

Parks and Leisure Committee

Thursday, 11th November, 2010

MEETING OF PARKS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor O'Reilly (Chairman);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Humphrey); and
Councillors Adamson, Cush, Ekin, Hartley, Kyle, Mallon,
C. Maskey, Mac Giolla Mhín, McCabe, McCann,
McCarthy, McKenzie, Robinson, J. Rodgers and Stoker.

In attendance: Mr. A. Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure;
Mrs. R. Crozier, Head of Parks and Leisure;
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer; and
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the High Sheriff (Councillor Stalford) and from Councillor L. Patterson.

Mr. Lawrence Walker

The Committee was advised of the death of Mr. L. Walker, the Council's former Head of Leisure Contracts, and agreed that a letter of condolence expressing its sympathies be forwarded to his family circle.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 14th October 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 November, subject to:

- (i) the omission of the minute under the heading "Boost Card: Means-Tested Benefits" which, at the request of Councillor Robinson, had been taken back to the Committee for further consideration; and
- (ii) the omission of the minute under the heading "Ulster Farmers' Union" which, at the request of Councillor Stoker, had been taken back to the Committee for further consideration.

Boost Card: Means-Tested Benefits

The Committee considered further the minute of the meeting of 14th October. An extract of the minute in that regard is set out hereunder:

“Boost Card: Means-Tested Benefits”

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

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

‘Relevant Background Information

Since the implementation of the Boost leisure discount scheme in April 2006, Belfast residents in receipt of Means Tested Benefit (MTB) and their dependant children have availed of a flat rate discounted charge for accessing leisure services. Currently over 26,000 customers are taking advantage of the £1.25 charge in the MTB scheme.

The council agreed in 3 March 2008 to extend the scheme beyond the Belfast boundary. Approval to extend the scheme was provided by DOE on 21 March 2008 and DCAL on 6 January 2009.

Key Issues

In addition to the benefits already created by the scheme, the council has been requested to consider providing wider access to the MTB discount scheme to include participants in the Training For Success programme and asylum seekers.

A report was brought to the Parks and Leisure Committee in August 2010 outlining the case for providing wider access to the MTB discount scheme to include participants in the Training For Success programme and asylum seekers. At this meeting Members asked for confirmation of whether the proposed groups were means tested.

It has been confirmed that participants on the Training For Success programme are not means tested. The National Asylum Support (NAS) cash support payment is means tested.

Equality Issues

There are no equality implications in the extension of the scheme. However, as a matter of best practice an equality screening was carried out on the scheme and indicated no adverse impact on any of the Section 75 groups and therefore this can be screened out.

Resource Implications

Financial

There will be an increase in revenue but unquantifiable at present. However, MTB memberships are reported in performance reports.

Human Resources

The amount of officer time required to validate additional applications could be managed within existing structures.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- 1. MTB criteria are extended so that the scheme can now be accessed by Asylum Seekers in receipt of payments from the Home Office National Asylum Support scheme.*
- 2. MTB criteria does not include participants on the Training for Success programme, on the basis that it is not a means tested benefit.*

Key to Abbreviations

MTB: Means Tested Benefit
DCAL: Department of Culture Arts and Leisure
DOE: Department of the Environment
NAS: National Asylum Support.'

After discussion, it was

*Moved by Councillor McCann,
Seconded by Councillor C. Maskey,*

That the Committee agrees that the Boost Leisure Discount Scheme be extended to include participants on the Training for Success Programme and Asylum Seekers, subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.

Amendment

*Moved by Councillor Robinson,
Seconded by Councillor Stoker,*

That the matter be considered within the review of the Boost Leisure Discount Scheme.

On a vote by show of hands eight Members voted for the amendment and nine against and it was accordingly declared lost.

The original proposal standing in the name of Councillor McCann and seconded by Councillor C. Maskey was thereupon put to the meeting when nine Members voted for and seven against and it was accordingly declared carried."

The Director of Leisure Services informed the Members that the issue of Means-Tested Benefits would be considered within the context of the overall review of the Boost Leisure Discount Scheme which was underway currently.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the matter until the outcome of the review had been determined.

Ulster Farmers' Union

(Mr. C. Quigley, Town Solicitor, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered further the minute of the meeting of 14th October. An extract of the minute in that regard is set out hereunder:

"Ulster Farmers' Union

The Director of Parks and Leisure reminded the Committee that a tier-three assessment, including hydrogeological modelling had indicated that the site at Lisleen would be suitable as a potential site for the Council's future burial provision. In addition, he reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 16th September, it had agreed that:

- (i) a robust business plan be developed in relation to the development of additional crematorium facilities and the extension of the Roselawn Cemetery;*
- (ii) officers make arrangements for site investigations at the Dundrod sites, with priority to be given to the site offered through the expressions of interest process;*
- (iii) the Nutt's Corner site was not suitable as a potential site for a new burial cemetery;*
- (iv) legal advice on the implications for potential future compulsory purchases be sought; and*
- (v) an update newsletter be sent to all potentially affected landowners and other key stakeholders.*

The Director stated that, throughout the process of site investigations in relation to the Lisleen site, the landowners had expressed concern regarding the implications of the burial land's project for their land holdings. In this regard, the Ulster Farmers' Union, on behalf of their members residing within the vicinity of the Lisleen site, had written to the Council seeking an opportunity to present their concerns to the Committee. Accordingly, he requested that the Committee consider the request which had been received from the Ulster Farmers' Union.

After discussion, it was

*Moved by Councillor Stoker,
Seconded by Councillor J. Rodgers,*

That the Committee agrees to withdraw its interest in the Lisleen site as a potential location for the Council's future burial provision.

On a vote by show of hands three Members voted for the proposal and four against and it was accordingly declared lost.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed to accede to the request which had been received from the Ulster Farmers' Union."

The Director of Parks and Leisure submitted for the Committee's consideration the undernoted report:

"Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to:

- (i) provide Members with an update on the burials land acquisition project; and**
- (ii) seek the Committee's approval to undertake a site visit to both the Dundrod sites.**

Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware of the ongoing project to select a site for a new cemetery for Belfast and that reports are brought to Committee on a regular basis, the last of which was in September 2010.

At that meeting Members agreed that:

- the Nutts Corner site is not suitable as a potential site for a new cemetery;**
- officers make appropriate arrangements for site investigations at the Dundrod sites, with priority to be given to the site offered through the expressions of interest process;**
- a robust plan be developed for the provision of additional crematorium facilities;**
- legal advice be sought on potential future compulsory purchase;**

- that further work should be carried out to investigate the provision of natural burials;
- burial and cremation charges should be reviewed; and
- an update newsletter is sent to all potentially affected landowners and other key stakeholders.

In bringing forward these recommendations a number of issues have arisen and these are outlined below.

Key Issues

Lisleen

Members are aware that landowners and residents at the Lisleen site have raised concerns that the lack of a decision by Council over the future of the site has impacted on their ability to sell their property or make decisions on improvements to their property. These concerns are to be articulated by the Ulster Farmers Union on behalf of Lisleen landowners at the beginning of this committee meeting.

It is anticipated that the combination of the additional land acquired at Roselawn and the development of additional crematorium facilities will meet the city's need for the next 40-50 years. Council officers are currently undertaking a statistical analysis to assess what the impact of additional crematorium facilities would have on the burial rate and the amount of burial land provision required by the council. This is based on the work undertaken by Scott Wilson earlier this year which reassessed the burial land requirement but did not take into account the impact of additional crematorium facilities. Since the completion of this piece of work we have received the economic appraisal of new crematorium facilities and officers are using both pieces of work to determine the impact. It is anticipated that we will bring the findings of the statistical analysis to committee in December 2010.

Members have agreed that the search for additional land to supplement this provision should continue but should have a North and West Belfast focus.

In addition, advice from the Assistant Chief Executive and Town Solicitor indicates that compulsory acquisition of land is a method of last resort and can only be justified where it is evident that land suitable for the project is not available to be acquired on a voluntary basis. Given the combination of the above factors it is his opinion that it is difficult to see how the Council could make an argument that there is a compelling need to acquire further land solely for burial purposes.

Therefore, despite the land at Lisleen having been demonstrated as suitable for burial provision, it is unlikely given the current position as described above that the council can demonstrate any legitimate reason for maintaining an interest in that land for the foreseeable future.

Crematorium

It was agreed by the Parks and Leisure Committee in September 2010 'that a robust plan be developed in relation to the development of additional crematorium facilities'. Officers are currently working on this plan and as part of the process have held informal discussions with a number of private providers. A paper outlining detailed options for the way forward will be brought to the committee in January 2011.

Dundrod

It was agreed by the Parks and Leisure Committee in September 2010 'that officers make appropriate arrangements for site investigations at the Dundrod sites, with priority to be given to the site offered through the expressions of interest process'. Since the Committee meeting several officers, with one elected Member, have made a visit to both sites. As a result of this visit officers have concerns around the accessibility of both sites due to access to the sites being by 'B' roads, the lack of public transport on the route and potential driving difficulties in wintry conditions. It is recommended therefore that Members undertake a site visit to both the Dundrod sites before site investigations commence.

Resource Implications

Financial

There is provision of £13.9 M in the Council's capital programme for new cemetery provision for Belfast City Council.

Human Resources

There are no human resource implications at this stage.

Asset and Other Implications

None at this stage, although the final phases of the project will inevitably increase the Council's land ownership and associated liabilities.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee agree to:

- (i) note the contents of this report;**
- (ii) indicate that, given the council's changed policy position, it has no intention of pursuing the development of new cemetery provision on the site at Lisleen for the foreseeable future; and**
- (iii) undertake a site visit to both the Dundrod sites."**

The Committee was advised that Mr. J. Cooper and Mr. J. White, representing the Ulster Farmers' Union, were in attendance and they admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

Mr. Cooper informed the Committee that they represented farmers and landowners who would be affected directly by any decision to proceed with the use of the Lisleen site for burial. He explained that, since the land had been identified some time ago as a possible site, local farmers and property owners had been faced with increased uncertainty and a lack of detailed information from the Council regarding its plans and how they would be compensated, should the location be selected as a burial site. As a result, many had been unable to sell properties or building sites or to raise loans to invest in their farms. This, in turn, had impacted upon their health, particularly in terms of stress. He stated that, when they had consulted the Council's legal representatives regarding the issue of compensation, they had been advised that this would be paid in line with the legislation in place and be settled at current market values. However, he pointed out that, over the period during which the Lisleen site had first been identified, property values had reduced considerably. He added that the uncertainty surrounding the future plans for Lisleen had made it more difficult for issues such as the determination of estates to be finalised and concluded by requesting that the Council decide, at the earliest opportunity, if it wished to proceed with the Lisleen site.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Cooper and Mr. White for being in attendance and they retired from the meeting.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor McCarthy,
Seconded by Councillor Robinson and

Resolved – That, in view of the change in circumstances, the Council agrees to withdraw any interest in pursuing the development of a new cemetery on the Lisleen site.

The Committee agreed also to undertake a site visit to both the Dundrod sites.

Natural Burials

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to:

- (i) provide Members with information on natural burials;
- (ii) seek the Committee’s approval to further investigate natural burials at Roselawn and develop a feasibility study; and
- (iii) seek the Committee’s approval to procure technical engineering and feasibility study consultancy support.

Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that the Cemeteries Working Group on 9th August 2010 recommended that further work was undertaken to investigate the possibility of a natural (woodland) burial site and that this was agreed at the Parks and Leisure Committee on 16th September 2010.

Members will be aware that a member of the public has recently sent a letter to Councillors asking that the Council consider providing the option of natural burials (also known as woodland burials) and that the Council’s decision to agree to investigate the possibility of a natural burial site has received media coverage. The Council has also received emails of support for the provision of natural burials from The Woodland Trust and Friends of Earth Northern Ireland.

Natural burial is when the body of the deceased is returned to the earth to recycle naturally in an environmentally sustainable way. The first natural burial site opened in the UK in 1993 and there are now over 250 around the UK, although there are currently none in Northern Ireland. There is a Natural Death Centre which established the Association of Natural Burial Grounds in 1994. The Association has a code of conduct for members including requirements around flora and fauna conservation, the use of biodegradable coffins and financial matters.

In a natural burial area graves are usually dug to a single depth and the body (preferably not embalmed) is buried in a bio-degradable coffin. Following an interment, the ground would be allowed to settle and would then be grassed over and a small native species tree planted in it. The area would over time become a woodland, under planted with wild flowers and would be managed for the benefit of wildlife. The area would not have the appearance of a traditional cemetery although irregular winding paths are included to allow for visitor access. Graves are marked with a wooden marker and no other form of marker or memorial would be allowed. Fresh cut flowers would be accepted but without any wrappings or ribbons nor as an arrangement in a container.

Key Issues

Development of natural burial ground at Roselawn

One of the options open to the Council is to develop a natural burial ground within the site at Roselawn. Roselawn Cemetery is the largest (268 acres) and busiest cemetery in Northern Ireland, carrying out 840 burials in 2009. The Council purchased an additional 10 acres in the 1980s and more recently a further 28 acres. This land is collectively called Section Y and plans are currently being drawn up to develop this as new burial ground.

Within this area provision could be made for a natural burial ground which is currently pasture/meadow green fields with mature trees and hedgerows. Tests could be carried out to determine if there is a particular area that is unsuitable for 'traditional' burial but could be used for a single depth natural burial thus maximising the use of this new land.

To comply with the Department of the Environment legislation, the ground that is selected at Roselawn Cemetery for a natural burial ground must not be located within certain distances of specific types of water; these are:

- at least 10 metres from any 'dry' ditch or field drain;
- at least 30 metres from any spring or any running or standing water; and
- at least 50 metres from any well, borehole or spring that supplies water for use.

The Council currently operate a woodland copse at the Roselawn site for cremated remains. This is an area of birch tress underplanted with naturalising bulbs such as bluebells and wood anemones which has been planned to specifically create a traditional woodland environment and to encourage fauna and wildlife. Chemical weed control is not used and in order to keep this area as natural as possible no floral tributes, plaques or any form of memorialisation can be left in the woodland copse. Cremated remains may be buried (poured into the ground or buried in a biodegradable urn) or scattered in the woodland copse. This area has been in operation since 1993 and to date 157 cremated remains have been laid to rest in this area.

Use of a private provider

In the period since the issue of natural burials was brought to the Cemeteries Working Group (August 2010), a natural burial ground has been opened in Co Wexford by The Green Graveyard Company Limited. This company is based in Co Donegal and it is currently exploring options to open a natural burial ground in Northern Ireland. The owner has expressed an interest in operating a natural burial ground on behalf of the council although no formal discussions have taken place. If the Council were to pursue this option it would only be workable at a new site which was used exclusively for natural burials.

Next steps

It is recommended that the next step in this process is a feasibility study which will investigate the options of providing a natural burial ground at the Roselawn site. Due to the specialised nature of this topic it is recommended that the Council become a provisional member of the Association of Natural Burial Grounds to avail of their knowledge and experience. It may also be necessary to commission external support for the feasibility study and officers will endeavour to keep this to the minimum level.

It is proposed that the feasibility study will examine a range of issues related to natural burials including:

Demand for Natural Burials

Work needs to be undertaken to assess the potential demand for natural burial in Belfast. The Natural Death Centre estimate that 4% of all burials in Great Britain are natural burials and that there is a 30% growth per annum.

Impact on other provision

We will be required to assess the potential impact that providing the option of a natural burial will have on our traditional burial service and cremation and the implications that providing single use graves will have on our future burial land requirements.

Location of Natural Burial Ground

Further boreholes tests need to be undertaken within the Roselawn site to determine the rock profile and soil conditions. This will allow us to identify areas that are not suitable for traditional burials but in which we could bury one body thus maximising the use of land. Technical engineering support will be required for this element.

Costs and charges

An initial search via the internet of the charges for natural burial grounds elsewhere show that these range from £450 for a single plot to £5000 for a double plot. All of the sites looked at had an additional charge for grave digging. The charges for the new natural burial ground in Co Wexford range from €715.05 for a single plot to €2497 for a family plot. We do not currently have any information on the costs of providing natural burials and further work needs to be carried out to determine these costs and what the Council should charge for this service.

Size of plots

Another issue that needs to be considered as part of the development of the feasibility study is whether the council wishes to provide single, double or larger plots. The practice elsewhere varies with some sites providing only single plots while others also provide the option of a double plot. Initial investigations would suggest that the natural burial ground in Co Wexford is the only site to provide plots for 3 and 4 people.

Terms and conditions

As part of the development of a feasibility study terms and conditions will be drawn up, these will include conditions relating to what is permissible on graves and the types of coffins that we will allow for this type of burial. These will be based on guidance from the Association of Natural Burial Grounds and best practice from other natural burial grounds.

Other issues may arise through the process and these will be addressed in the feasibility study.

Resource Implications

Financial

Technical engineering support - it is estimated this will be in the region of £20,000.

Feasibility study support - it is estimated that this will be in the region of £10,000 and will include the £75 membership fee for the Association of Natural Burial Grounds.

Human Resources

The feasibility study will be met through existing resources.

Asset and Other Implications

N/A

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- (i) agree that council officers further investigate the feasibility of providing a natural burial ground at Roselawn and produce a feasibility study; and
- (ii) agree that council officers procure technical engineering and feasibility study consultancy support as required."

After discussion, the Committee agreed that Council officers investigate further the possibility of providing a natural burial ground at the Roselawn Cemetery and authorised the undertaking of an associated feasibility study, at an estimated cost of £10,000.

Playing Pitches Strategy

The Committee agreed that a special meeting be held to consider a draft strategy which had been formulated in respect of the Council's playing pitch provision and agreed also that Party Group briefings be held in advance of the meeting.

Request for the Provision of Permanent Changing Facilities at the Musgrave Park

The Director of Parks and Leisure reminded the Committee that St. Brigid's Gaelic Athletic Club had attracted funding from a number of sources, including the Council, in order to provide a full sized pitch and smaller training area within the Musgrave Park. He reported that, as a condition of granting the facility, the Council had agreed to enter into a twenty-one year management agreement with the Club, which was due to run for another seventeen years. However, whilst the pitches had been a great success and were widely-used, there were no changing facilities on the site, as this provision had not been included within the original plan and funding application.

He explained that Council officers had, on a number of occasions, met with officials from St. Brigid's Gaelic Athletic Club to consider the possibility of providing changing facilities and their most appropriate location. The discussions had been based upon the assumption that the Club would seek external funding in order to provide the facilities and that the Council would then enter into a revised management or lease arrangement. However, at a recent meeting, which had been attended by representatives from the Club, Elected Members and Council officers, it had been determined that the Club was no longer in a position to fund the provision of permanent changing facilities and had requested that these be provided by the Council.

The Director of Parks and Leisure informed the Members that officers were preparing currently a playing pitches strategy, an element of which would relate to the provision of ancillary structures such as changing facilities. Accordingly, he recommended that the Committee agree that the request from St. Brigid's Gaelic Athletic Club be considered following the agreement of that strategy and the associated prioritisation process.

During discussion, a Member stated that the original agreement between the Council and St. Brigid's Gaelic Athletic Club had stipulated that the Club advise local primary schools of the availability for use of the two pitches in question. However, he pointed out that this had not been fulfilled and no schools had used either facility.

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendation and agreed that St. Brigid's Gaelic Athletic Club be advised again of its obligation under the management agreement to make the two playing fields available to local primary schools.

Parks and Leisure Improvement Programme – Dog Management Pilot Scheme at Orangefield Park

The Committee was informed that the issues of dog fouling and the management of dogs in the Council's parks and open spaces had on a number of occasions been raised both by Elected Members and within responses to public consultation exercises. The Head of Parks and Leisure reported that several residents within the vicinity of Orangefield Park had highlighted recently a number of dog-related issues, including dogs being permitted to foul on recreational areas such as football pitches, being released off their leads and on occasions being aggressive towards members of the public and other dogs.

She explained that a number of suggestions had been put forward by residents in order to address these issues and that it was now proposed that a pilot Dog Management Scheme be introduced within the Orangefield Park. She provided an overview of the initiative, which would involve the zoning of the Park into three areas, where dogs would either not be permitted, be required to remain on a lead or allowed to run freely.

She explained that the main objectives of the pilot would be to:

- improve the service provision within the Orangefield Park;

- develop improved relationships with local residents through a process of consultation in order to ensure that their needs were being met; and
- work in collaboration with the Council's Anti-social Behaviour Officer and the Dog Warden Service.

She added that the scheme would be developed in consultation with parks users and run for a period of six months, following which it would be evaluated in order to assess its effectiveness in terms of dog management. The estimated cost of signage at the entrance to and within the Park would be £8,000, with an additional £2,000 being required for the promotion of the pilot scheme. Accordingly, she recommended that the Committee approve the implementation of the pilot Dog Management Scheme within the Orangefield Park.

During discussion, several Members voiced concern that dogs would be permitted to run freely within the Orangefield Park, albeit within designated areas, and in terms of the health risks associated with dog fouling. It was pointed out that there was a considerable distance between the entrances to the Park and those areas where dogs could be released from their lead and it was suggested that it would be beneficial for additional areas to be made available at points nearer to the entrances.

In response, the Head of Parks and Leisure pointed out that the primary purpose of the scheme was to enhance the experience of all visitors using the Park and that there would still be a responsibility on dog owners to remove fouling deposited by their dogs anywhere within the Park. In addition, the Council would continue to promote all aspects of responsible dog ownership. She undertook to consult with local residents in order to address any issues arising from the initiative, including those which had been raised by the Members.

After further discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendation and noted that a report on the outcome of the evaluation of the pilot scheme would be submitted for its consideration in due course.

Shore Road Playing Fields

(Ms. D. Thornton, Principal Solicitor, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 16th September, it had considered a request which had been received from the Grove United and Malachians Football Clubs seeking to undertake a development project on the Shore Road Playing Fields site. The Director of Parks and Leisure reported that the Clubs were proposing to erect on the site permanent state-of-the-art changing facilities, an indoor sports arena and multi-purpose rooms for use also by the wider community. He explained that the Clubs had in place jointly with the Council a Facilities Management Agreement for the use of the site and that they had requested that the Council agree, in principle, to grant a twenty-five year lease in order to assist them in obtaining funding to deliver their project. The Committee had, at that meeting, deferred consideration of the matter to enable a legal opinion to be obtained from the Town Solicitor on whether the Council could accede to the request without firstly inviting expressions of interest.

The Director of Parks and Leisure informed the Members that the advice which had been obtained had indicated that, in the normal course of events, the Council would seek expressions of interest through public advertisement in order to determine if there was any legitimate competitive interest, other than that which had been received from the two football clubs. However, should there be a unique income stream available to the clubs which would benefit the Council-owned property, then the Committee could consider entering into an arrangement with the Grove United and Malachians Football Clubs. This would require them to develop a joint business case for the proposal and to provide written proof of the availability of funding to enable a decision to be made. He pointed out there were currently no plans to invite expressions of interest for any further development of the facilities at the Shore Road Playing Fields. Therefore, in order to consider the request from Grove United and Malachians Football Clubs to enter, in principle, into a 25-year lease arrangement with the Council, a detailed proposal setting out the business case and the benefit to be derived to the Council property arising from the development would be required to be submitted.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed that the Grove United and Malachians Football Clubs be requested to submit within six months a detailed proposal for the development of the Shore Road Playing Fields and that the report address in particular the availability of funding.

Cliftonville Football Club – Access Arrangements

The Committee deferred for one month consideration of a report seeking to address issues surrounding access to the Council's property at the Waterworks site, to enable further discussions to be held between Council officers, Elected Members and representatives of Cliftonville Football Club.

Refurbishment of Waterworks Park

The Director of Parks and Leisure reminded the Committee that the Waterworks Park was situated in North Belfast, close to the Antrim and Cavehill Roads. He explained that that Park was comprised largely of water and featured also a multi-user games area, two playgrounds, a newly refurbished grass pitch, two community gardens and a temporary community building. The facility was used widely, although it had at times been subjected to anti-social behaviour and parts of it were regarded as being a contested space.

He reported that the Council had, in 2008, prepared a masterplan for the Park which had been based upon the views obtained from Council officers and representatives of the various interest groups. He stated that the Park had an active Friends Group and that that organisation was keen to work with the Council in order to progress the physical enhancement of the facilities. In order to achieve this, it had been proposed that the Group, in conjunction with Groundwork NI, develop specific elements of the masterplan, identify potential sources of funding and various options for the management of the facility. It was the intention to submit to the Committee in early Spring a further report outlining proposals for the development of the Park, which would take into account these issues and highlight the implications for the Council in terms of capital and revenue expenditure.

Accordingly, the Director recommended that the Committee authorise the Friends of Waterworks organisation to draft development proposals for the Waterworks Park and that they be advised that, in no way, would such authorisation commit the Council to any of the proposals or to incur expenditure as a consequence, and that any work to be undertaken by the Group would be at the Group's own risk.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Alexandra Park Improvements Programme

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to obtain Council support for enhancements to Alexandra Park.

Relevant Background Information

The Committee is reminded that at its meeting on 11 June 2009 it was informed that funding from the Reconciling Communities Through Regeneration (RCTR) programme had been secured in late 2008 and it was agreed that Groundwork NI (GWNl) would work alongside local community representatives and relevant stakeholders in the development of regeneration proposals for Alexandra Park.

RCTR is ‘a strategic regional programme aimed at improving tolerance and acting as a catalyst for reducing sectarianism and racism. It aims to achieve this by involving local community and statutory agencies in regenerating local areas, which will eliminate or reduce displays of sectarian and racial aggression.’

RCTR is scheduled to run from October 2008 to August 2011, and has four key objectives to:

- **develop ‘key skills for peace’ and create opportunities for inter-group dialogue, cross community relationship building and networking;**
- **work strategically with the Peace III clusters;**
- **build positive relationships at a local level in order to achieve positive change; and**
- **begin to address contested physical space issues with the aim of regenerating physical spaces and removing the physical manifestations of segregation.**

Key anticipated outputs are:

- a 'shared space' strategy;
- networking;
- development of a skills audit and delivery of training/mentoring; and
- an 'iconic' environmental improvement.

These outputs should lead to the following outcomes:

- communities, service providers and elected representatives working together to encourage integrated actions and promote shared space and shared services;
- communities able to take advantage of future opportunities;
- reduced marginalisation and polarisation;
- reduced levels of sectarianism and racism; and
- enhanced skills and experience.

In conveying its consent to GWNI the Council was supporting an engagement process with communities surrounding Alexandra Park, with the aim of improving community relations, building skills and encouraging cross community dialogue around common concerns. The budget for the project includes up to £50k per area for physical regeneration works, which addresses the overall aim of the programme. Within the context of Alexandra Park this would provide an opportunity for some minor investment and regeneration.

The RCTR programme in Alexandra Park has, in addition to the involvement of council officers and staff from Groundwork included, the NI Housing Executive, the PSNI, local political representatives, community activists, local schools and residents.

Current Position

Since the project was approved by the Park and Leisure Committee on 11 June 2009 GWNI has been working alongside a variety of organisations and representatives from the local community to develop proposals for the park on a cross community basis. While participation has been widely encouraged and sought the main participants have been:

- Parkside, Newington and Castleton Residents Association
- Camberwell Terrace Residents Association
- Residents from Dunmore estate
- Residents from Alexandra Park Avenue
- Friends of Grove Park
- North Belfast Community Development Transition Group
- Residents from Tigers Bay.

A steering group was formed and as part of the process it undertook a survey of the surrounding area. Following an analysis of the survey and following discussion it was agreed that the project should focus on the development of a nature trail around the pond, a fishing stand, a seating area and interpretive panels in the upper section of the park and picnic tables, seating and interpretive panels in the lower section of the park.

Landscape proposals have been developed, based on the above design, and meetings have been held with Council Officers, PSNI representatives including the Design out Crime Officer and the Steering Group to consider and agree the proposals and the design layout.

A further community consultation exercise was carried out with a series of public meetings held at a variety of locations including Camberwell Court, Holy Family Youth Club, Currie Primary School, Grove bowling pavilion and Mountcollyer Youth Club. While the turnout was disappointing the overwhelming view was one of support for the proposed regeneration plans.

At present no funding has been secured for the project. However, an application for £50,000 will be made to the RCTR, in addition, a further application will be submitted to the Alpha Programme for £50,000 to meet the shortfall in the cost, the total cost is estimated at £100,000.

The proposals include:

- Upper section of the park:
 - Nature trail around the pond including clearing the rubbish and shrubbery, installation of seating and a seating area with interpretive panels on the history and wildlife within the park.
- Lower section of the park:
 - A picnic area, seating and interpretive panels on the history and wildlife within the park

This regeneration project will also compliment the Council's proposed refurbishment of the playground at the Lower Alexandra Park and the potential refurbishment of the Upper Playground at a future date as well as the ongoing management and maintenance.

Key Issues

The key issues for the Committee are:

- The Committee previously endorsed the concept at its meeting in June 2009;
- Proposals have now been worked up as outlined above;
- Funding is yet to be secured;
- Groundwork is seeking funding from RCTR Programme and the Alpha fund to meet the capital cost of the project, estimated at £100,000;
- The Council has been requested to convey its support for the funding applications as outlined;
- Groundwork would also seek consent from the Council to undertake the proposed works;
- Officers from the Landscape Planning and Development Unit and Parks Area Management have been involved with the Steering Group and are satisfied that the proposals are sensitive to the history and nature of the parks; and will have minimal revenue implications.

Resource Implications

Financial

There are no capital or revenue implications for Belfast City Council.

Human Resources

There are no additional human resource implications.

Asset and Other Implications

The project will improve the physical environment of the park, it will enhance biodiversity within the park and it will enhance the community cohesion around the park.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

1. The Committee agree to support the funding applications and direct the Director of Parks and Leisure to provide a suitable letter as appropriate; and
2. The Committee convey its consent to the Groundwork NI to undertake the necessary work providing adequate funding has been obtained; the necessary approvals have been obtained; and
3. Groundwork NI and or its agents carry the public liability insurance during the undertaking of the works, subject to an appropriate legal agreement being prepared by the Assistant Chief Executive and Town Solicitor.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Playground Improvement Programme Update

The Committee noted the contents of a report providing an update on the Playground Improvement Programme for 2010/2011.

Leisure for Free Programme

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

Leisure for free is a pilot scheme aimed at improving the health of those people living in areas of high deprivation, through the provision of free leisure centre membership.

The scheme is funded by the Public Health Agency and will provide 200 people with free leisure centre membership for one year, on the basis they attend a set number of times per month.

The aim of the scheme is to increase the physical activity levels of participants to the point where exercise becomes habit. On completion of the scheme, staff will work with each individual to ensure they can continue to participate in physical activity through our Boost leisure discount scheme and existing community programmes.

Key Issues

The scheme will look to improve the health of each participant through the provision of free access to leisure provision and access to a qualified fitness coach. It is anticipated that this programme will be advertised in January and begin recruiting in February 2011.

Selection of areas

It is recommended that this scheme is piloted in four areas across the city so that any differing factors for areas can be identified and considered prior to any possible expansion of the scheme. It is also targeted at areas of high deprivation. This is a core objective of the funding from the Public Health Agency. It also links with the Council's own strategic theme of 'Better support for people and communities' under the areas of 'People are healthier' and 'Inequalities reducing'.

In identifying the areas in which the pilot scheme could initially be offered, the Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) 2010 results were considered. This report highlights the following super output areas as being the most deprived in each of the 4 sectors of Belfast:

<u>Area</u>	<u>Super Output Area</u>	<u>Places available</u>
North	New Lodge 1	50
South	Blackstaff 2	50
East	Ballymacarrett 3	50
West	Whiterock 2	50

Allocation of memberships for this scheme will be split evenly across the four areas listed above.

Recruitment of participants

Information regarding the scheme will be disseminated through Council community centres, elected Members, Healthy Living Centres and community and voluntary organisations in each of the areas identified above. A press release highlighting the scheme will also be sent to each of the local newspapers in the areas identified above.

The information will direct residents to the Belfast City Council website where a complete list of postcodes for each of the identified areas can be found, as only those resident in certain postcodes will be eligible for the scheme. A contact telephone number will also be provided for those without internet access.

Should more than 50 residents register for the scheme in any of the four identified areas, selection of residents will be on a randomised basis. There will also be a waiting list.

Programme overview

Once selected, each resident will be required to attend an introduction meeting with their fitness coach. At this meeting the resident's health will be assessed, in line with our current fitness suite operating procedures. Should the health of any resident be deemed to be at risk, they will not be selected for the scheme and referred to their GP.

Those residents selected to participate in the scheme will be required to attend the leisure centre a minimum of 4 times a month during the first 4 months. This will increase to a minimum of 6 times a month during the next 4 months and up again to a minimum of 8 times a month during the final 4 months. Each month the participants will be required to meet with their fitness coach for a follow up assessment.

Monitoring and evaluation

In order to assess the feasibility of rolling this scheme out to other areas across the city a robust monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed.

The activity of all participants will be collected and reviewed on a weekly basis to ensure attendance targets are being met. Each participant will also complete a Health Related Quality of Life questionnaire every month which will be analysed for any changes in perceived health, self-esteem and attitudes towards physical activity. The findings for each area will also be compared to identify any trends or variable which may have an impact on the future development of this scheme. Factors such as proximity to provision, type of provision available and attitudes towards physical activity will need to be considered as part of the evaluation for this scheme.

Quarterly reports will be provided to the Public Health Agency, in line with the terms and conditions of funding. A final evaluation report will also be brought to Committee for their consideration.

Resource Implications

Financial

The Public Health Agency will provide £24,000 funding to cover the cost of memberships. There are no additional financial implications

Human Resources

There are no additional human resource implications

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee approve the areas selected for the pilot of this scheme.”

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendation.

Fun Days in Council Parks

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the series of fun days held during 2010 and to present proposals in respect of 2011 and the future of the scheme.

Relevant Background Information

The Committee will be aware that the council has held a programme of activities and fun days in parks for children over the summer for a number of years.

By way of background during the 1980s the former Parks Department organised a range of summer activities for children in the form of summer schemes in parks. These events ran for many years. In the late 1990’s summer fun days were introduced as an alternative to summer schemes. The aim at that time was to streamline the summer schemes which were increasing in cost and increasingly difficult to manage and deliver.

The fun days provide activities for children aged 5 – 12 years and are held in a number of parks across the city. The underlying purpose of the events, in addition to providing fun activities for children, is to promote the parks and encourage local residents to take part in the fun days and to take ownership of their parks.

Initially fun days were held in 9 parks, over the years this has increased to 14. A list of the parks where fun days are currently held has been circulated to Members. A typical event would include bouncy castles, face painting, climbing tower, street entertainers, games and sports.

Attendance numbers at the events can vary and are influenced by factors such as the weather or indeed other alternative forms of entertainment or recreation.

The budget allocation for the fun day programme has remained relatively constant at around £30,000. However, inflation and the increase in the number of venues has effectively meant a reduction in real terms.

Key Issues

While the Council wishes to continue to hold such events it is important that they are kept under review from time to time. Within that context the Committee is asked to note the following points:

- We wish to continue to provide a range of local events in our parks and open spaces to encourage positive use and to promote their value.

Numbers attending

- In general while the number of children attending such events has remain constant and relatively high in some locations, in other locations the numbers are low or have reduced. For example the numbers at South Link, Dunville Park, Ulidia Playing Fields, Tommy Patton Memorial Park and Grove Playing Fields are 75 or less.

Cost of provision

- The budget for the fun days has remained fairly static for a number of years now leaving little opportunity to further develop and expand each fun day.
- In 2010 the total cost of providing 14 fun days was in the region of £30,000. The average overall cost per child to attend a fun day is £10.18. However this varied from £5.25 to £49.18 per child in 2010 depending on the number attending.
- At those venues where the average attendance is 75 or less the cost is between £24.26 and £49.18 per head.

Anti Social behaviour concerns

- In a small number of locations there has been reported anti-social behaviour. Of particular concern in 2010 was an incident at Dunville Park which led to the cancellation of the event after only 45 minutes due to concerns regarding the safety of the children themselves and those providing the entertainment.
- In addition, at Springhill Millennium Park the climbing tower was damaged and bricks and bottles were thrown at entertainers at the end of the event whilst they were leaving the venue, although the event itself passed off without incident.
- Owing to the incidents above the providers have expressed concern about the re-occurrence of similar incidents, Members will be aware that these providers are brought in by the Council to provide the entertainment on our behalf.

Alternative forms of entertainment

- The Council provides a range of similar events and summer schemes across the city through the Parks small grants' scheme, leisure services, community services etc and there may be an issue around the duplication of events in some locations.
- The fun days have been in operation for over 10 years with only minor adjustments to the programme and format. Owing to limited resources there has been little opportunity to vary the programme of activities and consequently the Fun Days may have lost some of their initial appeal potentially contributing to a drop in numbers in some areas.

It is proposed that the scheme is reviewed to establish:

- continued need;
- a revised content and approach to refresh what has been generally viewed as a successful project;
- the most appropriate locations;
- an appropriate level of funding; and
- governance issues

Until the review is completed in consultation with communities and other council providers of events it is proposed that on those sites where numbers have been low that the fun days are withdrawn to enable the resources to be allocated to enhancing events at other venues. This would mean reducing the number of fun days to nine and terminating the fun days at:

- Alderman Tommy Patton
- Dunville
- Grove Playing Fields
- South Link;
- Ulidia

Resource Implications

Financial

The cost of providing the Fun Day programme in 2011 is estimated at £30,000.

The cost of a review of the future of the scheme would be in the region of £5,000.

Human Resources

There are no additional human resource implications.

Asset and Other Implications

The use of events in parks and the organisation of programmes and activities is an integral element in the promotion of our parks and open spaces.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. agree to continue to fund the fun day scheme;
2. agree to reduce the number to 9 in 2011 and retain the budget in line with option 2 above; and
3. agree that officers undertake a review to inform the future of the scheme after 2011.”

During discussion, several Members referred to the attendance figures for each of the fourteen fun days, a copy of which had been tabled, and pointed out that the Committee report did not provide specific reasons for the fall in the numbers attending the events at some of the venues, particularly those which were being recommended for withdrawal from the scheme. The point was made that there could be valid reasons associated with the reduced attendance figures and that every effort should be made to promote the events, as they were an important part of the Council's promotion of its Parks and Open Spaces.

After further discussion, the Committee agreed to continue to fund fourteen Fun Days in 2011 and agreed also that a review of the scheme be undertaken prior to any decision being taken in relation to the holding of fun days in 2012.

Greater Belfast Invitational Cup 2011

The Committee was advised that a request had been received from Youth Soccer Tournaments Northern Ireland seeking the use of a number of Council facilities in order to hold a soccer tournament. The Director of Parks and Leisure reported that the Greater Belfast Invitational Cup would take place on 22nd and 23rd April, 2011, and that it would operate along the lines of the successful Christopher Shaw Cup Tournament which, this year, had seen thirty-two teams participating. In view of the success of that event, the organisers were now proposing that the Greater Belfast Invitational Cup become an annual event, similar to both the prestigious Milk and Foyle Cups. It was anticipated that four venues, namely, Boucher Road, Strangford Avenue, Ormeau Park and either the Blanchflower Stadium or Victoria Park Playing Fields would be required. However, depending on the suitability of those venues at that time, it might be necessary to use other locations.

He explained that the Invitational Cup had the potential to attract teams from across the United Kingdom and that the organisers were planning to charge £80 per team in order to cover the cost of the tournament.

The Director of Parks and Leisure informed the Committee that it was anticipated that no club which used the pitches regularly would be disadvantaged by the holding of the Tournament, since the majority of leagues would have completed their fixtures by the time that the Tournament was taking place. However, should winter postponements mean that pitches were required, it could impact upon the Council's ability to provide the tournament organisers with additional capacity.

After discussion, the Committee approved the hosting in 2011 of the Greater Belfast Invitational Cup, subject to an appropriate management plan being completed to the satisfaction of Council officers.

Gospel Rally at Boucher Road Playing Fields

The Committee was advised that a request had been received from the William Tyndale Memorial Free Presbyterian Church seeking to hold a 'drive-in' gospel rally on the Boucher Road Playing Fields. The Director of Parks and Leisure reported that the event, which had been staged successfully in June 2010, had been part of ongoing outreach programme within the surrounding area of the church in Donegall Avenue. The organisers had chosen that type of event as it was regarded as being the most cost effective way of engaging the congregation in an informal environment, without the need to provide expensive accommodation and facilities on-site.

He explained that the gospel rally would take place within the Boucher Road Playing Fields from 19th till 24th June, 2011. He reported that other parts of the Playing Fields were used during the Summer months for gaelic sports, however, it was not anticipated that any games would require to be cancelled in order to accommodate the gospel rally. He added that it was proposed to charge the organisers £40 per evening for the use of the Playing Fields. Accordingly, he recommended that the Committee grant approval to hold from 19th till 26th June, 2011, a Drive-in Old Time Gospel Rally within the Boucher Road Playing Fields, subject to satisfactory terms being agreed by the Director of Parks and Leisure and on the conditions that:

- (i) the event organisers resolve all operational issues to the satisfaction of Council officers;
- (ii) an appropriate legal agreement is completed by the Town Solicitor; and
- (iii) the event organisers meet all statutory requirements, including compliance with Entertainments Licensing legislation.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Go Belfast Awards 2010

The Director of Parks and Leisure reported that the Belfast Zoo had been short-listed for an award in the "Visitor Attraction of the Year" category at the Go Belfast Awards 2010. He reported that the facility had last attained this award in 2007 and that this year's nomination had been made in recognition of the Zoo's recent successes in terms of its breeding programme, the opening of a new visitor centre and entrance and the ongoing increase in visitor numbers.

He explained that the Go Belfast Awards ceremony would take place in the Europa Hotel on 26th November and that the Parks and Leisure Department had been allocated one complimentary place at the event. Additional places could be purchased at a cost of approximately £150 per person.

The Committee approved the attendance at the Go Belfast Awards 2010 of the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman (or their nominees), together with two officers from the Parks and Leisure Department.

Tenders for the Procurement of Supplies and Services

The Director of Parks and Leisure sought and was granted authority to initiate a tendering exercise in relation to the provision of the following services:

- (i) the supply and delivery of top-dressing sand, the supply, delivery and application of top-dressing sand/verti-draining of sports pitches; and
- (ii) the supply of fruit and vegetables to the Belfast Zoo.

He reported that the tenders would be awarded for a one-year period, with an option to renew on an annual basis for a further two years, subject to satisfactory performance. It was anticipated the cost to the Council in respect of the provision of top-dressing sand and fruit and vegetables would be £75,000 and £120,000 per annum respectively.

The Committee noted that the tenders would be evaluated against criteria based on both cost and quality and that, in accordance with the authority delegated to him, the Director would be accepting the most economically advantageous tender submitted.

**Support for Sport - Small Development
and Hospitality Grants**

The Committee noted a Schedule of Support for Sport applications in relation to Small Development and Hospitality 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 site.

Chairman