

Parks and Leisure Committee

Thursday, 14th August, 2008

MEETING OF PARKS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Ekin (Deputy Chairman) (in the Chair); and Councillors , Adamson, Austin, M. Browne, Convery, Cush, Humphrey, N. Kelly, Kyle, C. Maskey, McCann, McCausland, Newton and Stalford.

In attendance: Mr. A. Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure; and Miss. L. Hillick, Committee Administrator.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the Chairman (Councillor Stoker), the High Sheriff (Councillor McKenzie) and Councillors McClenaghan and O'Reilly.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 16th and 23rd June were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st July.

Councillor N. Kelly

The Deputy Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, welcomed Councillor N. Kelly to his first meeting.

Parks and Cemeteries Improvement Agenda

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to:

- (i) seek approval to proceed to implement the recommendations contained in the report of SOLACE Enterprises and to outline some practical next steps for taking these forward, in a prioritised sequence; and
- (ii) to inform Members of the progress that is already being made in developing the Service.

Relevant Background Information

Since the formation of the Parks and Leisure Department in April 2007, work has been ongoing with the Departmental Management Team, Business Improvement Service, Human Resources and the Core Improvement Team to develop an improvement agenda that would lead to the creation of a Department that can more effectively contribute to the Council's vision for Belfast becoming a better place to live in, work in and visit.

The main areas of work within the improvement agenda are:

- business planning;
- performance management;
- financial management;
- developing management capacity; and
- communications.

One of the key elements of this overall plan of work included a more in-depth focus on the Parks and Cemeteries Service and defining the level of change which would be required in order to develop the Service into a modern customer oriented one, delivering in line with the ambitious expectations of the City.

To assist with this process the services of an experienced parks practitioner were secured through SOLACE Enterprises to:

- develop and articulate a modern customer-orientated, outcome focused service that will promote and assist in the delivery of the Council's aims and objectives; and
- undertake a baseline assessment of the existing service, excluding the zoo which will be the subject of a separate piece of work.

All of this work was done within the context of:

- the Parks and Leisure vision for future service provision within the Departmental plan;
- the important role Parks can play in delivering the corporate objectives of the Council as articulated within the Corporate plan 2008 - 2011;

- the major projects that are already programmed (Connswater Community Greenway, the Giant's Park, Loughside etc) in which Parks will take a leading role;
- the Council's improvement agenda;
- the growing financial pressures and the need to deliver both an efficient and effective service;
- preparing for RPA; and
- recognising the shadow of change that has been hanging over the service since November 2005.

SOLACE Enterprise's report outlines the current and ongoing position within the Service, diagnosing what the strengths and weaknesses of the Service are and makes recommendations on how it may be improved.

Members will also recall that the Parks and Leisure Committee, at its meeting on 13 September 2007, granted authority to create additional posts within the Parks and Leisure structure within existing payroll budgets. One of the posts considered essential for the future management of the Parks and Cemeteries Service is that of Parks Services Manager, the most senior management post within the Service. This post will be necessary to sustain the change programme and to provide leadership to the Service going forward.

The SOLACE Enterprises associate has also provided interim management for the Service since his engagement. This has allowed the recommendations made to be based on the reality of the daily management experience. This has also enabled elements of the work required to be progressed (see recommendations 6 and 7).

Key Issues

The key issue is how to take the recommendations forward to effect change as quickly as possible. The recommendations may be categorised into five broad groupings:

Recommendations 1 and 2 are aimed at establishing how the authority should approach the design and future management of our parks and to immediately put this into practice by redesigning two main parks. This would have an immense positive effect on raising staff morale especially given their disappointment when, following the adoption of the Open Spaces strategy in 2004, little changed in relation to proactive parks improvement. Subject to agreeing the parks work could start immediately.

Recommendations 3 - 5 involves the restructuring of the Service. It is proposed that a number of costed options could be drawn up by January 2009, one of which would involve no growth. Early consultations with staff indicate that there is a growing recognition of the need for such and that planning at the margins will not produce the change that is needed (a verbal report on the consultation exercise will be given at the meeting). It is proposed that an inclusive approach will be taken to the review to achieve staff involvement and buy in. It will also attempt to shift resources from back of house to frontline where possible. Progress reports and Members input will be made through the Members Focus Group and once the preferred option is agreed a detailed project plan will be prepared with a view to an early implementation.

Recommendation 6 is aimed at delivering a geographical database depicting all of our sites and the levels of maintenance being applied. This will enable parks managers to manage and will enable the City to compare how it is performing with others. This is already being progressed through an in-house team supported by the Business Improvement Team and ISB under the overall direction of the Interim Manager. The composition of the in-house team involving managers and operational staff reflects the inclusive approach we wish to take. In addition to addressing the asset register, the use of machinery has also begun to be measured with interesting results. It is anticipated that this work will be completed by November 2008.

Recommendation 7 is aimed at addressing the skills capacity issues identified and to develop and prepare the staff for what will hopefully be a smooth transition. As has been pointed out by SOLACE Enterprises, structural change alone will not deliver change. Again, the department is progressing this recommendation. Parks staff are currently involved in the management development programme being delivered by Ad Lumen as well as responding positively to the fresh direction being given by the Interim Manager who is emphasising the need for teamwork and the need to adopt a more strategic approach. In relation to the latter, work has commenced on a policy/strategy for play area provision, play area safety, and playing field provision in addition to a review of the parks strategy Your City Your Space.

It is also recognised that to successfully implement the recommendations made by SOLACE Enterprises, significant progress will be required in the re-engineering of the supporting business processes and business infrastructure within the Service in line with the agreed agenda for the wider departmental improvement. Dedicated support, including corporate support, will be required for these elements of work to ensure progress. Detailed project plans will be developed for each element of this work.

It is proposed that recommendations are taken forward by the Director in association with SOLACE Enterprises acting in an interim management capacity. This would be supported by the Policy and Business Development Manager and Business Manager. Business Improvement and other corporate support will also be used as required.

Resource Implications

Financial

The financial implications involved in the next phase will be:

- Interim management arrangements (3 months) – approximately £18,000 and reasonable expenses which is based on a negotiated reduction in SOLACE Enterprise's rates of just under 15%.
- Project management and development of options and staff/TU consultation – officer time
- Recruitment of a permanent post of Parks Services Manager (indicative grade PO11 - £50,012).

Human Resources

Delivery of most of the activities detailed in the Project Plan will require dedicated officer time and the buy-in and support of the support of staff across the Parks and Cemeteries Service.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- (i) approve the recommendations contained in SOLACE Enterprise's report as outlined above;
- (ii) grant authority to appoint a permanent post of Parks Services Manager in line with previous discussions of 13 September 2007; and
- (iii) grant authority to implement interim management arrangements for at least 3 months until a Parks Services Manager is appointed through retaining the services of SOLACE Enterprises at the negotiated reduced rate."

It was reported that Mr. M. Hannon, Solace Enterprises, was in attendance and he was welcomed to the meeting by the Deputy Chairman.

Mr. Hannon referred to the various factors which he believed had resulted in the decline of the City's Parks, including a lack of investment, inadequate management, vandalism and anti-social behaviour and the compulsory competitive tendering process. He drew the Committee's attention to a baseline assessment which had been undertaken in connection with the Council's Parks Service. He pointed out, due largely to the dedication and commitment of the Council's staff, particularly those involved in the day-to-day delivery of front-line services, that there were no apparent Service failures and the public perception of the Service was good. However, the assessment had revealed low staff morale and the fact that the City's parks were becoming increasingly dated. He then proceeded to draw the Members' attention to the findings of his assessment of the Council's Parks and Cemeteries Services, namely:

- a lack of policies and strategies to inform decisions had led to reactive rather than proactive management;
- a lack of teamwork throughout the Service, caused by confusion over roles and responsibilities;
- the capacity issues in relation to staff skills across the Service, particularly with regard to leadership and management;
- the difficulties associated with assessing performance; and
- the gaps in the scope of what is a fairly comprehensive Service.

Mr. Hannon outlined for the Committee the comprehensive nature of the issues which needed to be considered in order to achieve the changes which would be necessary. In conclusion, he stated that it was imperative for the risks, inefficiencies and inconsistencies to be addressed in order to deliver a new modern customer-orientated Parks Service. Therefore, it would be necessary for structural change, with such change to be accompanied by actions, which would fundamentally change the work culture and general management philosophy of the Service and clearly define which functions it undertakes.

After discussion, the Deputy Chairman thanked Mr. Hannon for his presentation and he then retired from the meeting.

After further discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations contained within the report and granted the authorities sought. In addition, the Committee noted that a copy of the Solace Enterprises report was available on Modern.gov.

Draft Policy Framework for Renaming/Naming
of Parks and Leisure Facilities

(Ms. E. Boyle, Policy and Business Development Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to:

- (i) outline the background to the development of a policy for how to manage requests from the public and community groups for the re-naming of Parks and Leisure facilities; and
- (ii) present a draft policy framework for managing future requests for discussion and agreement by Members.

Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware of a recent request to the Parks and Leisure Committee through the Director from the Linfield Supporters' Club and Blackstaff Community Development Association suggesting that, as a suitable memorial to commemorate the former Northern Ireland and Linfield football player, the late Tommy Dickson, the Blythefield Open Space be re-named the Tommy Dickson Park.

At the meeting of the Parks and Leisure Committee on Thursday 13 March 2008, the Committee agreed that a report on proposals for re-naming open space be submitted for consideration.

This report has been developed taking onboard extensive research and best practice examples and consultation with Members across the Party Groups.

Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to those that have an interest in the (re)naming of Belfast's Parks and Leisure facilities. It is proposed on the basis that it would apply to all Council owned Parks and Leisure facilities but not those facilities which the Council has taken on management responsibility for under a formal lease or agreement with an external organisation or group.

The intention behind the development of the policy is to provide a management framework within which requests from organisations and groups can be managed and to provide direction on how to apply for approval to (re)name Parks and Leisure facilities.

Up until this time, many parks have been named subject to no specific criteria. Currently 87% of Parks and Leisure facilities have the name of the geographic location in which they are located although the Council has reacted in the past to (re)name some of its facilities (playgrounds, playing fields and parks).

There are three main types of naming situations this policy intends to address:

- (i) The opening or reopening of parks and leisure facilities;
- (ii) Providing recognition of major financial contributions;
- (iii) Requests for 'Memorialisation' or honouring individuals in recognition of "significant" contributions to the area or particular location.

Background Policy Context (External and Internal)

The (re)naming of Parks and Leisure facilities (or any Council location) is complex and potentially emotionally evocative because assigning a name can be a powerful and permanent identity for a public place or facility. The (re)naming of parks and leisure facilities must also be considered in light of less obvious factors such as staff and financial resources and wider external factors such as changing names on signs, maps, and other literature. In addition, the Council should also be mindful that excessive and constant name changing could be the source of confusion to the public.

External Policy Context

There are a number of relevant policy frameworks in place in Northern Ireland which relate and inform the issue of (re)naming of Parks and Leisure Facilities to a greater or lesser extent, namely:

- **A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland (2005).** The shared future policy sets out challenging aims for building a shared society, with a key priority being to reclaim shared space.
- **Draft Programme for Government (2007).** This programme highlights that it is imperative that we all embrace the opportunity to create a shared and better future, based on tolerance and respect for cultural diversity.
- **Racial Equality Strategy (2005).** The aims of the Racial Equality Strategy complement those of A Shared Future.

Internal Policy Context

Within the Council there are three relevant policy strands currently in place which could be interpreted as relating to or informing the issue of (re)naming of Parks and Leisure Facilities to a greater or lesser extent, namely:

- 1) The Street Naming Policy;
- 2) The Equality Scheme;
- 3) The Good Relations Plan

In developing this draft framework and report, cognisance has also been taken of ongoing research work across the Council such as that commissioned by the Good relations Unit (Conflict Transformation Project) into the promotion and maintenance of shared space across the City.

Current Position

A review of current Parks and Leisure facilities outlines that only 13% of Parks and Leisure facilities have been (re)named with a name which is not reflective of their geographical location. In summary:

- 6 facilities have been named in memory of a person ('Memorialisation') including 1 facility which was purchased by the Council with the proviso that the park should be named after a member of the family;
- 2 facilities have been named after people (based on 'significant contributions' – e.g. the exemplary performance of Mary Peters);
- 3 facilities have non-geographical names, related to Royalty, dating back to Victorian times (King George V, Queen Mary's, Alexandra and Victoria Parks);
- 5 facilities have been named after the relevant benefactor.

Key Issues

Research and best practice gives some assistance to the development of a policy on this subject although it must be acknowledged that the type of criteria used in other cities and countries are not directly transferable to the Belfast context. Some general examples of criteria are outlined below:

- parks and facilities which have been officially named shall retain their existing names; the renaming of Parks and Leisure facilities is strongly discouraged;
- new parks or existing parks which have not been officially named shall be named after the geographic location, neighbourhood or public street where the park, facility or amenity is located;
- facilities named after persons, organisations, foundations or families contributing towards the acquisition, development or conveyance of land or building;
- names will not be considered that are discriminatory or derogatory considering race, gender, creed, religious or political affiliation, or other similar factors.

General Principles

In considering proposals for the (re)naming of a park or leisure facility, best practice would suggest that there are general principles which should be taken into account either collectively or individually, such as that the proposed name should;-

- engender a strong positive image;
- be appropriate having regard to the parks or leisure facility location;
- have historical, cultural or social significance for future generations;
- commemorate places, people or events that are of continued importance to the City or region;
- have broad public support as evidenced through consultation; and
- be inoffensive and non-party political

Cost

One of the main issues for consideration when deciding to implement a policy on this issue will be the financial implications for the Department. Currently the Parks and Leisure Department requires a substantial increase in finance to enable it to complete essential maintenance at a number of facilities as well as a number of the development activities outlined in the departmental plan.

A policy which requires both staff time and departmental finances (which the department cannot foresee, plan for and allocate financial spend to) could potentially have the effect of diverting resources which should be dedicated to essential activities already in the workplan.

Consultation

Some discussion has taken place with the Party Groups with regard to how community consultation could be undertaken and what a suitable and valid approach would be – for example, should the ‘community’ be interpreted as being the users of the park or facility or the home owners living within a certain distance? In order for this to be a valid approach consultation must take into account the Council’s statutory requirements.

It is also important that any proposed name change coming before the Council has the required level of community support forthcoming at the consultation stage. This is to ensure that no embarrassment is caused to any individual or organisation who might not receive the necessary support for the (re)naming proposal.

At present the Council has in its plan of work the development of a consultation and engagement strategy. In the absence of a Council approach to conducting consultation to guide the development of a process which would support this policy, a draft “proposed application process”, with detail on the (re)naming request guidelines and the guidelines for the consultation outlined.

Policy Options

OPTION 1 – (Continue as we have been) To adopt an ad-hoc approach dealing with individual requests received.

OPTION 2 – To agree a policy which “draws a line in the sand” from this point, and establishes that Parks and Leisure facilities are named after their geographical location (or shall retain their existing names) and that the renaming of Parks and Leisure facilities is strongly discouraged.

OPTION 3 – To treat it as a policy issue for the Department and develop a rigorous policy framework to deal with all (re)naming requests received by the Parks and Leisure Department.

This approach has much broader implications for Parks and Leisure in terms of consultation, staff resources and the associated costs.

Recommendation and Proposed Criteria

Based on all of the research and the need to strike a balance between defining a strict policy and placing undue limits on the democratic process, Option 3 is recommended. It is further recommended that the policy apply only to local parks and leisure facilities and that the Council would not wish to have its City, District and Country Parks re-named.

The criteria have been designed to ensure that only sincere and non-vexatious proposals will be considered by the Council.

It is recommended that this should be supported by a detailed set of criteria and management framework as follows:

1.0 Proposed Criteria

1.1 Where the request made is to memorialise a person:

The person must be deceased for a minimum of five years.

- If the nominee is deceased then appropriate relatives or friends will be contacted asking if they approve of the request. If the relatives or friends do not approve, the naming process will not be pursued.
- The person must have made a 'significant contribution' to the life of the area/City/made a significant positive contribution to parks and leisure objectives within the community where the facility is located.
- The person must have lived within the locality/district electoral area (DEA) of the park or leisure facility for a significant or formative period.

1.2 It is recommended that a park not be named for a living person, except in the event that the person / family have made a significant financial contribution to improvement / development of the park or facility.

1.3 Where the name requested relates to a specific unique location:

- The name should provide a sense of place, reflecting the geographic location, community, neighbourhood or street where the park, facility or amenity is located;

- The name should reflect the historical significance of the area or reflects unique characteristics of the site (unique flora / fauna).

1.4 In ALL (re)naming cases:

- The applicant will bear the cost of the (re)naming in terms of consultation, signs, plaques etc;
- The name, once bestowed, is permanent;

1.5 Names should not be considered which:

- Cause confusion due to duplication or names sounding similar to existing named facilities/locations within the City;
- Unlawfully discriminate within the meaning and scope of the provisions of the Council's equality and good relations policies and the Shared Future agenda;
- Are party-political in intention or use.

1.6 Existing names will not be changed without consideration of the historical significance of the existing name, the cost and impact of changing existing signs, rebuilding community recognition and updating records (i.e. letterhead, databases, and promotional materials).

1.7 Each application will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

1.8 All signs that indicate the name of a park and/or recreational facility shall comply with Belfast City Council's Parks and Leisure design standards. Specialised naming signage should not be permitted.

Resource Implications

Financial

The recommended option will place the financial implications of carrying out consultation on the proposed (re)name change and any subsequent changes to signage on the applicant.

There will be financial implications for the Council in terms of updating literature/Council documents.

Human Resources

The implementation and management of the proposed framework will require officer time which is difficult to predict at this stage and which would require re-examination after a suggested 12 month period. There will be resource implications in terms of officer time required to verify the consultation process.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- (i) review the report presented, research and options;
- (ii) agree the recommendation – Option 3 and the approach which has been proposed in terms of procedure and consultation; subject to
- (iii) the preferred policy position then being fully considered in line with the Council's statutory Equality obligations."

After discussion, the Committee agreed to adopt the recommendations contained within the report.

Fire at Grove Wellbeing Centre

The Committee agreed to note the contents of a report in relation to the damage which had occurred and the actions which had been taken as a result of a malicious fire at the Grove Wellbeing Centre on Sunday, 20th July. It was noted also that there had been some disruption to Services following the Fire, with the swimming pool and the fitness suite both having been closed to the public. The centre had been fully operational by Thursday, 24th July.

Whiterock Leisure Centre - Special Event Application

The Committee was informed that a request had been received from Gort Na Mona Historical and Cultural Society seeking permission to hold a special event on Saturday, 20th September at the Whiterock Leisure Centre. The Society was a group based in the Upper Springfield area of the city which carried out research and sought to tell the history of the area and the people who resided there. The Society had held a similar successful event at the Leisure Centre during June, 2008.

The application had indicated that bar facilities would be required and the Society had undertaken to apply for an occasional licence which would be required for the event and had given an assurance of full compliance with the Council's policies and any statutory requirements. The Director suggested that, should approval be granted, a charge in the sum of £720 plus associated staff overtime costs, in line with the Council's charging policies, be levied.

The Committee approved the application by Gort Na Mona Historical and Cultural Society to hire facilities at Whiterock Leisure Centre on Saturday, 20th September and agreed that bar facilities be provided at the event, subject to the Society providing an occasional licence and complying with all Council policies and statutory requirements.

Fitness Suite Admission Procedures

The Committee agreed to note the contents of a report in relation to the new admission and induction procedures regarding the use of the health and fitness suites at the Council's Leisure Centres and recognised that, on occasions, new customers would not be granted access to the facilities until they had undertaken an induction session.

Elite Facilities Programme Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

As part of the preparations for, and the legacy of, the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Sport NI is coordinating a bidding process for sports facilities which could attract up to 75% capital funding. Facilities to benefit from this funding must be capable of accommodating elite training and major events.

On 16th January 2007, the Community & Recreation Committee agreed:

- to submit an expression of interest for a velodrome facility, capable of accommodating indoor cycling, basketball, fencing, volleyball and table tennis; and**
- that the location for the velodrome would be the Alderman Thomas Patton Memorial Park.**

On 13th February 2007, the Community & Recreation Committee agreed that, subject to the funding application being successful, the East Belfast leisure centre be integrated with the velodrome

The decision to apply for funding for a velodrome followed a visit to the National Cycling Centre in Manchester by Councillors Campbell, McCann, Mullaghan, Rodgers and officers (Mervyn Elder, Philip Lucas and Phil Kelly).

Subsequently, at the Community and Recreation Committee of 20th March 2007, Members agreed that the proposed velodrome bid should include cycling, fencing, table tennis and volleyball accommodation to elite level and basketball at a competitive but not elite level.

The Committee is further reminded that the Parks and Cemeteries Sub-committee at its meeting in June 2006 agreed to make a submission in respect of an upgrading of the Mary Peters Track. At its meeting in March 2007 the Sub-committee agreed that the application would be in respect of an indoor high performance athletics area to accommodate all of the track and field events and that the upgrading of the Mary Peters Track to 8 lanes would be put forward for inclusion in the Council's Capital Programme subject to the Gateway process.

The timetable for the funding competition was:

- 30th March 2007: closing date for receipt of applications
- September 2007: announcement of shortlist
- January 2008: closing date for stage 2 applications
- April 2008: announcement of preferred bidders
- March 2010: facilities operational

On 14th September 2007, Belfast City Council was advised that it had been successful at stage one of the Elite Facilities Programme in relation to all aspects of the bids, that is, the velodrome (indoor cycling, volleyball, fencing and table tennis) and Mary Peters Track (upgrade track to 8 lanes and provide an indoor high performance athletics facility). Therefore the Council would be invited to proceed to the second stage of this bidding competition.

Key Issues

The above timeline has changed significantly as the Council only received formal notification of the terms and initiation of the Stage Two process in July 2008. Consequently the operational deadline has been removed and there are now no restrictions on this.

The stage two application which includes an outline business case and RIBA Stage A-C needs to be submitted by 4pm on 28th November 2008 for assessment by Sports NI, the Department of Culture and Leisure and the Department of Finance and Personnel. This will take approximately 20 weeks.

The Community and Recreation Committee meeting of 27th February 2007 gave authority to officers to seek external assistance in preparation for Stage Two of the Elite Facilities Programme.

On 11th October 2007, the Parks & Leisure Committee:

- agreed that the Council proceed to Stage Two of the Elite Facilities Programme bidding competition;

- approved the required expenditure to do so, in terms of preparing our bid to the required standard; and
- approved recommending to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee that the necessary 25% match funding be included within the draft capital programme and subjected to the Gateway process, as appropriate.

Given the timescales involved work has commenced on the preparation of Stage Two bids. However, given the resources required for preparation of the bid and the potential impact on the Capital Programme a further report will be presented to the appropriate Committee in September.

Resource Implications

A more detailed report will be presented to Members at the September Committee.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Members note the contents of this report.”

Noted.

Belfast Sewer Project

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The Committee is reminded that at its meeting on 16 June 2008 it received a report outlining proposals from NI Water in respect of the ongoing Belfast Sewer Project. The report highlighted that NI Water had advised that the original approach, to drill underground was no longer viable owing to rock composition. Consequently, NI Water advised that owing to technical, financial and time constraints it was necessary to use open trench excavation rather than underground drilling.

The Committee expressed concerns at the new proposal and highlighted the detrimental impact on both the playing fields at Ormeau Park and also the Golf Club, which would have to close for the duration of the work. Members instructed Officers to engage with NI Water to ascertain whether all options had been considered.

In the intervening time, officers from Parks and Cemeteries Service and the Estates Management Unit have met with representatives from NI Water and their Engineering Consultants.

The concerns of the Committee were expressed together with the view that the Council's preferred option would be for the less intrusive underground drilling.

NI Water was receptive to the concerns and undertook to further review the options. It was clear that the open trench methodology was also not NI Water's preferred approach. NI Water has now reviewed the approach to be adopted together with consultants and contractors and have proposed an alternative solution which reverts to the previous method of underground tunnelling. The main elements of the method are:

- Drive tunnel at shallower depth in the 'upper boulder layer' along the original route (tunnel will be around 6m depth as opposed to 9m depth in original proposal). This will reduce the risk of hitting a boulder.
- The tunnel diameter will be 1.95m.
- The existing shafts will have to be modified but this will not affect the golf course or Ormeau Park.
- The tunnel equipment will be modified to help deal with small boulders.
- Any boulders encountered will be removed by surface excavation.
- Preparatory work will commence in September 2008 with tunnelling starting at the beginning of October 2008. Tunnelling in Ormeau Park and the Golf Club will take eight months to complete.

NI Water has met with representatives of the Golf Club and reached agreement on this approach. The Director has also confirmed with the Golf club that they are now content with the proposed method.

Key Issues

The Committee is asked to note the following key points.

1. NI Water has reverted to the original proposal of underground drilling, with drilling taking place at a lesser depth in an attempt to avoid larger boulders;
2. NI Water has cautioned that open trench excavation may still be necessary if large boulders are encountered although they have assessed this possibility as low risk;

3. NI Water requests that the Council grant its approval to enter its property and undertake the appropriate works to complete this element of the Belfast Sewers Project;
4. An appropriate agreement will be drawn up on behalf of Parks and Cemeteries by the Estates Management Unit and the Director of Legal Services.

Resource Implications

Financial

This work will be undertaken by NI Water including reinstatement and appropriate compensation to the Council and the Golf Club.

Human Resources

This project will require Officer time in the drafting of the legal agreement and monitoring of progress of the scheme plus reinstatement.

Asset and Other Implications

It is hoped that through the use of the less intrusive underground drilling that the impact on the asset will be minimised.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report and approve the request to permit access to NI Water for the purposes of completing this element of the Belfast Sewer Project, authorise Officers to enter into discussions with NI Water with a view to drafting an appropriate legal agreement as outlined above.”

The Committee adopted the recommendation contained within the report and noted that it would not be necessary to enter into discussions with the Northern Ireland Water Service in order to draft an appropriate legal agreement.

Victoria Park - Egg Culling and Tree Cover

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The Committee will be aware of the development and growth of the Belfast City Airport. These developments are of course to be welcomed from the point of view of economic growth and wealth creation.

It should be noted that some local residents are increasingly expressing their concerns at the growth of the airport and the impact on community health and the environment. These are important issues but are largely outside the remit of the Parks and Cemeteries Service.

However, the growth of the airport is having an increasing impact on Victoria Park. Members will be aware of the public safety zone which includes a large part of the Park and which limits development. There are two main issues for Parks and Cemeteries Service at this time.

1. Egg Culling

The authorities at the City Airport have had concerns for a number of years over the increasing greylag goose population at Victoria Park and the potential threat of bird strikes on aircraft. This concern reflects the shift away from propeller based aircraft to jet engined aircraft. The authorities at City Airport regard this as a public safety issue and have been active in leading measures to control the number of birds in the flight path. Birdstrikes can cause damage to aircraft and, in the worst case scenario, have the potential to cause a serious accident. The Civil Aviation Authority has issued guidelines, CAP 772, Birdstrike Risk Management for Aerodromes, on this matter. This document provides guidance for airport operators in establishing and maintaining an effective Bird Control Management Plan (BCMP), including the measures necessary to assess the birdstrike risk at airports, and the identification of appropriate action to minimise that risk.

The Belfast City Airport authorities applied for and were granted an annual licence from Environment Heritage Service (EHS) under the Wildlife Order permitting the Airport authorities to prick goose eggs to control goose numbers. The Airport still requires permission from the landowners (i.e. Belfast City Council) to carry out the control measures. The Airport authorities approached the Council in 2001 and permission was given verbally for this control to take place for three seasons. In 2005 they again contacted the Council and were asked to put their request in writing. This they did and written permission was granted for them to proceed for a further three years by the then Head of Parks and Amenities. This was seen as an operational decision at the time.

Following a further approach in April 2008 by the airport authorities to the Council to continue this control the process has come to the attention of the general public and the media, and has resulted in much press interest and comment. Members may be aware that there was a public meeting in June 2008 at which grave concern was expressed in relation to this matter.

Members are asked to note that the control process is carried out by the City Airport under licence from EHS, and it is the responsibility of the EHS to ensure that the conditions of the licence are fulfilled. However, Officers recognise that the Council also has a social responsibility in this matter and that a more controlled process is required.

2. Tree Cover

The Committee is asked to note that Officers have come into possession of a report commissioned by the City Airport Authorities in regards to tree cover within Victoria Park. This technical report states that trees within Victoria Park have been identified as obstacles within the various safety zones for the airport. The report calls for a proactively managed target tree environment at Belfast City Airport in accordance with the requirements of the Civil Aviation authority.

Officers from the Council have not been consulted in regards to the recommendations of the report.

The Committee is asked to note that a copy of this report has been received and will be discussed with City of Belfast Airport Authorities.

Key Issues

The Committee is asked to note the following points:

- 1. Belfast City Airport has experienced significant growth which contributes to the economic well being of the region;**
- 2. there are wider issues and concerns associated with this growth in terms of the impact on the health and wellbeing of the local community and on the environment;**
- 3. Airport authorities have identified bird strikes as a potential public safety issue and have engaged in egg culling for the past number of years under licence from EHS; the airport wishes to continue this practice and are seeking Council approval to enter Council land;**
- 4. The airport has further commissioned a report which identifies trees in Victoria Park as a potential public safety issue and are seeking to proactively manage tree cover in the Park;**

It is proposed that discussions be held with the Airport to establish both the need for the management of the bird and tree populations in Victoria Park; to establish the extent of this management; and to establish an agreed protocol and framework within which management can take place.

Resource Implications

Financial

There are no financial implications for Belfast City Council. Belfast City Airport has been financing the control of goose numbers and will pay for the suggested tree pruning, removal, thinning and all replanting.

Human Resources

While this does not require additional staff, it is time consuming and diverts Officer time from other duties.

Asset and Other Implications

The proposed measures may have a significant impact on the natural environment of the Park.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of the report; and agree that Officers meet with Airport Authorities as outlined in the report and that a further report be brought to Committee no later than October 2008 on this matter.

Key to Abbreviations

EHS: Environment and Heritage Service.
BCMP: Bird Control Management Plan”

After discussion, the Committee agreed to adopt the recommendation.

Management of Playgrounds

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The Council manages and maintains 76 outdoor equipped playgrounds which include 2 purpose built multi-purpose sports areas.

The Committee is asked to note that since 2005/06 with the allocation of additional funding, a planned refurbishment programme has enabled the provision of high quality play facilities. However, this investment has further highlighted the need to review the inspection and maintenance regimes for the playgrounds. In 2007, the Parks Section commissioned a Play Safety Consultant from the Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT) to review current management practices to enable resources to be targeted more efficiently and effectively.

This report will examine the findings and make proposals which will improve the overall effectiveness of the play function.

Key Issues

The Committee is asked to note the following key points:

Playground Inspections

The playgrounds are currently inspected on a daily basis by seven Playground Teams comprising 24 staff who are required to:

- undertake visual and operational inspections of play equipment, surfacing and infrastructure
- remove litter and broken glass
- complete a daily inspection sheet for each playground which records remedial tasks completed and identifies any defects and action required.

In essence, 76 sheets are created each day which are forwarded to the Parks Managers to generate work orders for repairs to be undertaken by Facilities Management. The Playground Teams are required to record on the daily inspection sheets when repairs have been completed and the Parks Managers are responsible for authorising payment to Facilities Management for completed works.

Proposed Changes to Current Practice

The CAPT report concluded that the system is too thorough to be achievable and had a tendency to generate paper rather than action. The Teams spend time completing forms and recording outstanding defects every day rather than concentrating on site cleanliness such as removal of broken glass etc. which is one of the major sources of public liability claims. The report recommended that inspections should be undertaken in accordance with the European Standard EN1176 which, although not mandatory, is in line with good health and safety work practice.

It has the status of a British Standard and similar to the recommendations of BS 5696 which it replaced in 1999. The new inspection regime would entail:

- daily inspections reduced to visual inspections with priority given to identifying and remedying vandalism and broken glass;
- report forms simplified to record remedial action taken;
- report forms reduced to one per week on which there is a section for each day (help reduce administrative workload considerably);
- managers analysing the reports and classifying the playgrounds into three categories so that operational savings could be obtained:
 - 'high problem' – to be inspected every day
 - 'low problem' – to be inspected every week
 - 'intermediate problem' – to be inspected two or three times per week with possible targeting at problem days such as weekends;
- a system of operational inspections being instituted and undertaken by trained playground inspectors at three-monthly intervals except where significant deterioration is evident from the reports;
- the operational and the annual inspections would use a similar system of prioritisation so that they would both act as learning tools and control measures for each other.

To reduce the array of problems with the current playground repairs and to complement the above, it is proposed that regular meetings are undertaken with Facilities Management as a means of quality assurance.

Legal Opinion

To guide Officers as to the implications of changing the frequency of inspections, a meeting has taken place with Legal Services. The legal opinion would advocate that a system of daily inspections as recommended in the report should continue but the report form should also record that a visual inspection of each item of equipment etc has taken place. It was recommended that a risk assessment should be undertaken and documented for each playground as a means of determining if the inspection frequency needed to be increased.

A legal opinion has been sought on the authenticity of electronic data capture to replace the current paper based inspection recording system. It was felt that an electronic system was acceptable provided that the data was non-editable and documentary evidence of inspections could be produced for litigation purposes. It is proposed to introduce a play management database which will need to be developed and hand held computers will also be required to capture data on the playground inspections.

Resource Implications

Financial

The cost of design and development of a computerised Play Management System is estimated to be £35,000 (excluding training) and each hand held computer for recording inspections would cost £2,500. An accurate costing will be obtained when the requirements of the system have been fully identified and this will be reported to Committee at a later stage. There should however be efficiencies achieved in the targeting of resources more effectively at remedying vandalism, improving playground safety and thereby reducing litigation costs.

Human Resources

The introduction of a computerised Play Management System will reduce the administrative workload for officers and help streamline processing of work orders and retrieval of information for litigation purposes.

Asset and Other Implications

Through the implementation of a robust and rigorous playground inspection and maintenance system, the quality of play facilities will improve.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- note the content of the report;
- approve the revised playground inspection regime as outlined above; and
- agree to the introduction of a Play Management System subject to further approval of the total cost.”

The Committee agreed to adopt the recommendations.

Belfast in Bloom

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

The Belfast in Bloom project has been developed by the Parks and Cemeteries Section over the last 14 years, the objectives being to make Belfast a cleaner and more attractive city, to encourage inward investment and to increase tourism. It falls within the wider Ulster in Bloom initiative which is celebrating its 30th birthday and the wider United Kingdom scheme Britain in Bloom. While a considerable emphasis is placed on flowers, the project's aims are wider and look at improving the landscape generally through, for example, the removal of graffiti and the reduction or elimination of litter. The Parks and Cemeteries Section would, therefore, acknowledge the support received from colleagues in the Health and Environmental Services Department.

Each year, competitions are organised for the commercial and community sectors with categories for Best Hanging Basket, Window Box, Front Garden, Community Street, Hotel, Public House, Restaurant, Commercial Street and Commercial Premises. Awards are made at a formal presentation ceremony which is well attended and receives substantial media coverage.

Belfast Council has a number of partners who support the project – the Department for Regional Development Roads Service, the Department for Social Development - Belfast Regeneration, City Centre Management, Belfast Chamber of Trade and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The bulk of the Council's contribution is from the 'Brighter Belfast' programme which this year amounted to £50k, some 50% of the overall expenditure.

In September 2007 at the Award Ceremony of Ulster in Bloom, Belfast won the award for the 'Best City' category and was nominated for the first time ever to represent Northern Ireland in the Britain in Bloom competition 2008 (judged on 7 August).

At the 2007 awards, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board representative stated:

'Who would have thought back in 1979 that Ulster in Bloom would become so popular, or that Northern Ireland would be named as a 'must see' destination by the world's leading travel publication, Lonely Planet? This competition has a central role to play in making Northern Ireland such an attractive destination and significantly adds to the visitor experience.'

Key Issues

The 'In Bloom' initiative is a major project for improving the City on a number of fronts and contributes significantly towards meeting the council's objectives. It is, however, entering a critical period.

The key issues that face the initiative now are

- The 'Brighter Belfast' programme funding contribution may end or, at best, be substantially reduced from its current level of £50,000. If withdrawn in full, this will lead to at least a 50% reduction in the available funding.
- Two of the key officers involved with the project will have left within the next 18 months.
- The tightening economy and the increased competition for sponsorship.

The flower baskets are planted and grown by Parks staff and the placing out and maintenance of them is outsourced. Owing to the increase in the amount of floral displays requested a tender exercise is required for the placing out and maintenance service.

Resource Implications

Financial

The value of the tender is £30K to £35K per annum and the evaluation criteria for awarding the contract is:

- price
- previous experience
- ability to meet timescales
- contract management skills including liaison with Council representatives.

Human and Asset

Consideration must be given to the future capacity issues that have been identified.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to

- note the success of Belfast in winning the Ulster in Bloom, Best City award and its subsequent nomination to the 2008 Britain in Bloom competition, representing Northern Ireland, for the first time ever.
- agree in principle to the continuation of Belfast in Bloom and to the Council's leading role
- approve the undertaking of a strategic review of the Belfast in Bloom initiative, which will include:
 - an assessment of how the project may be expanded to improve all aspects of the environment including litter, graffiti, fly-posting etc.
 - an assessment of the quality, quantity, type and location of plantings to maximise impact.
 - an assessment of how the project may be funded including what opportunities exist for profitable partnerships within the City and how these may be developed to continue to improve its image.
- approve the above tender exercise and authorise the Director of Parks and Leisure to award the tender following evaluation using the agreed criteria."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Invasive Water Lily at Waterworks Site

The Committee was informed that during 2007 officers from the Environment and Heritage Service had identified a Fringed Water Lily at the upper pond of the Waterworks site. This invasive species was not native to the Country and it was evident that it had been introduced to the pond at some stage by individuals unknown. The species grows very quickly and currently covered a large area of the upper pond and, should the species be permitted to grow unchecked, it could eventually choke the entire pond.

The Director pointed out that officers from the Parks and Cemeteries Services Section had been in consultation with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's Water Quality Unit to ascertain what remedial action could be taken to remove the Lily. Accordingly, two options had been identified, namely:

- (i) Mechanical Removal - however, this had been considered to be counter productive as it could possibly leave fragments behind which could regrow and result in the Lily being spread more rapidly; and

- (ii) Spray the Lily with an appropriate herbicide - as the waterworks site was part of a water system, any such proposal must be approved by the Water Quality Unit.

He reported that, although there was a risk of a small-scale loss of fish stock as a result of the herbicides, a proposed programme of spraying had been identified as the best option. It was intended that, should the proposed spraying programme proceed, the Families of the Waterworks Fishing Club would be advised of the possible loss of fish stock and a proactive press release would be issued to counter any possible adverse publicity.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that option (ii) be adopted in order to remove the species of Water Lily from the Upper Pond at the Waterworks site.

Woodvale Park - Beacon Event and Cultural Celebration on 11th July

The Committee agreed to note the contents of a post-event report in relation to the lighting of a Beacon at the Cultural Celebrations which had been held on the 11th July at the Woodvale Park.

Tenders for the Procurement of Goods and Services

The Director sought and was granted approval to seek tenders in relation to the following goods and services:

- the supply and delivery of trees;
- the provision of children's activities and entertainment;
- the supply and delivery of play equipment and surfacing;
- the installation of play equipment and surfacing, including groundworks; and
- the provision of floral decorations.

The Committee noted that all tenders would be evaluated using the agreed criteria and awarded by the Director of Parks and Leisure in accordance with the authority delegated to him.

Support for Sport

Hospitality Applications

The Director of Parks and Leisure submitted a Schedule of Support for Sport applications in relation to Hospitality which had been approved in accordance with the authority delegated to him. A copy of the Schedule was available for inspection on Modern.gov.

Small Development Grants

The Committee noted a schedule of Support for Sport applications in relation to Small Scale Development Grants which had been approved by the Director of Parks and Leisure in accordance with the authority delegated to him. A copy of the Schedule was available on the Modern.gov intranet site.

Large Development Grants

The Committee proceeded to consider the following requests which had been received and had been assessed within the agreed criteria for assistance in relation to Large Development Grants:

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Recommended</u>
Donegal Celtic Football Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to specialist coaching support mentoring programme
Holy Trinity Amateur Boxing Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to a Community Outreach Programme
Belfast United Women's Football Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to a schools initiative for girls
Northern Ireland Youth Climbing Team	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to a partnership programme in schools
Loughside Football Club	Provision up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to coach education and mentoring training
Instonians Rugby Football Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to a coach mentoring and development plan
Cliftonville Football Development Centre	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to a specialist coaching and sports science support programme
Linfield Youth Academy	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to a coach mentoring and enhancing life skills programme
Instonians Cricket Club	Provision of support for up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to a winter coaching programme followed by a summer initiative in partnership with local schools

Organisation

Recommended

Imaculata Football Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5000 in relation to a schools outreach programme
Civil Service Northern Ireland Cricket Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to the creation of a cricket academy in primary schools
St. Oliver Plunkett Football Club	Provision of support up to a maximum of £5,000 in relation to the establishment of a grass roots soccer school for 5-10 year old children
Cathal Brugha Amateur Swim Club	Do not support
City of Belfast Amateur Swim Club	Do not support
Cliftonville Community Centre Football Club	Do not support
Junior Belfast Giants Hockey Club	Do not support
Immaculata Boxing Club	Do not support
Leander Amateur Swim Club	Do not support
Dance Starz	Do not support
Belfast Fencing Club	Do not support
Church of Ireland Young Mens Society Tennis	Do not support
Willowbank Football Club	Do not support
112th Old Boys Taughmonagh	Do not support
Santos Football Club	Do not support
N. I. Women's Private Greens Bowling Association	Do not support
Glentoran Football Academy	Do not support
Belfast Bishnu Gosh Competition Club	Do not support
Albertville Harriers Athletics Club	Do not support

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Recommended</u>
Bredagh Gaelic Athletic Club	Do not support
Newhill Football Club	Do not support
O'Donnell's Gaelic Athletic Club	Do not support
Crusaders Football Club	Do not support

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Chairman