Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	A Draft Policy Framework for (Re)naming Parks and Leisure Facilities
Date:	14 August 2008
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Emer Boyle, Policy and Business Development Manager

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to:

(i) outline the background to the development of a policy for how to manage requests from the public and community groups for the re-naming of Parks and Leisure facilities; and

(ii) present a draft policy framework for managing future requests for discussion and agreement by Members.

Relevant Background Information

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

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

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

Purpose of the Policy

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

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

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

There are three main types of naming situations this policy intends to address:
(i) The opening or reopening of parks and leisure facilities;
(ii) Providing recognition of major financial contributions;
(iii) Requests for "Memorialisation" or honouring individuals in recognition of "significant" contributions to the area or particular location.

Background Policy Context (External and Internal)

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

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

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

(Further details on each of these are attached at Appendix 1.)

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

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

(Further details on each of these are also attached at Appendix 1.)

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

Current Position

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

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

Key Issues

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

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

General Principles

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

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

Cost
One of the main issues for consideration when deciding to implement a policy on this issue will be the financial implications for the Department. Currently the Parks and Leisure Department requires a substantial increase in finance to enable it to complete essential maintenance at a number of facilities as well as a number of the development activities outlined in the departmental plan. A policy which requires both staff time and departmental finances (which the department cannot foresee, plan for and allocate financial spend to) could potentially have the effect of diverting resources which should be dedicated to essential activities already in the workplan.

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

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

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

Policy Options

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

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

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

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

Recommendation and Proposed Criteria
Based on all of the research and the need to strike a balance between defining a strict policy and placing undue limits on the democratic process, Option 3 is recommended. It is further recommended that the policy apply only to local parks

and leisure facilities and that the Council would not wish to have its City, District and Country Parks re-named (a list of the City, District and Country Parks is attached at Appendix 5).

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

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

1.0 Proposed Criteria

1.1 Where the request made is to memorialise a person

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

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

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

- The name should provide a sense of place, reflecting the geographic location, community, neighbourhood or street where the park, facility or amenity is located;
- The name should reflect the historical significance of the area or reflects unique characteristics of the site (unique flora / fauna).

1.4 In ALL (re)naming cases:

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

1.5 Names should not be considered which:

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

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

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

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

Resource Implications

Financial
The recommended option will place the financial implications of carrying out consultation on the proposed (re)name change and any subsequent changes to signage on the applicant.
There will be financial implications for the Council in terms of updating literature/Council documents.

Human Resources
The implementation and management of the proposed framework will require officer time which is difficult to predict at this stage and which would require re-examination after a suggested12 month period. There will be resource implications in terms of officer time required to verify the consultation process.

Recommendations

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

Documents Attached

Appendix 1: additional information (internal and external policy context).
Appendix 2:(Re)naming Parks and Leisure Facilities Process.
Appendix 3: Stage 1: (Re)naming request guidelines.
Appendix 4: Stage 2: Consultation guidelines.
Appendix 5: List of Parks and Leisure Department City, District and Country Parks.