



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Growing Communities Strategy
Date:	9 February 2012
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officers:	Emer Boyle, Policy and Business Development Manager Maria McAleer, Policy and Business Development Officer

1.	Relevant Background Information
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) update Members on the progress of the development of the “Growing Communities” strategy for Belfast and seek an opportunity for a committee briefing or workshop on the subject in March;(ii) present a draft process for consideration on how allotments should be allocated;(iii) present proposed sites for the possible development of four new community gardens across the city in line with the decision of this committee in November 2011 (allocation of corporate underspend);(iv) seek authority for the granting of interim financial support to the Council’s existing Community Gardens for the period from April-June 2012, pending the implementation of an agreed longer-term approach in line with the emerging strategy’s recommendations.
1.2	<p><u>The Emerging “Growing Communities” Strategy</u></p> <p>Since late September 2011 the department, with assistance from its partner organisations, the Public Health Agency and Belfast Healthy Cities, has been developing a ‘Growing Communities’ strategy for Belfast. It is anticipated that following the conclusion of the final steering group meeting in March 2012 and a period of consultation the strategy will be available for consideration by the Parks and Leisure committee.</p>
1.3	<p>The wider health and wellbeing benefits of ‘growing your own’ are well documented. The ‘Growing Communities’ strategy is just one of a number of projects from across Northern Ireland being used to demonstrate how Health Equity in All Policy (HEIAP) works in practice by using it to help align the strategy with the Council’s wider remit to improve the quality of life for all its citizens.</p>
1.4	<p>In December 2011 Sustainable Northern Ireland completed a baseline study for the council of ‘Grow your Own’ provision within Belfast. The</p>

1.5	<p>purpose of this study and report is to enable the council to amend if necessary current operational practices and to apply the recommendations of this study to the development of a 'Growing Communities' strategy for Belfast. A copy of the executive summary is attached at Appendix 1 and the full report can be provided to Members on request.</p> <p>A steering group made up of over 40 representatives from the private, community and voluntary and statutory sectors has met for monthly workshops since September 2011. Officers are now using the outputs of these workshops to draft sections of the strategy.</p>
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2.	Key Issues
2.1	<p>Belfast City Council has a long history of allotment provision and currently provides 207 allotments across four locations in Belfast: Annadale, Belmont, Blythefield and Ballysillan. However, demand for allotments in the Belfast council area continually outweighs supply. In April 2012 new allotments (co-funded by the Public Health Agency) will open at Musgrave Park, Belfast and soil testing and survey activity is ongoing in relation to the development of new allotments at Falls Park, Belfast.</p> <p>To date the allocation of allotments has been adhoc and inconsistent, with differing approaches being taken at different sites. This has led to confusion for people on the waiting list. In light of the emerging strategy and the imminent availability of new allotments for the public, the following draft process is being proposed as the Council's approach to allotment allocation.</p> <p><u>Proposed Allotment Allocation Process</u></p>
2.2	<p>A suggested procedure for the allocation of ALL council allotments including those at new locations is as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the first instance allotment plots will be allocated to Belfast residents only as detailed on the waiting list for each location. 2. Secondly it is proposed that all non-Belfast residents on existing allotment waiting lists will be contacted in writing by the department to advise that the council cannot consider applications for allotments from non-Belfast residents and therefore they are being removed from the waiting list. In future no requests from non-residents will be accepted. 3. Thirdly, it is proposed that remaining Belfast residents on all of the waiting lists are sent a letter asking them to confirm both that they wish to remain on the waiting list and whether or not they would consider an alternative location from those sites that are already in existence and those that are currently being developed. Following receipt of replies by the date specified it is proposed that all waiting lists are amalgamated and that a single master allotment waiting list is compiled and managed centrally within the department. Those residents who have been on waiting lists for a specific site will retain their position for this site until a plot becomes available. If they accept a plot at their alternate location they will lose this position. 4. If a resident makes a new application for an allotment at one of our 4 existing sites or the 2 that are currently being developed they will be added to the master list. No new applications will be accepted from

the date of committee approval until after the closing date for receipt of replies from those currently on the waiting list.

5. If the council develops a new allotment site in the first instance those people on the waiting list will be contacted to ascertain their interest in taking a plot at this site before new names are added to the master list for this site.

4 New Community Gardens (allocation of corporate under-spend)

2.3

In recent years our four community gardens have been funded under Priority 1.1 of the European Unions' Peace III programme, as part of the Belfast local action plan. We also have received valuable support from external funders such as the Public Health Agency in the development of Community Gardens. To date it is the council's experience that community gardening has a positive impact on local communities as well as delivering wider health, wellbeing, environmental, economic and social benefits for those involved.

To further support the development of community gardens and subject to the approval of proposed sites by Members, the council has agreed that a total of £200k from the corporate under utilised funds should be invested in the development of Community Garden projects across the City (agreed at the November meeting of the Committee).

2.4

Using data from the baseline study for the strategy plus local knowledge from the parks managers and outreach managers in the department, a long list of potential sites for investment in community gardens has been developed for review and consideration by committee. In addition, officers have developed draft criteria and scoring matrix, also for review, in order to inform the committee of how the process will work. The sites proposed were as follows:

2.5

Site Name	Area
Victoria Park	East
Avoniel Leisure Centre	East
Elmgrove	East
Orangefield Park	East
Knocknagoney	East
Taughmonagh	South
Wedderburn	South
Benmore	South
Finlay Park	North
Hammer CS	North
Grosvenor	West
Falls Park	West

The proposed matrix (attached at Appendix 3) has been developed specifically for use in the prioritization of sites for using the £200K immediately and it is not proposed that these criteria would also apply to any future matrix or approach developed for the strategy. This is due to the fact that there are a number of criteria of particular relevance with regard to the allocation of these funds, ie,

- that the site is council owned;
- that the site is ready for development; and
- that there are no other funds immediately available to complete the

2.6	<p>development.</p> <p>An application of the matrix, weightings and criteria as proposed would suggest the following sites for development (the top score in each area N,S,E and W):</p>									
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="480 376 810 510">Geographical Area</th> <th data-bbox="810 376 1230 510">Proposed Community Garden development options</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="480 510 810 555">North Belfast</td> <td data-bbox="810 510 1230 555">Finlay Park</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="480 555 810 600">South Belfast</td> <td data-bbox="810 555 1230 600">Wedderburn Park</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="480 600 810 674">East Belfast</td> <td data-bbox="810 600 1230 674">Knocknagoney (CS)</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="480 674 810 757">West Belfast</td> <td data-bbox="810 674 1230 757">Falls Park Grosvenor</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Geographical Area	Proposed Community Garden development options	North Belfast	Finlay Park	South Belfast	Wedderburn Park	East Belfast	Knocknagoney (CS)	West Belfast
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2.8	<p><u>Interim Financial Support for Facilitation at Existing Community Gardens</u> The council's existing community gardens were mostly funded through Peace III but require ongoing community engagement, "grow-your-own" facilitation and both horticultural and "in-kind" support from the council. In practice a number of partners are involved in providing this support through a range of mechanisms, eg, funded either directly to the organisation (GROW at Waterworks community garden) or through a partner agreement with Conservation Volunteers NI (Ballysillan, Musgrave).</p> <p>A longer term approach will be developed in line with the "Growing Communities" strategy in which the council will seek (a) suitable contract partner(s) to help deliver facilitation across the city's community gardens. In the meantime it is proposed that each existing community garden be provided some assistance on an interim basis. This would allow the communities involved to prepare for the forthcoming growing season.</p> <p>Based on an assessment of facilitation time needed (4 hours per week, per garden over 12 weeks) a sum of £2000 per garden (x7 = £14,000) is suggested. These funds would be allocated to the partner currently managing the facilitation work in the gardens; - GROW; CVNI and Larne Lough Nurseries.</p>									

3.	Resource Implications
	<p><u>Financial</u> Proposed allocation for community garden development to be allocated from the corporate under spend in line with the decision of the November committee (£200K); £14,000 for community garden facilitation to come from the 2011-12 departmental budget.</p> <p><u>Human Resources</u> It is our ambition that existing gardeners will be involved in the planned facilitation work in the gardens over the next number of months, with a</p>

	<p>view to expanding departmental expertise in this area.</p> <p><u>Asset and other Implications</u> This report refers to 2 emerging community gardens (Grove and Musgrave) and 4 new sites, all of which will enhance existing council assets and will inevitably require ongoing input, oversight and maintenance by the council.</p>
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4.	Equality and good relations implications
	The processes proposed in this report will be subject to the council's existing equality screening process.

5.	Recommendations
	<p>That the Committee agrees to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the content of the baseline study completed by Sustainable NI attached at Appendix 1. 2. Agree the process for allocation of allotments; 3. Review, comment and agree the proposed matrix, criteria, weightings and sites for the establishment of 4 new community gardens; 4. Agree that interim financial support, totalling £14,000 can be allocated to existing partners for facilitation work in existing community gardens for the forthcoming growing season (subject to appropriate legal agreements being in place).

6.	Decision Tracking
	A report outlining Growing Communities' Draft Strategy and an associated action plan will be presented to Committee in April/May 2012 by the Policy and Business Development Manager.

7.	Key to Abbreviations
	<p>HEIAP: Health equity in all policies PHA: Public Health Agency SEUPB: Special EU programmes body CVNI: Conservation Volunteers NI</p>

8.	Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 - Sustainable NI executive summary report of December 2011 Appendix 2 – Map of existing and proposed new community gardens Appendix 3 – Draft proposed matrix, weightings and scoring criteria</p>