



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	ESRC Knowledge Research Project – “Walkability” Model for the City
Date:	9 February 2012
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Emer Boyle, Policy and Business Development Manager

1.	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek committee support to become a research partner in a knowledge exchange project which has been developed by Queens University Belfast (QUB) in conjunction with a number of other partners in Belfast and across Northern Ireland. Our proposed contribution would be £10,000 plus officer time “in-kind”.
1.2	The project aims to maximise the policy impact of research already undertaken on “walkability”, by extending the applicability of developed policy tools to a variety of public bodies and further dissemination to potential practice-users in order to increase the evidence base for interventions in the built environment aimed at promoting physical activity.

2.	Key Issues
2.1	In June last year the department signalled its interest in being a partner in the project and provided a letter of support for the application, pending formal committee approval.
2.2	The ESRC has reviewed the application from QUB and made an offer of funding for the project to go ahead.
2.3	This project aims to maximise the policy impact of research already undertaken on walkability, particularly the development of a <i>Real Walkability Network</i> , which has initially been generated as part of the PARC project based on a study area of the Connswater Community Greenway in East Belfast (on which the committee has previously received a presentation).

2.4	<p>This project aims to extend the applicability of the developed policy tools to cover the two main cities of Northern Ireland; Belfast and Derry, so that the model then covers 37% of the population and some of the most deprived communities in the region. The project will disseminate the use of this model to practitioners in order to increase the evidence base for interventions in the built environment aimed at promoting physical activity.</p> <p>The value of the project is reflected in the large number of public bodies that have been willing to become partners, including Belfast and Derry city councils, the Department of Regional Development, the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety, the Public Health Agency and Belfast Healthy Cities, as well as cities in England who have provided match funding and in kind support of over £88,000. The project will run for 12 months and employ two research assistants to help undertake the following three separate work packages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work Package 1: model consolidation and validation (months 1-5). This work package will involve the appointment, training and placement of 2 research assistants to be based in Belfast and Derry city councils respectively, during which time they will consolidate and extend the model developed for East Belfast so that it has operational coverage of the entire 2 local authority areas. • Work Package 2: project integration and sustainability (months 6-10). This stage will involve a process of integrating the walkability models and other elements of spatial analysis into the existing physical activity-related programmes of the partner organisations to improve their effectiveness, efficiency and accuracy. This stage of the project will also involve developing the capacity of project partners to ensure the sustainability of the place-specific walkability models. • Work Package 3: knowledge dissemination and engagement with wider practitioner communities (months 11-12). This stage will involve an evaluation and a report of the benefits, costs and opportunities arising from the operational deployment of walkability models and their integration with other central and local government responsibilities and initiatives.
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3.	Resource Implications
3.1	<p><u>Financial</u> Provision has been made within the departmental estimates for 2012-13 for the £10,000 financial contribution.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Human Resources</u> The indirect “in-kind” contribution for this research project is estimated to be in the region of £5,000 and would come from the officer time within the Policy and Business Development team in Parks and Leisure. The research assistant would be based within the Parks and Leisure team in Adelaide Exchange.</p>

3.3	<u>Asset and Other Implications</u> None.
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4.	Equality and good relations implications
	All recruitment and development will be conducted by QUB in line with the public body's obligations in the area of equality and good relations.

5.	Recommendations
	Members are asked to support the council's involvement in this knowledge exchange research project and to approve the financial contribution of £10,000 to the project in addition to the in-kind officer support to the development of the project.

6.	Decision Tracking
	None.

7.	Key to Abbreviations
	<p>QUB: Queens University Belfast</p> <p>ESRC: Economic and Social Research Council</p> <p>PARC: Physical Activity and the Rejuvenation of Connswater (QUB project to evaluate Connswater Community Greenway)</p>

8.	Documents Attached
	None.