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Greyhound Board defends closure of profitable Harold's Cross track

Body says it did not make commercial sense to keep stadium open despite profits of €280,000 in 2015

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⋮ The Irish Greyhound Board (IGB) said it “did not make commercial sense” to keep Harold's Cross Stadium open despite making profits of €280,000 in 2015.

Phil Meaney, chairman of the IGB, told the Public Accounts Committee on Thursday: “The market isn't being enough for two tracks on similar night.s”

“The decision to sell Harold's Cross is not solely predicated on its potential value to IGB or its contribution to the resolution of the debt issue but is also based on the fact that it is two miles from Shelbourne Park Stadium, which is twice its size and operates for a limited period every week as indeed does Harold's Cross. It doesn't make commercial sense,” h said.

Mr Meaney said the “effective closure” of Shelbourne Park Stadium over the past 10 weeks by those opposed to the closure of Harold's Cross Stadium “is clearly not sustainable”.

The Dublin Greyhound Owners and Breeders Association called on its members to withdraw dogs from races following the closure of Harold's Cross Stadium in February.

“In addition to the €300,000 losses which have been incurred by IGB, the disruption of racing has cost owners and trainers some €250,000 in prize money. IGB cannot haemorrhage money in this way, and unless there is a resolution, and I have to make this clear, then the end game is the cessation of all racing nationally,” he said.

The IGB also known as Bord na gCon is the semi-state body responsible for the control and development of the greyhound industry in Ireland.

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It accepted an offer earlier this week made by the Department of Education to acquire the site of the former greyhound stadium in Harold's Cross.

Sean Brady, interim CEO of the IGB, said it could not disclose how much the site in Dublin 6 is being sold for but that its property advisers Savills said it is “an acceptable price”.

Mr Brady said he understood the Department's intention is to build “a school or schools on the site”.

Mr Brady remained silent when questioned by Sinn Féin TD David Cullinane as to whether there was a tendering process or open market sale.

Members of Save Harold's Cross Greyhound Stadium protested outside the Dáil as members of the board addressed the Public Accounts Committee.

Mr Brady said there were "things the IGB could have done better" in relation to the closure of Harold's Cross Stadium.

"I regret absolutely and IGB regrets the inconvenience to many genuine greyhound people in Dublin. . . . We accept that people who lived and were part of the infrastructure of Harold's Cross were discommoded, and we're sorry about that," Mr Brady said.

"One thing we would have definitely done differently was we would have had some involvement by the board of Harold's Cross in the decision-making."

The IGB has a debt of over €20million that it says stems from the building of Limerick Greyhound Stadium in 2011 as well as legal fees from a previous High Court action.

Mr Meaney said the building of Limerick Greyhound Stadium "put huge financial pressure on the organisation", adding the closure of Harold's Cross Stadium was "the correct decision".

"Decisions were made [BY THE BOARD] when the economy was at its highest - the economy collapsed, and it's certainly with the benefit of hindsight, you would question some of the decisions."

The board also defended its wage costs with 11 staff accounting for €1.2m of the total bill. It said it needed "talented people" and "good leadership" to ensure its survival.

The IGB will address the committee again on May 18th.

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