



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Parks and Leisure Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Redevelopment of Belfast Zoo Playground
<b>Date:</b>	12 January 2012
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Rose Crozier, Assistant Director of Parks and Leisure
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Mark Challis, Zoo Manager

1.	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Tourism Development Scheme (TDS) is the programme devised by Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) to allocate capital funds made available from the Executive budget to tourism related capital projects. The TDS is a competitive process and requires applicants to make bids for funding from the scheme.
1.2	Members will recall that a successful application to this fund for £250,000 grant support in 2006 resulted in the building of the new entrance, visitor centre and shop facility at the zoo in 2008.
1.3	The NITB TDS for 2011-2013 was launched at the end of November 2011. Applications to the scheme close on 06 January 2012. Preference will be given to projects that can be completed by 31 March 2013.
1.4	In order to be eligible, applications have to come from facilities within one of the NITB's 9 key destination areas, which include Belfast. Further, the NITB has identified priority products which will be developed to meet with increased visitor expectations and market need, and the scheme guidelines specifically mention play areas as part of a wider theme park or visitor attraction, for which funding will be provided to support.
1.5	Successful applications will receive up to a 50% contribution from the TDS towards the capital cost of the project.
1.6	Members will recall the Committee report of 12 August 2010 regarding the Parks Playground Improvement Programme. The report highlighted the poor condition of the zoo's playground, which needed a wider range of play activities to reflect the visitor numbers, and recommended: 'The Zoo is a major tourist and visitor attraction and should provide a play area consistent with its status as a major attraction.'

1.7	During 2011, staff from the Parks Landscape Planning and Development department designed a new scheme for a proposed playground at the zoo. The plan presents an enhanced facility, which will better cope with increased visitor numbers now attending the zoo, provide a wider range of play equipment suitable for a variety of ages and abilities, and which creates better links and learning opportunities between play and the key themes of the zoo, ie animals, habitats and biodiversity.
1.8	It is proposed that a strategic outline case be developed for this project to be considered for inclusion in the capital programme.

<b>2.</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	The NITB TDS 2011-2013 opened recently and applications to it have to be received by 06 January 2012.
2.2	The TDS is a competitive process and offers up to 50% grant funding for eligible projects.
2.3	The need for redevelopment of the playground at the zoo has been a priority since the Committee report of June 2010. A plan for a new playground has been developed during 2011. The new scheme has a budget cost of £430,000.
2.4	The redevelopment of the playground at Belfast Zoo is eligible for TDS funding and the project provides a close match with TDS criteria.

<b>3.</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
3.1	Should the application to the NITB TDS for a 50% grant towards the cost of a new playground at the zoo be successful, it is anticipated that, with Members support, the remaining 50% costs (i.e. £215,000) for the project will be made via a financial contribution from the council.
3.2	Members should also be aware that the Development Committee agreed that the council would make three other applications to the NITB TDS, for conference facilities at the Waterfront Hall, for the relocation of the Belfast Welcome Centre (BWC) and for Belfast Titanic/Maritime signage.
3.3	Depending on the success of the 4 projects and thus the total potential council funding commitment, a further process of review of ongoing support for the 4 projects may be required.

<b>4.</b>	<b>Equality and good relations implications</b>
4.1	The provision of an enhanced playground at the zoo will provide improved play facilities to a greater number of visitors, of a wider age and ability range than is currently available.

<b>5.</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
5.1	Members are asked to consider supporting the application to the NITB TDS for an enhanced playground facility at the zoo, and to agree in principle to meeting the council contribution from the council's capital programme for the purposes of this application.
5.2	Any commitment by the council would be subject to the zoo project being awarded the TDS grant funding, and subject to further consideration of priorities depending the success of the 3 other council applications for TDS funding.

<b>6.</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
6.1	A further report will be presented to the Committee in Spring 2012 regarding the NITB TDS application.

<b>7.</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
	TDS – Tourism development Scheme NITB – Northern Ireland Tourist Board BWC – Belfast Welcome Centre

<b>8.</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	None.