



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Victoria Park
Date:	14 August 2008
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Robert Scott, Conservation and Promotion Manager Stephen Walker, Principal Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager

Relevant Background Information

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

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

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

1. Egg Culling

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

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

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

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

2. Tree Cover

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

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

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

Key Issues

The Committee is asked to note the following points:

1. Belfast City Airport has experienced significant growth which contributes to the economic well being of the region;
2. there are wider issues and concerns associated with this growth in terms of the impact on the health and wellbeing of the local community and on the environment;
3. Airport authorities have identified bird strikes as a potential public safety issue and have engaged in egg culling for the past number of years

- under licence from EHS; the airport wishes to continue this practice and are seeking Council approval to enter Council land;
4. The airport has further commissioned a report which identifies trees in Victoria Park as a potential public safety issue and are seeking to proactively manage tree cover in the Park;

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

Resource Implications

Financial

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

Human Resources

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

Asset and Other Implications

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

Recommendations

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

Key to Abbreviations

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

Documents Attached

None.

