Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Universal design principles – workshops for Parks staff
Date:	15 April 2010
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Caroline Wilson, Policy and Business Development Manager

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to inform Committee regarding a learning and development proposal for parks staff on the Universal Design model.

Relevant Background Information

Universal design refers to a set of design principles that produces buildings, products and environments that are usable and effective for everyone, including people with disabilities. The intent of universal design is to simplify life for everyone by making products, communications, and the built environment more usable by as many people as possible at little or no extra cost. The principles of Universal Design were developed in North Carolina State University and have been widely adopted internationally.

Key Issues

The Council has been invited to become a partner with QUB (School of Architecture), PLACE – the Architecture and Built Environment Centre for Northern Ireland and Dublin City Council on a learning and development programme, based on the universal principles. The programme is funded by CARDI, the Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland. The process is as follows:

Phase 1 – two preliminary workshops with parks staff and users focused on Botanic Gardens. It will explore the issues of accessibility for older people, tourists and people with disabilities and an outline of the universal design (UD) principles. The focus would be on Botanic initially, as a case study, but it is agreed that we could broaden the discussion to look at other parks in the city and the application of the UD principles elsewhere. In the first instance, however, Botanic Gardens exposes many issues pertinent for UD principles, with its diverse group of users.

Phase 2 – a learning and development programme which looks at more of the

detail of UD principles, offers training to our operational staff in UD principles and develops concepts for a park. The Department would nominate staff for participation, and it is likely that this will be drawn from across the city's parks.

The process will be facilitated by Stakeholder Design, an independent consultancy, who will facilitate the workshops, provide technical advice and support the user group engagement. The outputs from these 2 phases are:
- Increased understanding of UD principles;
- Skills and capacity to integrate UD principles into service delivery;
- Shared learning opportunities with Dublin City Council, who are adopting the model for Grafton Street;
- Report, concept drawings and rationale for capital investment – completed by Stakeholder Design and partners; and
- Robust evidence to proceed to a larger funding application to implement the recommended capital improvements. This evidence will also serve our own capital prioritisation purposes.

While all our parks are compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act requirements, Universal Design is an innovative model which promotes a commitment to accessibility beyond the compliance model.

There is potential to develop this work into a full Interreg application using materials from phases 1 and 2 as source material, with potentially up to several million Euros for capital improvements. However, there is no commitment required at this stage to pursue a full Interreg application. Any recommendation to proceed to a full capital bid would be presented to Committee for their consideration, at a later date.

Resource Implications
<u>inancial</u> No cost to the Council for phases 1 and 2 except for staff time.

Recommendations
Members are asked to note the contents of the report.

Decision Tracking
A report outlining the findings and recommendations from the process will be presented to Committee in October 2010 by the Policy and Business Development Manager.

Key to Abbreviations
QUB – Queen's University Belfast CARDI – Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland UD – Universal Design PLACE – Planning, Landscape, Architecture, Community and Environment

Documents attached
None.