

Parks and Leisure Committee

Monday, 6th September, 2010

SPECIAL MEETING OF PARKS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor O'Reilly (Chairman); and
Councillors Adamson, Cush, Humphrey, C. Maskey,
McCarthy, McKenzie, Robinson, J. Rodgers and Stoker.

Also attended: Councillors Austin, W. Browne, Hendron, Jones,
Kingston, Kirkpatrick, Mullaghan and Rodway.

In attendance: Mr. A. Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure;
Ms. C. Wilson, Policy and Business
Development Manager; and
Miss L. Hillick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the High Sheriff (Councillor Stalford) and Councillors Ekin, Hartley, Kyle, Mallon, Mac Giolla Mhin and McCabe.

Shankill Community Greenway

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 10th June, it had agreed to receive a presentation from the Greater Shankill Partnership Board in respect of its proposals to create a Greater Shankill Greenway. It was reported that Mr. J. Redpath and Ms. K. Robinson were in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

Mr. Redpath advised the Committee that, following the publication of the Strategic Regeneration Framework for the Greater Shankill area, the Partnership Board had commissioned a feasibility study on the potential for the development of a Community Greenway within the area. That study had focused on the utilisation of those natural assets which existed within the surrounding area, such as the Belfast Hills and the Ballygomartin and Forth Rivers. He drew the Members' attention to plans which depicted how the proposed Greenway would link with the Belfast Hills, the City centre and other facilities within the area and stated that the feasibility study had been carried out by the Paul Hogarth Company, which had been involved with the Connswater Community Greenway project.

Mr. Redpath stated that, given there were no specific sources of funding, it was envisaged that the Partnership's plans would be implemented incrementally and would build on those opportunities which existed currently at the Woodvale Park and along the arterial routes. It was envisaged also that the proposals would shape the future plans of partner agencies. The Partnership was of the view that its proposals would increase

the quality of life for the residents of the Shankill Road area in particular and for the rest of the citizens of Belfast also. Mr. Redpath referred to the fact that the Shankill Road area had declined over recent years and, from an environmental perspective, was in urgent need of regeneration. He informed the Committee that a convention would be held during the Autumn which would establish a taskforce to identify the opportunities which existed to progress the proposals.

After discussion, the Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the representatives for their presentation and they retired from the meeting.

The Committee noted that a report in relation to the matter would be submitted for its consideration at a future meeting.

Ligoniel Environment and Heritage Project

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 10th June, it had agreed to act as a third party partner and to provide funding in the sum of £5,122.57 in relation to Phase II of the Ligoniel Environment and Heritage Project. At that meeting, the Committee had agreed also that representatives of the Ligoniel Improvement Association be invited to make a presentation in relation to the Project. Accordingly, it was reported that Mr. T. Lovett, Ms. M. Morgan and Mr. K. O'Reilly were in attendance and they were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

Mr. Lovett advised the Committee that the Ligoniel Dams were located at the foot of the Belfast Hills and could easily be accessed through a newly-built housing estate close to the centre of the Ligoniel village. He stated that the Ligoniel Village Environment and Heritage Group had recognised the increasing threat which the area was facing from developers and the resulting loss of green space for community use. The Group was of the view that the site should be protected and maintained as a valuable green asset. In recent years, it had been proactive in purchasing and renting sections of land in and around the Dams and a masterplan for the site had been developed. The Ligoniel Improvement Association wished to open up the area to the general public as a major community recreational resource, work in partnership with the Council and other organisations to raise environmental awareness, build stronger community cohesion, increase the potential for social economy enterprise and increase volunteering capacity.

Mr. Lovett then drew the Committee's attention to a series of maps depicting the proposals for the site and stated that the project would be delivered through Groundwork Northern Ireland, which had a good track record of delivering such projects in partnership with local communities. It was envisaged that work on the project would commence during October, 2010 and, subject to the receipt of the necessary approvals, would take approximately six months to complete. A team of volunteers and staff would be involved in the management and delivery of the projects in terms of both the physical maintenance and the delivery of associated programs which were currently being drafted.

In conclusion, he stated that the Association was developing further plans which would seek greater integration with the Belfast Hills and would wish to work closely with the Council in this regard. In addition, plans to develop an activity centre within the vicinity were being pursued also.

The Chairman thanked the representatives for their presentation and they retired from the meeting.

After discussion, the Committee noted that a report in relation to the project would be submitted for its consideration at a future meeting.

Refurbishment of Floral Hall

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 12th August, it had agreed to receive a presentation from Consarc Consultants in relation to the feasibility of restoring the Floral Hall. It was reported that Mr. D. Stelfox, Consarc, and Mr. G. Welsh, Epec, were in attendance and they were welcomed to the meeting by the Chairman.

Mr. Stelfox provided the Committee with a historical overview of the Floral Hall and referred to the serious deterioration of the building. In particular, he drew the Members' attention to the collapse of the roof, water ingress, timber decay and various structural issues. He expressed the view that there was an opportunity to restore and create a unique venue for the City which could generate income for the Council. He referred to the fact that the Floral Hall was an iconic pre-war building, one of only a few remaining within the North and South of Ireland, and he drew the Members' attention to other pre-war buildings throughout the United Kingdom which had been restored and were being successfully utilised.

Mr. Stelfox referred to the visitor numbers at the Belfast Zoo and he pointed out that the opportunity existed for the Floral Hall to benefit from the increasing rise in visitors. The refurbishment of the Floral Hall could create a high quality café and restaurant to complement the facilities at the Zoo and a major function space within the north of the City which could be utilised for a range of purposes including the promotion of business tourism within the area. In addition, he stated that the public's affection for the Floral Hall might create the potential for a public fund-raising campaign.

Mr. Welsh informed the Committee that the study had indicated that the proposals would be feasible and sustainable and he outlined those steps which would be necessary to progress the project, including:

- the commissioning of a business case and economic appraisal;
- consideration of a package of emergency works to re-roof and secure the external fabric of the building, the estimated costs of which would be £500,000, with the potential of grant-aid being received from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency;

- liaison with the Belfast Buildings Preservation Trust to publicise and develop the oral history of the building and the establishment of a public fund-raising campaign; and
- the commissioning of development work to enable funding applications to be submitted to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the Heritage Lottery Fund, should a business case and economic appraisal be favourable.

After discussion, Mr. Stelfox and Welsh retired from the meeting.

The Committee noted that a report in relation to the matter would be submitted for its consideration at a future meeting.

Chairman