

PARKS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

11th NOVEMBER, 2010

“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 (GWNI) 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.”

