

# Parks and Leisure Committee

Thursday, 13th October, 2011

## MEETING OF PARKS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Kelly (Deputy Chairman) (in the Chair);  
Aldermen Humphrey and Rodgers;  
Councillors Austin, Haire, Hargey, Hendron, Kyle,  
Mallon, McCabe, McKee, McNamee, McVeigh,  
Mac Giolla Mhín, Mullan, A. Newton and O'Neill.

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

### **Apologies**

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the Chairman (Councillor Corr) and Councillors McVeigh and Robinson.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 15th September were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 3rd October, subject to the omission of the minute under the heading "Facility Management Agreement – Termination of Agreement" which, at the request of Councillor Hendron, had been taken back to the Committee for further consideration.

### **Commencement Time of Future Meetings**

In accordance with Notice on the Agenda, the Chairman advised the Committee that a Member had requested that the Committee give consideration to a later commencement time for its future monthly meetings.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Mac Giolla Mhín,  
Seconded by Councillor McCabe,

That the Committee agrees to continue to meet at its current commencement time of 4.30 p.m. for its monthly scheduled meetings.

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

**Facilities Management Agreement - Termination of Contract**

The Committee considered further the undernoted minute:

*"The Committee was reminded that, on its meeting on 11th August, it had noted a report in relation to annual evaluation of Facility Management Agreements which had set out the current position in terms of compliance for the financial year ended March, 2011. The Assistant Director had reported that the club which held the existing facilities for the Dixon Park Playing Fields had failed to provide its financial returns and more recent usage figures. As a consequence, a notice of termination letter had been issued by Legal Services. It had been reported also that the club was working to meet the stipulated requirements within the dictated time frame approved by Legal Services. The previous report had stated that any issues of non-compliance would be addressed through the appropriate channels and might result in the termination of the Facilities Management Agreement for the Dixon Park Playing Fields following advice from Legal Services and authority from the Committee. Council officers had been in communication with the club and had made all reasonable attempts over many months to resolve the situation.*

*The Committee was advised that the key issue was the non submission of annual accounts by the local football club as required under Clause 14.1 of the Facility Management Agreement. Since 5th July 2010, the Council had issued a number of demands requesting submission of its accounts. The Assistant Director of Parks and Leisure had met with a representative of the club on 14th June, 2011 to discuss the need to provide the accounts and the club had been informed of the possible termination if those were not forthcoming. On 19th July, 2011 the Legal Services had written to the club to once more request the accounts and had warned that failure to comply would result in a termination letter being issued and the club being required to vacate the Dixon Park Playing Fields. To date the club had not provided the required accounts.*

*Accordingly, it was recommended that, on the basis that the club was in breach of the Facility Management Agreement at the Dixon Park Playing Fields, that steps be taken to terminate the agreement in accordance with Clause 18(i) of the aforementioned Agreement.*

*The Committee adopted the recommendation but agreed that the club be given until the date of the Council meeting scheduled to be held on 3rd October to submit properly constituted accounts."*

After discussion, during which the Director advised the Committee that the financial accounts of the club had still not been received, the Committee agreed to affirm its decision of 15th September and that, on the basis that the Club was in breach of the Facility Management Agreement at the Dixon Park Playing Fields, steps be taken to terminate the agreement in accordance with Clause 18(i) of the aforementioned Agreement.

**Departmental Improvement Programme –  
Review of Landscape Planning and Development Unit**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“1. Relevant Background Information**

**As part of the Parks and Leisure improvement programme, the Organisational Development Unit was requested to undertake an operational review of the Landscape Planning and Development Unit.**

**The Landscape Planning and Development Unit is responsible to the Principal Parks and Cemeteries Services Development Manager for the design and implementation of landscape and minor civil engineering work associated with parks, open spaces, playing fields and play areas.**

**It was agreed at the Parks and Leisure Committee meeting of 12th August, 2010 that the post of Principal Parks and Cemeteries Services Development Manager be re-designated to the post of Departmental Portfolio Programme Manager.**

**It was also agreed at the committee meeting of 12th August 2010 that the posts of Woodland and Recreation Manager, Woodland and Recreation Officer and Woodland and Recreation Assistant be transferred to the Landscape Planning and Development Unit. As a result of this structural change, the unit now also has responsibility for the provision of urban forestry and recreation services.**

**Following the transfer of the 3 Woodland and Recreation Unit posts and also following the re-designation of the post of Principal Parks and Cemeteries Services Development Manager to that of Departmental Portfolio Programme Manager, reporting lines and structural positions have changed for all posts across the unit.**

**There has been no recruitment of Industrial Placement Students since September 2006.**

**The unit's project portfolio continues to expand and there is an ongoing demand for resources – projects that staff are currently involved in include the following:**

- Playing Pitches Strategy
- Connswater Greenway
- Refurbishment of Woodvale and Dunville Parks
- Green Flag standards
- Park Management Plans
- Inspections of Roads and Footpaths
- Play Refurbishment and independent inspections
- Tree Health Condition Surveys
- Tree Preservation Orders

There will also be additional work for the Unit once the High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 becomes operational (within the next 6 months). However capacity will have to be determined once the extent of the workload is known.

## 2. Key Issues

The operational review of the Landscape Planning and Development Unit has been completed and recommends that:

- All job descriptions are updated to better reflect the structural changes that have already occurred. New job descriptions will also take account of current and anticipated workload (for example the management of the High Hedges legislation).
- All job description are also updated to build on the synergies already present with the Project Management Unit (PMU) and Portfolio Office in the Property and Projects Department in order to deliver a co-ordinated, high quality project managed portfolio for Parks and Leisure Department.
- The posts of Landscape Planner and Landscape Architect are amalgamated to a new post of Senior Landscape Planning and Development Officer thereby increasing flexibility across the unit and reducing the number of posts.
- The posts of Assistant Landscape Planner and Assistant Landscape Architect are amalgamated to a new post of Landscape Planning and Development Officer thereby increasing flexibility across the unit and reducing the number of posts.

A management (desktop) job evaluation exercise carried out on updated job descriptions has indicated the following grades:

- Landscape Planning and Development Manager, PO 7
- Senior Civil Engineering Officer, PO 3
- Senior Landscape Planning and Development Officer, PO 3
- Civil Engineering Officer, SO 2

- Landscape Planning and Development Officer, SO 2
- Senior Woodland and Recreation Officer, PO 3
- Woodland and Recreation Officer, SO 2
- Woodland and Recreation Arboreal Officer, SO 1

The review also recommends the deletion of 2 Industrial Placement Students and 1 currently vacant Assistant Architect from the structure thereby reducing the overall staffing establishment from 14 to 11.

3. **Resource Implications**

**Finance**

It is proposed to re-grade the posts within the Landscape Planning and Development Unit following a management led job evaluation exercise. The net cost of the proposed upgrades is £14,405. It is anticipated that this cost will be met by the savings generated from the deletion of 3 x posts from the current organisational structure (see section 2) and also from the termination of a number of agency contracts within the unit.

The proposed change to grades have been incorporated into the 2012/2013 budget estimates.

**Human resources**

Staff from the Landscape Planning and Development Unit and their trade union representatives have been consulted throughout the review process and all staff in substantive posts are in agreement with the proposed structure.

4. **Equality and Good Relations Implications**

None.

5. **Recommendations**

Committee is asked to agree the proposed organisational structure and that work continues with staff and trade unions to implement the agreed structure.

6. **Decision Tracking**

Assistant Director of Parks and Leisure responsible for implementation.”

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

### **Facility Management Agreements**

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided an update on the review of Facility Management Agreements and agreed to the holding of a Members' Consultation Workshop in November to enable further details to be provided and to consider future options. It was agreed further that the meeting would commence at 5.00 p.m.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour Programme - Update**

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided an overview of the anti-social behaviour in parks and leisure facilities by electoral area, the recent work of the Anti-Social Behaviour Co-ordinator in the Parks and Leisure Department and the key areas of focus and expenditure at present.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and requested that the issue of anti-social behaviour in Parks and Leisure Facilities be highlighted in a future edition of City Matters and that the article provide details of the costs to the ratepayer of such incidents.

### **London 2012 Olympic Torch Bearer Nomination**

The Committee was reminded that the Northern Ireland leg of the 2012 Olympic Torch Relay would culminate in Belfast on 6th June, 2012 after a three-day tour across the region. The route had been selected by the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games and was not open to change, since the final selection of both the route and torch bearers rested with the London 2012 Olympic Games organisers. The Olympic Flame will be welcomed to the City Hall for a celebration event on the evening of 6th June, 2012 with the cortege being met by a range of performers, some of who would be engaged by the Organising Committee.

The Director of Parks and Leisure reported that there had been an opportunity for the general public and a range of sporting and non-sporting individuals to be nominated to carry the Olympic Flame through Belfast, with the public selection process for those individuals having closed at the end of June. However, the Council had been afforded the opportunity to nominate by 31st October, 2011, two individuals to carry the Olympic Flame. He pointed out that, due to the guidelines which had been published by the Organising Committee, the Council was not permitted to make a public call or campaign for nominations. He explained that, at the meeting of the 2012 Events Officer Working Group which had been held in July, it had been noted that Council officers already had a list of inspirational individuals nominated by the public for the Belfast Sports Awards in March, 2011 and it had been suggested that those individuals could form a shortlist for nominations. That course of action had been approved by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 26th September, when it had agreed also that the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Parks and Leisure Committee, together with officers from the Development Unit, look at the winners from those awards as potential nominees for the Council's two torch bearer nominees.

The Director reported that that exercise had now been completed and the Group was recommending that the Committee approve the selection of Ms. Laura McCann, St. Dominic's Grammar School, and Mr. Matt Shields, North Belfast Harriers, as the two Torch Bearer nominees.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

### **Suffolk Football Club**

The Director submitted for the Committee's consideration the undernoted report:

**“1. Relevant Background Information**

The Committee is reminded that at its meetings in March and April 2011 it received reports regarding a request from Suffolk Football Club. The football club had sought, and subsequently received, approval from the council to bring an existing unused pitch at Suffolk Playing Fields into use through the provision of new drainage. The club further proposed to erect a spectator rail and enclose the new pitch with a security fence. It was noted that the pitch would be used by Suffolk Football Club. The council did not make a financial contribution to the works which were undertaken with Alpha funding obtained through Groundwork NI. It was agreed that the council would enter into a 7 year management agreement with the club in respect of the pitch and that the club will at its own expense undertake the management and maintenance of the pitch and fencing.

This work has now been completed and the pitch will be available for use in advance of the new season in August 2012.

In the report in April 2011 it was reported that the club had aspirations to further develop the site and construct separate changing facilities to service the new pitch. This would mean that the facilities would meet the ground requirements of the Intermediate League. The report noted that this would be a separate issue.

The club has now been given an opportunity to acquire two modular buildings, one would provide changing facilities and the other would function as a meeting room and for pre and post match entertainment for travelling teams. These buildings are not new and have been in use by another club. Suffolk Football Club is seeking permission to locate temporary changing facilities on the site. It is their proposal to locate it adjacent to pitch and close to the former school site.

**2. Key Issues**

There are a number of issues associated with the proposal:

1. The club has recently applied for planning approval for its proposal. It is hoped that this will be through within 4-6 months, however, as the building is temporary in nature it is likely that the planning approval, if granted, will be time limited.
2. A request has been made to the Property and Projects Department to inspect the buildings to determine their condition and fitness for purpose, the survey is yet to be completed, however providing the report is positive this shouldn't be an impediment to progress.
3. The club has stated that it will undertake the management and maintenance of the new facility at its own expense.
4. The club will also acquire the structure and undertake the installation at its own expense; there will be no financial cost to the council.
5. The proposed location for the changing facilities is currently subject to a right of way agreement with NIE. Preliminary discussions with NIE have indicated that the matter can be resolved, however this is subject to further discussion and confirmation is awaited.
6. Should these issues be resolved the club is seeking agreement to locate the facilities on the site for a period of 7 years, consistent with the agreement regarding the refurbishment of the pitch. Following discussions with Estates it is proposed that the installation of the proposed temporary buildings be incorporated within the terms and conditions of the proposed facilities management agreement as agreed in April 2011.

The Committee is also asked to note that the club has requested permission to 'store' the structures on site until such time as they can be installed. This is not something that the council would normally do; although the council currently permits through licence containers to be kept on site for storage purposes;

Should the Committee agree to the request from the club to store the structures on site pending installation it will be necessary to enter into a temporary licence agreement with the club. This would be subject to a time limit and a fee would be charged. Although the intention is to store the structures



behind a security fence it would be appropriate for the club to obtain the necessary public liability insurance to indemnify the council in the event of damage, theft, injury resulting from the storage of the structures should the Committee agree to this request.

3. **Resource Implications**

**Financial**

There are no financial implications for the council. The cost of acquisition and installation will be met by the club; the building maintenance and utility costs will also be met by the club.

**Human Resources**

There are no additional human resource implications other than officer time.

**Asset and Other Implications**

The provision of the temporary building will, together with other associated works, bring the football ground up to the required standard for intermediate and amateur league football.

4 **Equality and Good Relations Considerations**

In relation to the building the main issue would relate to DDA compliance, it will be requirement that the building meets the necessary standard.

5. **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. Note the report.
2. Agree in principle to enter into an appropriate management agreement with the club to permit the installation of the temporary changing facilities subject to planning approval and agreement with NIE regarding the right of way.
3. Agree that Legal Services be instructed to incorporate within the facilities management agreement agreed in April 2011 to incorporate these temporary buildings.

4. **Consider whether it wishes to permit the club to store, under licence and subject to conditions, the temporary structures at the Suffolk Playing Field site.**
5. **Agree that recommendations 2 – 4 above are conditional on receiving a positive report on the condition of the buildings.**

6. **Decision Tracking**

**A further report will be presented by the Departmental Portfolio Programme Manager following a decision by the Planning Service.”**

The Committee adopted the recommendation and agreed to permit the Club to store, under license and subject to conditions, the temporary structures at the Suffolk Playing Field site.

**Out-of-Hours Use of Leisure Centres**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 11th December, 2008, it had agreed to extend the out-of-hours use of leisure centres to all clubs, and adopted a charging rate of £20 per hour as a contribution towards utilities costs. The Committee had agreed further, at its meeting on 11th June, 2009, to extend the out-of-hours use of leisure centre scheme to all sporting organisations throughout the City and, at its meeting on 10th September, 2009, had agreed to reduce the charge to £10 per hour. Following inflationary price rises the current charge was £10.50. Currently there were seven water-based clubs/governing body and one tennis club which availed of the out-of-hours facilities totalling 30.5 hours per week.

The Director of Parks and Leisure reported that the legal agreements for the first phase of the scheme had ran from 1st October, 2009 till 31st March, 2011 and at this point all of the clubs were technically 'over-holding' on their agreements, which the Council needed to agree to formally continue or terminate. He pointed out that, as soon as it had been discovered that the timeframe for the agreements had expired, Legal Services had been contacted and had advised that retrospective Committee approval should be sought for the extension of the agreements for the periods from March, 2011 to the present date, as well as authority being sought to extend the existing agreements until March, 2012.

The Committee approved the extension of the out-of-hours agreements until 31st March, 2012.

**Catafalque at Belfast Crematorium**

The Committee was reminded that the City of Belfast Crematorium had opened in 1961. Over the previous five years the management responsible for the Crematorium had been made aware of the Health and Safety issues regarding the structure and the height of the existing catafalque in the funeral church, which related to the steps and actual height of the catafalque. The National Association of Funeral Directors had

expressed concern regarding the health and safety risks and had consulted with Councillors and had held meetings with the Director of Parks and Leisure to discuss the matter. The Property Maintenance Unit had been consulted and had drawn up detailed plans to remove the three steps at the base of the catafalque and reduce the height of it and install a safety rail. The appropriate groups had been consulted and had approved the plans.

It was reported that the work had been entered onto the Planned Maintenance Schedule for 2011/12 and required the funeral church to be closed to the public for the work to be completed safely. Accordingly, approval was being sought to temporarily close the operational side of the crematorium for three days from Saturday 12th till Monday, 14th November, 2011 inclusive to enable the work to be undertaken. Arrangements would be made to offer additional cremation times in the weeks prior to and after the closure to minimise the disruption to bereaved families.

The Committee granted the approval sought.

#### **Small Grants Scheme**

The Committee was reminded that the Parks Events Small Grants Scheme had been operating successfully since 2006. Its original purpose had been to encourage community-based groups and organisations to organise and hold events in parks and thus increase their usage and instil a sense of ownership within the community. The scheme continued to be popular with community groups, churches, friends groups and other organisations. During 2011, a fund of £60,000 had been allocated for the scheme and a maximum grant of £2,250 had been made available to each group. A total of 33 applications had been received, with 31 groups having been funded for 51 different events to be held in 26 different sites.

The Director of Parks and Leisure reported that, in line with the Parks and Leisure Department's new vision of animating the parks and open spaces as much as possible and encouraging community events and participation, it was hoped that the scheme could be further developed over the next number of years. To that end, the Department had made a bid for the current £60,000 budget to be increased to £100,000 in the draft estimates for 2012/13. This would be subject to the Committee's approval later in the year. Therefore, it was proposed that the Department continued to run the scheme for a further year either at the existing level or, pending approval, at the increased level.

Officers would be working to develop the grants scheme in the intervening period and would be examining the criteria and structure of the grant award process in order to encourage a broad range of applicants and help increase participation in the events in parks and open spaces, with any revision being submitted to the Committee for review and approval.

After discussion, during which the Director undertook to review also the application form and process, the Committee approved the continuation of the Parks Small Grants Scheme for 2012/13 and, subject to approval through the estimates process, to extend the scheme to provide a fund of £100,000.

### **Schools Cup at Mallusk Playing Fields**

The Director reported that the Northern Ireland Schools' Football Association had submitted a request to the Council to hold the quarter finals of the Northern Ireland Schools' Cup at the Mallusk Playing Fields. It was anticipated that the event would attract approximately 600 participants, aged between twelve and eighteen years, from twenty-five schools across Northern Ireland. The proposed date for the event was Wednesday, 15th February, 2012.

He pointed out that the event had taken place last year at Mallusk for the first time and the use of a single venue had enhanced and promoted cross-community participation and engagement and ensured effective and efficient running of the finals. He outlined for the information of the Members the media coverage which would be associated with the event and stated that the event organisers had agreed to the completion of an event management plan and to address all relevant issues, including health and safety, to the satisfaction of the Council. Each participating school would cover the cost of its transport, whilst the sponsors of the Cup would cover the cost of the referees. The potential revenue to be derived for the Council for the use of the pitches would be approximately £375, however, the organisers had submitted an application for the free use of both the pitches and ancillary facilities.

The organisers had requested also that four pitches be marked to accommodate junior football. These would be required to be remarked again in time for the weekend league fixtures. As the event would be held during mid-week there would be no displacement to regular users.

The Committee approved the free use of the facilities at the City of Belfast Playing Fields by the Northern Ireland Schools' Football Association for the holding of the quarter finals of the Schools' Cup, subject to the completion of an appropriate event management plan to the satisfaction of the Council.

### **Multi-Users Games Area at Waterworks (Upper)**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **"1 Relevant Background Information**

**The Committee is asked to note that the former Community and Recreation (Parks and Cemeteries) Sub-Committee in October 2005, considered and approved a report on the 'Waterworks and Westland Road Recreation Facility'. This approval followed an earlier presentation by Groundwork NI and the Westland Road Community Group in March 2005. A copy of the minute has been circulated and outlines a series of proposals to develop and enhance the site including a playground and sensory garden which have both been delivered. One of the main items was the provision of a Multi-User Games Area (MUGA).**

**At the time the sub-committee had agreed to the provision of land for the purpose of constructing the MUGA.**

The community, in partnership with Groundwork NI, have now secured funding through Peace III to construct a MUGA. Officers have been in discussion with Groundwork NI to facilitate the construction of the work. However, the council has now been asked to sign up to a partnership arrangement as set out by the funding organisation. This partnership agreement will be between the council, Groundwork NI and the Westland community.

The specific obligations in the agreement for the council are as follows:

1. To maintain and ensure the multi-use area at Westland and to ensure that it remains as a public asset post completion of the Sharing our Space Programme.
2. To work with the Westland community and Groundwork NI to put in place an appropriate management arrangement;
3. To participate in a project working group with other stakeholders; and
4. To work in conjunction with Groundwork NI to meet the overarching objectives of the programme.

With the exception of point 1 above the arrangement is merely asking the council to engage in discussions at this time. Members are assured that any human resource or financial implications arising from these discussions will be reported back to Committee for consideration and approval to proceed.

## 2. Key Issues

The Committee is asked to note that:

1. There remain a number of issues to be resolved regarding the physical construction of the MUGA, these include the need for a contamination survey;
2. Whilst the scheme is not a council project it will be subject to the council's gates review process;
3. Access to the proposed site will be via a piece of land adjacent to the proposed location and which is currently leased to a third party. However, preliminary discussions with the lessee indicate that an accommodation re access will be facilitated;

In order for the project to progress the Committee is asked to consider the following:

1. To reaffirm its decision to permit the construction of the MUGA on council land;

2. The partnership agreement requests that council undertake the maintenance and insurance of the facility. This had not been previously agreed. While it is acknowledged that it is unlikely that the facility would be economically viable no provision has been made in the revenue estimates for the maintenance; excluding damage owing to vandalism. The maintenance costs could be in the region of £5–£10,000 per annum. It would approach the higher figure if it became necessary during the year to power hose it should the drainage system become blocked; the Committee is asked to consider whether it wishes to accede to request that the council undertakes the maintenance of the facility and incorporates it within the schedule of insurance for the purposes of public liability;
3. Members will be aware that the terms and conditions of external funding normally require that the project be sustained for a fixed period of time which can vary according to the level of funding; Groundwork has confirmed with the funding body that it would require a period of 10 years from completion of the works and Groundwork has requested that the council agree to meet the maintenance liability for that same period;
4. The construction of the MUGA will be managed by Groundwork NI and it will be necessary to enter into a licence agreement with Groundwork NI and/or its contractor to provide access to the site for the purpose of construction and to indemnify the council from any loss, damage or injury which may be incurred during the construction;
5. The officers work with Groundwork NI and the community to develop an appropriate management agreement and programme for the facilities consistent with the objectives of the funding.

### 3 Resource Implications

#### Financial

The capital cost of the project will be met through external funding. It is estimated that the annual revenue cost of management and maintenance will be in the region of £5-10,000 in the absence of any growth in 2012/2013 it will be necessary to meet the cost from existing budgets.

#### Human Resources

There are no additional human resource implications; inspections and maintenance work will be incorporated within existing resources.

### **Asset and Other Implications**

The construction of the MUGA will increase provision for the area and enhance opportunities for participation in sporting activities.

#### **4 Equality and Good Relations Considerations**

The project is being progressed as Shared Space Programme and issues around access to the facility will be addressed through the management plan.

#### **5 Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to:

1. Note the report;
2. Agree that the council will undertake the maintenance of the facility for a period of at least 10 years from completion and undertake to cover public liability insurance;
3. Agree that the council enter into a licence agreement in relation to the construction; and
4. Agree that officers work with Groundwork NI and the community to develop an appropriate management agreement and programme for the facilities consistent with the objectives of the funding.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

### **Hire of Musgrave Bowling Pavilion**

The Committee was advised that a request had been received from Mr. Alan Gibson, on behalf of a non-denominational Christian group, to hire the Musgrave Bowling Pavilion each Friday evening from 8.00 p.m. till 9.00 p.m., commencing 20th January till 27th April, 2012 (inclusive) for a series of gospel meetings. The group would require the use of the main hall, reception, toilets and the car park adjacent to the building. Access to the pavilion would be through the main vehicular gate off Hospital Road, which would be opened and closed by staff before commencement at the end of each hire period. The event was anticipated to attract between eighty and one hundred people each week. In addition, the Group had requested permission to use a small battery operated public address system.

The applicant had confirmed that there would be no charge or fee nor collection of money at the gospel meetings. No food or catering was required and no advertising would be placed outside or around the Council's property, however, Mr. Gibson wished to hand out invitation cards outside the park.

The Assistant Director pointed out that the Council's events policy placed responsibility for appropriate management of waste associated with an event with the event organiser. Officers would ensure that the organiser was in receipt of the

Council's Events Policy – Handbook for Applicants, which outlined clearly that arrangements must be in place for litter collection and gave guidance on appropriate steps, based on the scale of the event proposed. As with all events, but particularly because of the evening element involved in this event, it was essential that health and safety and other issues were addressed through the preparation of an event management plan by the event organisers to the satisfaction of Council officers.

The current policy permitted the use of Council premises for religious activity as long as there was no breach of Section 76 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Council had previously granted Mr. Gibson permission to hold gospel meetings at the Ormeau Bowling Pavilion in 2011 and those had proved to be a success. There would be no hire charge for the period of hire in line with the Council's pricing policy, however, Mr. Gibson had agreed to contribute towards the cost of providing staff cover for the event.

Accordingly it was recommended that permission be granted for the use of the Musgrave Bowling Pavilion as outlined, subject to satisfactory terms being agreed with the Director of Parks and Leisure and on the condition that:

- (i) the event organisers resolved all operational issues to the Council's satisfaction;
- (ii) appropriate documentation was in place prior to the commencement of the event, to include an event management plan, public liability documentation and appropriate risk assessments;
- (iii) the event organisers meeting all statutory requirements;
- (iv) an agreement being reached regarding the charge for the use of the facility which would cover the Department's costs and the agreed hire charge; and
- (v) the building being inspected and deemed fit for use by the Council's health and safety officer.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

### **Mary Peters Track**

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided an update in relation to the progress on the refurbishment of the Mary Peters Track. The Committee agreed also to receive a presentation on the proposals for the track refurbishment at the next meeting.



### **Midnight Soccer Programme**

The Director submitted for the Committee's consideration the undernoted report:

**"1 Relevant Background Information**

The Midnight Soccer intervention programme ran from July to September 2011. In June 2011 Health and Environmental Services (Community Safety Section) successfully applied for summer intervention funding of £6,900 on behalf of the Parks and Leisure Department to develop this initiative. It was intended that midnight soccer would be available at the following leisure centres:

- Avoniel
- Ballysillan
- Olympia
- Whiterock

The proposal was developed to service all geographical areas of Belfast and was designed to operate primarily between the hours of 2000-2300 during Tuesday/Wednesday and Friday evenings.

The original objective of the project was to create a diversionary activity in order to help reduce traditionally higher levels of antisocial behaviour within Belfast during the summer months. In addition the expansion of community and voluntary sector linkages was identified as a mutual benefit to operating the project.

**2 Key Issues**

Following the award of funding an implementation plan involving representatives from Parks and Leisure, Community Safety, PSNI and Belfast Community Sports Development Network (BCSDN) was developed and the initial Midnight Soccer session was held at Avoniel Leisure Centre on Friday 8 July. BCSDN were chosen to co-ordinate all coaching and refereeing aspects of the programme and the council managed infrastructure, logistics, advertising, safety and equipment provision.

The initial plan was expanded to include an under 14 age group in addition to the targetted 14-17 age group. The under 14 sessions were named 'Community Kick About' and due to the programme expansion and leisure centre availability the Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group (LORAG) sports pitch was also utilised as part of the programme. This further enhanced the ability of the scheme to reach a greater volume of young people.

An interim report during early August indicated that the programme was enjoying a notable level of success. Average weekly attendances for both age groups were recorded as follows:

- Avoniel: 75
- Ballysillan: 105
- Olympia: 45 (limited pitch availability)
- LORAG: 75
- Whiterock: 85

Whilst previous Midnight Soccer initiatives had been undertaken in specific geographical areas this programme has formed the basis of the first structured citywide involvement from Parks and Leisure in conjunction with partners. It should also be noted that traditionally the East Belfast area has struggled to successfully implement such a programme however this year's initiative attracted nearly 600 young people to Avoniel Leisure Centre for soccer participation. Ballysillan Leisure Centre enjoyed the single highest participation level when numbers had to be limited to 130 during a Friday evening session.

A 'Finals Day' was organised at Ballysillan Leisure Centre for Sunday 4th September 2011. This celebratory event invited the best performing nine teams during the programme, throughout the city, to Ballysillan for a league style competition. Following the league style event a knock out finale resulted in the Village team defeating Santos by a score of 1-0. The successful Village team received their trophy from the Lord Mayor.

In addition to competing teams from geographical Belfast areas, players originating from Romania and Hungary participated enthusiastically throughout the initiative.

Programme feedback involved surveying 104 participants on 19th August 2011. The resulting surveys indicated that some 77% of participants identified that they would have either been consuming alcohol (27%) taking narcotics (18%) or walking the streets (32%) if the programme had not been commissioned. 96% of young people advised that they had enjoyed the initiative and the optimum ages ranges were aged 14-15 (37%).

The programme has surpassed officer expectations and all involved are keen to develop and expand the Midnight Soccer initiative during 2012.

### **3 Resource Implications**

#### **Human Resources**

A Leisure Centre Manager was directly deployed to co-ordinate the programme development and management. Support was received from Leisure Operations, Leisure Development, Community Safety, P&L ASB Co-ordinator and BCSDN.

#### **Financial**

<b><u>Costs</u></b>		<b><u>Funding</u></b>	
BCSDN coaching and referring costs	£10,500	Department of Justice	£6,900
Advertising/ equipment purchase	£2,500	Council contribution	£9,300
Transport	£3,200		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b><u>£16,200</u></b>		<b><u>£16,200</u></b>

#### **Asset and Other Implications**

Facilities utilised during periods of low usage and times of closure.

### **4 Equality and Good Relations Implications**

This was a cross community scheme which contributed positively to good relations in the city.

### **5 Recommendations**

That Committee note the contents of this report and support the proposed development of this initiative during 2012.”

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

#### **Approval to Seek Tenders**

The Director of Parks and Leisure sought and was granted authority, to instigate tendering exercises in relation to the undernoted items:

<u>Tender</u>	<u>Potential Annual Cost/Revenue</u>
Supply and delivery of haylage, meadow hay and barley straw at the Belfast Zoo	£20,000 per annum
Supply and delivery of fruit and vegetables at the Belfast Zoo	£100,000 per annum
Supply, delivery and application of top dressing sand for parks and playing fields	£60,000 per annum
Provision of research, market testing, evaluation and facilitation services	£50,000 per annum
Supply of fertiliser, grass seed and pesticides for parks and playing fields	£100,000 per annum
Supply and delivery of memorial seats at cemetery sites	£16,000 per annum, depending on demand

The Committee noted that all tenders would be evaluated on the basis of both cost and quality and would be awarded to the most economically advantageous tender submitted by the Director in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation.

### **Consultation on Enabling Legislation for National Parks**

The Committee was advised that, in March, prior to the Assembly elections, the Department of the Environment had published a White Paper on Enabling Legislation for National Parks as a first step towards bringing forward legislation to allow for the creation of national parks in Northern Ireland. At that time the Department had indicated that, following the elections, an expanded paper would be published for formal consultation. Accordingly a new document had been produced at the end of August and included the white paper as an appendix for ease of reference. The document looked in more detail at the governance options for a national park and sought answers to a number of specific questions on national park issues, with a view to developing policy proposals for enabling legislation to be brought before the Assembly. The closing date for responses was 31st October, 2011.

Accordingly it was proposed that the undernoted comments be submitted as the Council's response to the consultation exercise:

**“Appendix 2**

**Belfast City Council’s response to the  
Consultation Document on Enabling  
Legislation for National Parks (August 2011)**

**1. *What are your views on the proposed aims of national parks?***

Belfast City Council welcomes the proposed aims of national parks and views these as aiming to balance conservation of natural and cultural resources with developing tourism and sustainable business.

**2. *What are your views on the proposed criteria for identifying areas that may be suitable as national parks?***

We would see the criteria as appropriate and sufficiently challenging to ensure that appropriate locations are designated. One point that we feel requires clarification is whether or not there is a minimum size requirement for areas to be considered for national park status.

**3. *What are your views on the proposed arrangements for consulting on a proposal to designate a specific area as a national park?***

We are in agreement with the proposed arrangements for consulting on a proposal to designate a specific area as a national park and welcome the proposal that any decisions will be Executive rather than Ministerial. We would suggest that the point in the process at which a public enquiry may be justified needs to be carefully considered.

**4. *What are your views on the proposed management framework arrangements for national parks?***

The Council believes that the management framework arrangement that is chosen for national parks needs to ensure both local and wider interests are taken into account, as national parks will be of regional significance. We would concur that the management body requires a long-term commitment from Government to support it.

**5. *What are your views on the proposed duties, functions and powers of a national park management body?***

The Council agrees that it would be important for any national park management body to provide the leadership needed to bring together all relevant organisations and individuals and to engage all relevant players in developing a vision and drawing up plans for the national park.

**6. *What are your views on the proposed role of a national park management body in planning matters?***

The Council would suggest that the management body should be a statutory consultee and we would welcome clarification on whether this will be the case.

**7. *What are your views on the governance options?***

The Council advocates any proposals which would strengthen the role of local government, and we would agree that the governance of national parks by district councils, as set out in option 4, would sit comfortably with proposed devolved powers such as land use planning and community planning. It would also complement areas that local authorities already have responsibility for such as local tourism and economic development. We recognise that there may be an issue with this option in that any site chosen may straddle several district council areas, and that there may be a conflict of interest in relation to planning issues. We also acknowledge that elsewhere there has been experience of this model not working.

With respect to option 1, we would have concerns that, with DoENI acting as Northern Ireland's National Parks Service, governance would be too centralised, with limited local focus and the danger that local needs would not be sufficiently considered.

We would also have concerns over options 2 and 3 as we feel that local representation is important on any body that oversees national parks and/or AONBs, and we feel that neither option would facilitate sufficient local representation.

We would agree that option 5 'would permit a flexible, responsive and innovative approach' and allow for local decision making with local buy-in. If this option is chosen, we believe that the appropriate and balanced involvement of district councils should assist in providing vital links to a wider knowledge base and be to the mutual benefit of both councils and the independent bodies.

The Council believes that the chosen governance option needs to ensure both regional and local interests are represented. Indeed, national parks are of regional significance and, as gateways to Northern Ireland, their governance could benefit from suitable inputs from Belfast City Council and/or the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau.

**8. *What are your views on the proposed constitution of a national park management body?***

We are in agreement with the proposed constitution of a national park management body and welcome the proposed mix of local and regional representation.

**9. *Do you share the Department's analysis in the Partial RIA that national parks will have little or no negative impact?***

The Council does not feel that it is in a position to comment, as national park locations have yet to be designated.

**10. *Are there any other comments which you wish to make about the Department's proposals?***

In relation to the section on access and occupiers' liability, the Council would like to highlight the following points:

The document states that 'it is proposed that district councils would continue to exercise their powers under the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order within the national park'.

The only piece of legislation in Northern Ireland that relates to access to the countryside is the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983. Under this order the Council has a duty to assert rights of ways and this is currently carried out through the Countryside Officer. However, whilst the legislation imposes a duty on Councils to assert, protect, keep open and free from obstruction rights of way, it does not actually empower the Council to enter another person's land to do so. We would also suggest that the legislation may need to be revisited with a view to making it more user-friendly for landowners, and that consideration should be given to issues such as removing liability from landowners to encourage promotion of access.

If a national park were to be instated, then there may be a perception that there is open access to all land within the park - as in England and Wales under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This would require careful consideration in order to protect private landowners.

Under the Access to the Countryside (NI) Order 1983, it is only possible to enter into a public path agreement, ie dedicating land in perpetuity, which is not favourable to many landowners. It is possible through the Recreation & Youth (NI) Order 1986 to enter into a permissive path order thereby constraining the land for a limited time. This approach is generally more favourable with landowners, and if access is to be achieved then this opportunity needs to be explored and strengthened.

**We would also seek clarification around payment for land access with regard to the value and source of this money.**

**The Council would also ask that consideration is given at any site designated as a national park to the proper management of waste and adequate public toilet provision.**

**Whilst the Council welcomes developments that increase tourism to Northern Ireland, we would be concerned that tourism funding would be directed towards new national parks to the detriment of other areas.**

**The Council feels that In advance of proposed designations, equality issues are difficult to define and that equality issues may be become apparent when preliminary designations are published.”**

The Committee approved the foregoing comments as the Council’s response.

#### **Healthier Families Progress Report**

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided details on the progress achieved under the Healthier Families Programme.

#### **Association for Public Service Excellence Awards 2011**

The Committee was reminded that the Parks and Leisure Department had submitted an entry in the annual Association for Public Service Excellence Awards 2011 in the category of Best Efficiency for the Parks and Leisure Departmental Improvement Programme. The Department had been selected as one of the top finalists but had been unsuccessful in winning the award.

Noted.

#### **Support for Sport – Small Development Grants and Hospitality Applications**

The Committee noted a schedule of Support for Sport applications in relation to small development grants and hospitality applications which had been approved by the Director of Parks in accordance with the authority delegated to him. A copy of the schedule was available on the Council’s modern.gov website.

Chairman