



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Alexandra Park Update
Date:	10 November 2011
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Paula Irvine, Outreach Manager

1.	Relevant Background Information
	<p>In late 2008 Groundwork NI was awarded £998,000 under the European Regional Development Fund Peace III Programme, Priority 1.1 Building Positive Relations at a Local Level, to deliver the Reconciling Communities through Regeneration (RCTC) programme.</p> <p>In consultation with the council and the local community, Alexandra Park was chosen as a specific project within RCTC, with a budget allocation of £50,000 towards physical regeneration works. In November 2009, a community/inter-agency project steering group (the Steering Group) was established</p> <p>In November 2010, Committee approved regeneration proposals made by the Steering Group including development of a nature trail, installation of seating and interpretive panels on the history and wildlife within the park and development of a picnic area. Site work was completed earlier this year with the assistance of an additional £50,000 secured from the Alpha Programme (the Landfill Communities Fund distribution body).</p> <p>Members will be aware of the funding agreement, agreed at the September 2011 committee, between Groundwork NI and the Council regarding Alexandra Park. This agreement was to ensure that the progress to date is built upon and that sustainable partnerships and relationships continue to be developed.</p> <p>Groundwork continue to work with the cross community steering group, the Community Park Manager, Community Outreach Manager and the Department's Antisocial Behaviour Co-ordinator to extend the activities that came about through the RCTR and ALPHA funding.</p>

2.	Key Issues
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In February of this year Groundwork NI carried out consultation with residents to gauge opinions on installing an access point in the peace wall running through Alexandra Park. The survey responses were in favour of opening the peace wall temporarily as a pilot with possible extension following evaluation. It was agreed that the gate would be constructed in time for a formal opening in September 2011 and would trial for three months to December 2011. Currently the gate is open from 9.00am to 3.00pm Monday to Friday.

The formal opening of the peace wall took place on Friday 16 September 2011. It was opened by Justice Minister David Ford and school children from Currie and Holy Family primary schools. The Chair of the Parks and Leisure Committee also attended the launch event and spoke on behalf of Belfast City Council. The launch was well attended and received positive media coverage not only locally but also nationally and internationally.

Since the opening, several prestigious visits have taken place to the park. On Thursday 6 October 2011 the park was visited by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement upon request by one of the project funders, SEUPB; and on Thursday 13 October 2011 Ms Jane B Zimmerman and Ms Kamala Shirin Lakhdhir, who are representatives of the US Embassy, visited the park and the Deputy Chair of the Parks and Leisure Committee also attended on this occasion. As a result of her visit the US Consul has offered to host the Steering Group's planning day in December when the group will discuss future plans for the park and develop an action plan for the way forward.

On Saturday 17 September the community enjoyed a wide range of activities at a family fun day to celebrate the completion of the regeneration works. The event was free for all to attend and activities included:

- bouncy castles;
- a zip line across the peace wall;
- a penalty shoot out;
- an environmental scavenger hunt;
- fishing demonstrations;
- a climbing wall;
- a variety of art workshops, musical entertainment, face painting, magician and street entertainment; and
- a birds of prey display

Attendance on the day was estimated at just over 500 people. The Lord Mayor attended the fun day and walked throughout the whole park to see the variety of activities on offer at the fun day.

Since then several workshops have been organised with the surrounding schools to work on both historical and environmental artwork for the interpretive panels installed within the park as part of the regeneration work. Work will also be commencing with the local youth clubs to try and engage some of the more marginalised young people who 'hang out' in

	<p>the park and give them a more positive role in the regeneration of the park. This ongoing engagement with young people within the community ensures community buy-in and ownership. The artwork and information should be printed on the interpretive panels by January/mid February and will add educational value to the park and its users.</p> <p>Groundwork NI and the council continue to monitor and evaluate the success of the pilot through community feedback and reports of incidents or antisocial behaviour directly linked to the access gate. To date there have been no incidents of antisocial behaviour reported to the antisocial behaviour officer or to the PSNI.</p> <p>On completion of the pilot Groundwork NI in partnership with the council will carry out any further necessary evaluation and consultation around the possibility of extending the opening hours of the access gate in line with park opening and closing times and making it permanent. Following her visit to the park, the Committee Deputy Chair has suggested that the Committee might want to receive a presentation on the pilot once it has concluded.</p>
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3.	Resource Implications
	This work is being carried out by Groundwork with involvement from the Department's outreach and parks staff in line with the agreement with Groundwork. The cost to the council is £11,000 in the 11/12 financial year.

4.	Equality and Good Relations Implications
	The Alexandra Park project has been developed with the full involvement of the good relations team, local communities and all relevant stakeholders and is completely in line with the Council's responsibilities in this area.

5.	Recommendations
	Members are asked to note the content of this update report and to agree to a presentation on the project at the conclusion of the pilot of the opening of the gate in the park

6.	Decision Tracking
	None.

7.	Key to Abbreviations
	None.

8.	Documents attached
	None.