



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Watch This Space
Date:	10 March 2011
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Agnes McNulty, Open Spaces and Active Living Manager

1	Relevant Background Information
	<p>The Committee is reminded that at its meeting on 14 January 2010 it agreed to the continuation of the Watch This Space Programme to June 2011. The Watch This Space programme is carried out in partnership between Belfast City Council and the Ulster Wildlife Trust. The committee also agreed that an evaluation should be undertaken of the Watch This Space Programme to inform the development of the 2011/12 business plan & revenue estimates.</p> <p>This programme aimed to meet three needs identified within the council's Open Spaces Strategy, as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The need for education and promotional programmes to increase understanding and appreciation of natural heritage and biodiversity in parks across the city.2. Develop environmental education programmes and heritage packs for local schools in line with the national curriculum.3. Improve and promote access to natural heritage and biodiversity. <p>In October 2010, following a quotation exercise, Sustainable Northern Ireland was commissioned to undertake an external evaluation of the Programme and in particular to assess:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ the extent to which the programme delivered its initial objectives;▪ if the programme is value for money for the council; and▪ if there is a demand for the programme to continue and if so how it should be delivered in the future. <p>The evaluation included interviews and information gathering with key programme staff within the council and the Ulster Wildlife Trust, members of the Parks and Leisure Committee, teachers and parents. The evaluation also included a review of all relevant programme documentation and measurement of programme outputs against initial</p>

	<p>agreed key programme success criteria. A copy of the evaluation report is included in Appendix 1.</p> <p>The purpose of this report is to consider the findings and agree the future management of the programme.</p>
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2	Key Issues
	<p>The evaluation report identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a number of measurable outputs of the programme namely; 1,404 school children have attended the programme including 40 secondary school children; 50 children have been involved in the Saturday clubs; 14 annual council fun days have included input from the programme each year; comprehensive web-based resources have been developed and are available from the council's and Ulster Wildlife Trust's websites and significant publicity for the council has been generated in the local press. ▪ That the programme had been positively received with children demonstrating an improved understanding of biodiversity and appreciating the resources within their local area and that schools would want to be involved if the programme continues beyond June 2011. ▪ that it would not save the council money to manage the programme in-house. Furthermore, it would eliminate the added value the Ulster Wildlife Trust brings to the programme through their network of other trusts, their ability to use additional guides to support the programme and their experience in delivering environmental education programmes. Therefore the option for the council to deliver this programme internally has not been considered further at this time. It is proposed however that a review will be undertaken at the end of year two of the contract to assess whether an external service provider is still the best option for the delivery of the programme. <p>In summary, the report concluded that the programme had been successful, had met the programme's objectives and there is significant demand for its continuation. Its recommendations included that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the programme should be committed to for another three years; ▪ an external delivery partner should be used to deliver the programme; ▪ a longer term strategy is required to deliver the programme; ▪ measureable objectives and targets for the programme should be developed; and ▪ the programme should be better integrated within the council's Parks and Leisure Department and should be used to help deliver the educational aspects of all departmental strategies. <p>The key issue for the committee is to consider whether to continue to support this community based, educational outreach focused programme within our parks.</p> <p>To assist Members in making a decision as to the future management of</p>

the programme, two possible options have been identified below with potential advantages and disadvantages. Members are asked to be mindful that funding for the programme has been included within the 2011/12 budget and that costs presented in options are for a 9 month period from June 2011 to March 2012.

Option 1: to withdraw the Watch This Space programme from June 2011.

Pros

- Financial saving of £48,750 – no further cost.

Cons

- Break in relationship with schools and local communities which has been built up over the last 3 - 4 years.
- Saturday clubs would probably not continue as local parents not ready to take over their management.
- No further resources developed.
- No environmental education element to events such as Summer Fun Days.

Option 2: to continue with the Watch This Space Programme from June 2011 to March 2012 in partnership with the Ulster Wildlife Trust

Pros

- Opportunity to refine and broaden programme content to include health and well being, sustainability and environmental aspects.
- Closer integration with the Community Parks' Outreach Officers and Community Park Managers
- Opportunity to build on and develop existing work relationships with schools and local communities.
- Continued educational outreach work, school visits to local parks, Saturday clubs as per existing programme.
- Development of further resources.
- Increased understanding and appreciation by children of natural heritage and biodiversity in parks throughout the city.
- Environmental education element included in Summer Fun Days 2011
- Continued positive public relations for Parks.
- Opportunity to further develop teacher training element.
- Positive impact on the delivery of the council's Open Spaces Strategy and Local Biodiversity Action Plan.

Cons

- Cost of £48, 750

Conclusion

The risk is that should the programme cease, it is unlikely that any other organisation will fund a similar programme in these communities where open space is largely owned by the council.

	<p>The evaluation report has concluded that the programme has been successful, there is significant demand for its continuation, it has met its original objectives and should be committed to for another three years. It is therefore proposed that the existing programme should be continued until March 2012 to coincide with the Ulster Wildlife Trust's business planning and financial cycle whilst allowing officers time to put in place a tender exercise for delivery of the programme for the next three years. The tender would be for the period of one year from April 2012 with the option to renew on an annual basis for a further period of two years. The tenders would be evaluated on both cost and quality and the contract would be awarded to the most economically advantageous tender.</p> <p>In the interim it is proposed that a workshop be held with interested parties to refine and develop the programme content and a report brought back to Committee in June.</p>
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3	Resource Implications
	<p><u>Financial</u> The financial implications of the two options above are as follows: Option 1 – saving of £48,750 Option 2 – cost of £48,750</p> <p><u>Human Resources</u> There are no additional human resources implications for option 1 as the programme will be managed by the Open Spaces and Active Living Manager. Option 2 will require the Open Spaces and Active Living Manager to prepare and issue a tender for the delivery of the programme in conjunction with the Procurement Section.</p> <p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u> The programme continues to significantly improve the profile of the parks and will enhance the value of the assets. It will support the physical elements of parks management in the sites selected.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
	None.

5	Recommendations
	<p>It is recommended that the committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ agree to the continuation of the programme with the Ulster Wildlife Trust from June 2011 to March 2012. A report will be brought back to committee in June with more detail on the programme content and objectives; and ▪ approve the proposed tendering exercise as set out above and authorise the Director of Parks and Leisure under the scheme of delegation to award the successful tender.

6	Decision Tracking
	Officer responsible: Open Space and Active Living Manager. All actions to be completed by April 2012.

7	Key to Abbreviations
	None.

8	Documents Attached
	Appendix 1: Evaluation Report