

City of Belfast Golf Club
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12 January 2011

Dear Councillor,

I am writing on behalf of the City of Belfast Golf Club, to seek the City Council's agreement to a 15-year lease & management agreement for the City of Belfast Golf Course, together with the permission to build a clubhouse at the facility. This agreement is required to allow City of Belfast Golf Club to pursue a development programme at the course, which would be of great benefit to the wider community of North Belfast and would produce additional financial savings for Belfast City Council.

As you will be aware, City of Belfast Golf Club agreed a five-year Facilities Management Agreement with Belfast City Council in 2005 to manage the golf course facility at Mallusk. The Golf Club (previously named Mallusk G.C.) has been using the course for the past 25 years and now wishes to consolidate the future of the club with the development of the clubhouse therefore providing an improved facility for all the community.

The City of Belfast Golf Club is one of the few "stand alone" facility management arrangements, which promotes the City of Belfast in its activities and in its name.

Over the past six years the Golf Club has developed the facility in partnership with Belfast City Council, increasing both course membership and pay and play visitors. As the experienced and multi-disciplined management team at the Club give their services on voluntary bases, this partnership has produced significant savings for Belfast City Council. The professional management team is a structured committee that provides full accountability and audited accounts to Belfast City Council and have all the requisite experience to manage the course under a code of good governance on behalf of Belfast City Council. Successful financial performance in the past six years of the agreement underpins the capabilities of the team to manage the course in partnership with Belfast City Council.

City of Belfast Golf Club has found a niche market for this cross-community project, attracting people of all ages and gender from across all sections of the community, especially senior citizens and juveniles not normally associated with golf, who appreciate golf at an affordable price. Promotional offers such as Early Bird Specials, Twilight Golf, Senior Citizens Specials and reduced weekend fees for young people have proven very popular within the local community including those from North Belfast. Many of our customers are unable to afford expensive privately owned golf courses. The club offers junior course membership from £70 per year and senior citizens course membership for £160 compared to £800/£1,000 for private golf club membership. This is a community golf course supported by the wider community of North Belfast that offers affordable course memberships / daily green fees to all.

During the period of the Facilities Management Agreement, City of the Belfast Golf Club has carried out major improvements resulting in an enhanced course and despite the disruption caused by the DRD water pipe installation (over a two-year period) the course has been extended.

Fred Daly, Open Champion 1947, once described the course as having the potential to become one of the best short courses in Ireland and we believe that this potential is now being fulfilled.

At present the management agreement is being operated on short-term extensions, however the Golf Club Council is anxious to seek a long-term agreement, as they have to consider the employment of six staff and the continuation of course memberships. The present agreement expires in July 2011 and unless the agreement is extended the club will be required to give notice to their staff, as continuity of employment cannot be assured.

The existing clubhouse at the course consists of a single storey portacabin that is 25 years old. The ageing building is in constant need of repair and maintenance resulting in escalating costs for Belfast City Council. The Council has carried out two surveys of the building, and these have highlighted defects in the structure including rot to timber on external plywood sheeting and timber frames and recommended replacement of all sanitary appliance. The building is poorly insulated, has single glazing and is heated electrically making it expensive to run and not very Eco friendly. Belfast City Council considered replacing the building, however this was considered cost prohibitive at the time.

Following a feasibility study commissioned by City of Belfast Golf Club, we are anxious to construct a clubhouse on the site to replace the existing portacabin. The new building would greatly enhance the image and profile of the course by offering modern facilities, which would be available to all customers / users of the facility which may include local charities and schools. The building would also comply with current building regulations in regard to disability and child protection and be Eco friendly. It would also provide immediate savings in relation to the work already identified by Belfast City Council for the present building and provide future savings by avoiding escalating maintenance costs to the ageing portacabin. The Golf Club appreciate that Belfast City Council funding for capital projects is limited in these difficult times, hence the club is seeking outside financial support to construct the clubhouse with no financial implications to Belfast City Council and no additional resource implications for the Council. Drawings and financial projections have already been made available to council officials indicating cash resources would be available to cover a monthly commercial mortgage if grant aided-funding is unsuccessful. However, in order to avail of the necessary grant-aided funding from various sources or a commercial mortgage, a minimum 15-year lease & management agreement would be required.

At present Belfast City Council is also addressing a problem regarding complaints from a new housing development at Rogan Wood. The council has been asked to consider the construction of a 12 metre high fence to prevent golf balls intruding on residential property in Rogan Wood. The estimated cost of this fence and alteration to the high voltage cables is in the region of £40k, however if a 15-year lease/agreement could be agreed, City of Belfast Golf Club would be willing to procure the installation of the fence / alteration of power lines & contribute 50% of the total cost. The Belfast City Council could be invoiced for the remaining 50% on completion of the installation. Planning permission has already been approved for a ball catch fence.

Any lease / management agreement could be subject to a buy out clause, should Belfast City Council decide to cancel the agreement for commercial reasons during the term of the agreement.

While we appreciate the committee have to take into consideration any future development of the site, a 15-year agreement would allow the Council sufficient time to have a clearer position regarding the long-term future of the site within the context of a revise BMAP

PA Long

President,
City of Belfast Golf Club