20,000 objections have been lodged, including those from the horse-racing industry, residents' associations, businesses and two junior government ministers.

But Norman Turner, CEO of Sonas Centre Ltd, maintained that they had identified the need in Dublin for such facilities.

It was clear that a development on the scale planned could not be contemplated in the city centre and, instead, had to be considered in a national planning context and to be accessible by all forms of transport from the country in general as well as internationally.

CHALLENGE

The Phoenix Park site met all the necessary criteria for such a development and the 26 separate consultants employed to prepare the scheme had been given a clear brief to minimise any adverse impact the development might be thought to have on both the immediate and wider environment.

A planning consultant, Dr Brian Meahan, challenged the reasons for refusal of permission and argued that there were similarities with developments like Croke Park, the Clonaldakin Stadium, the Convention Centre and Casino on O'Connell Street and the Dublin Leisure Dome, which had been approved.

He maintained that the development was in accordance with the recreational, leisure, tourism and employment objectives of the County Development Plan and said it did not affect greenbelt zoning.

Bob Cotter, President of the European division of the Sheraton Hotel group, said they would run the hotel, casino and conference centre and were excited by the project.

McCarthy backs stadium plan

IRELAND'S new soccer supreme boss, McCarthy, right, yesterday threw his weight behind the controversial £400m Phoenix Park development with its 63,000 seater stadium where his team would play future international matches.

The planning inquiry into the project was told that agreement had been reached with the rugby and soccer authorities on holding major international games in the new super stadium from 1999 on.

The new Ireland manager turned up at the inquiry yesterday, saying he backed the idea of a new national stadium.

"I think the idea of a national stadium is a great one because we don't have the facilities for football here to be good," he said. "We had a fair bit of success at Lansdowne Road mind you."

Norman Turner, CEO of Sonas Centre Ltd, the company behind the proposed development at the old Phoenix Park racecourse, said it had recently executed agreements with the IRFU about use of the planned stadium.

Through these agreements, the IRFU and the FAI would take possession of the new stadium to hold all major international matches there from late 1999 onwards.

Denis Docherty, of Dublin-based Doyle Architects, said the new stadium would accommodate 63,000 fans, greatly increasing the seating capacity available for international matches from the present 23,000.



Collins denies rift with hypnotist

By DICK CROSS in Cork WBO Super-middleweight champ Steve Collins yesterday ruled out any question of a rift between himself and his confidante and hypnotist consultant Tony Quinn.

Collins flew in from his training camp in Jersey for a news conference at the Beamish and Crawford brewery in Cork ahead of his March 9 title fight against challenger Neville Browne at the Green Glen Arena in Millstreet.

It will be the champion's first visit there since his first victory over Chris Eubank almost a year to the day earlier.

Collins was quizzed about reports that his partnership with Tony Quinn might be at an end because of a financial disagreement and Collins' own reported determination to cut costs.

He said he had spoken only a week ago to Tony Quinn, who was in New York, and he believed the hypnotist would be in Millstreet for the fight.

Asked about the public perception outside of boxing circles that Tony Quinn appeared now to be vital to his success, Collins said he would have no problem going it alone.

Meanwhile, Millstreet's Noel C Duggan, who is handling sales of the 5,000-plus arena tickets, is already looking even further ahead. He wants Collins to beat Brown indoors and then fight Nigel Benn before an open-air crowd of up to 30,000.

Slot machine gambling 'can have grave impact'

THE PLAN to build a huge casino on the old Phoenix Park racecourse was strongly attacked yesterday by junior Justice Minister Joan Burton, a local Labour TD.

She insisted that the proposed 1,100 slot-machine casino would be detrimental to the area and unacceptable to the vast majority of residents.

The Minister, who has objected to the Sonas Centre plan, is expected to appear as a witness before the public hearing being held into the development by a Bord Pleanála Inspector, Mr Simon Clear.

In a statement issued yesterday, Ms Burton stated: "Slot-machine casinos are associated with serious social problems such as gambling addiction, drug abuse

and prostitution and any potential gain to be made would be more than offset by the problems which it would give rise to."

A traffic expert, Michael MacNicholas, argued that even as individual companies, the various elements of the development would place a considerable strain on existing transport infrastructure in the area.

Mr MacNicholas, speaking on behalf of the West Dublin Action Group, maintained that combining all of the proposed uses on one site was the kernel of the problem.

Mr John Reid, counsel for the Action Group, claimed that the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) submitted by the developers was "fundamentally flawed."

Garda union in talks with ICTU

LEADERS of the Garda Representative Association are to meet ICTU general secretary Peter Cosgrave today to explore affiliation to Congress.

Two successive annual conferences of the embattled association have given their leadership a mandate to seek Congress affiliation, but so far no action has been taken.

The association believes that as it represents the large majority of rank-and-file members of the force it is entitled to enter into talks with Mr Cosgrave. But officials are also anxious to

ensure that the gardai could use opt-out clauses to avoid involvement in strikes.

A GRA spokesman said last night: "The Minister for Justice has refused to meet us in recent months and this leaves our 6,500 members unable to express their views. This gives us another possible outlet."

The Government was due to discuss planned legislation for changes in the garda representative structure at this morning's Cabinet meeting but this has now been postponed for a week because of the IRA bomb in London.

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