Project Name: Connswater Community Greenway

Decision Required

Approval required to utilise the vacant space (See google map appendix 1) within the grounds of Avoniel Leisure Centre as a community garden to facilitate training, engagement and ownership by the local community with the Connswater Community Greenway and councils parks and open spaces.

It is anticipated that this space will be utilised by local community groups with the design and development of the space supported by Conservation Volunteers Northern Ireland (CVNI) or other training provider through a contract with East Belfast Partnerships Connswater Community Greenway team.

Project Background

The Connswater Community Greenway (CCG) is a £32m investment in east Belfast which will develop 16kms of new paths connecting our parks and open spaces, developing new community space and creating a living landmark through the heart of east Belfast. The funding package for the project includes £23.5m from the Big Lotteries Living Landmarks Programme, £3m from DSD’s Belfast Regeneration Office and £4m from Belfast City Council. In addition, Belfast City Council has targeted significant staff resources to the management and delivery of the capital works contract.

Rivers Agency is working in partnership with the Connswater Community Greenway and key elements of the east Belfast Flood Alleviation Scheme will be delivered through a joint contract with Belfast City Council and the approved contractor bringing the value of the project to circa £40m.

The Greenway will deliver significant improvements to parks and open spaces and has a broad community engagement strategy to ensure community ownership and engagement with the space. A key element of the engagement strategy is the development of community gardens along the route allowing local community organisations and residents the opportunity to develop horticultural skills, social networks, ownership of and engagement with the CCG. The CCG Team already hold expressions of interest from local community groups East Belfast Counselling Services, East Belfast Mission, Lower Castlereagh Community Group and Bloomfield Community Association.

Note:
This document may be treated as a summary and each section supported by backup documentation as required. The nature and scale of the project will determine the level of detail. Further guidelines on completing this form are available on BelNET.

Justification for Project: (Business case, including anticipated benefits or savings).
The Connswater Community Greenway, with its £40 million investment in green and open spaces in east Belfast, represents a significant opportunity for both the community in east Belfast and Belfast City Council in terms of transforming the way people think about and use their green spaces. Aside from the impact the CCG will deliver in terms of the physical environment in east Belfast and increased access to enhanced, high quality green space major social benefits can be achieved in relation to health and well being, education and community confidence and safety.

Provision of community gardens at key locations represents an opportunity to encourage people into the parks and encourage people to develop healthier lifestyles. Community gardens can animate public space with the associated increased positive usage reducing incidents of anti-social behaviour. They are also an opportunity for local communities to develop a sense of ownership of their local park and open space.

Piloting a community garden at Avoniel Leisure Centre, on unused space, in much the same way as other areas of Belfast and across the UK will allow us, for a relatively small initial investment, to encourage community involvement with and ownership of parks and open spaces, contributing to the key judging criteria required for Green Flag status for our parks.

We are, therefore, seeking Belfast City Council approval to proceed with the development of the community garden element of the project and development of a management and maintenance plan for a pilot community garden at Avoniel Leisure Centre.

Any further comments/information and suggestions for Project Team nominations:

A key feature of the Connswater Community Greenway has been its ability to bring key stakeholders from within the community, business and statutory sectors together in real partnership to develop and deliver what we anticipate will be an award winning Greenway through one of Belfast and Northern Ireland's most deprived communities. It is our firm belief that the community gardens will only be successful if all key stakeholders are involved in the development, delivery and management of this resource.

The new BCC Parks management team have developed significant experience over the past few years in supporting the development and delivery of community gardens in other parts of the city and we would welcome their active participation in the development and delivery of a pilot community garden for the CCG. This would include assistance in developing management agreements, contracts, procurement of services etc…

The attached documents refer:

Appendix 1 – Site Plan
Appendix 2 – Original business case
Appendix 3 – Draft expression of interest pro-forma
Appendix 4 – Draft volunteer description (community gardens action team)
Estimated Costs for Acquisition, Development and Implementation:

There are no acquisition costs associated with this project. The identified land is currently owned by BCC and has not been used for many years. The area is already secure ensuring no cost requirements in relation to fencing/gating etc…

Initial CCG concept design and cost projections included associated costs for the development of 12 community allotments at Clarawood as an integral part of the community engagement strategy. Additional revenue costs were identified and recorded to facilitate horticultural training, leadership training, a green gym project, a community adoption scheme and volunteer taster sessions. Circa £70k has, therefore, been ring-fenced with the CCG revenue budget to support these activities.

As the project developed it became clear from community consultation that the emphasis needed to be placed on developing community gardens as opposed to community allotments and work commenced to identify suitable locations to pilot community gardens. Areas considered where Flora Street Walkway, Dixon Playing Fields, Orangefield Park and Victoria Park (Appendix 2 – Community Garden proposal).

As we went out to tender for the main contractor suitable locations for community gardens had not been confirmed and a decision was made to omit them from the tender document on the condition that, as the design and build contract was progressed, the community gardens would be introduced as a compensation event once suitable sites had been agreed in partnership BCC.

East Belfast Partnership had secured the services of CVNI to support the development and delivery of volunteer training etc… and they, or another suitably experienced and qualified provider will be able to assist with the development and delivery of a pilot community garden. We would anticipate that there would be some resource support in terms of council officers’ time such as the Parks Outreach Manager.

Likely additional costs would include a site contamination survey, materials, tools and plants.

Contamination survey - £2k
Materials, tools and plants - £2k

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Connswater Community Greenway – Community Gardens

1. Background

The Connswater Community Greenway Project has been developed by East Belfast Partnership and will create a linear park in east Belfast from Belfast Harbour Estate to the Castlereagh Hills linking existing green and open spaces in the east of the city and delivering 16 kms of cycle and footpaths along the Knock, Loop and Connswater Rivers.

Funding for the project has been secured from the Big Lottery Fund, Belfast City Council and the Department for Social Development with Rivers Agency developing a flood alleviation scheme for east Belfast to be delivered under a joint contract with the project.

Planning approval for the entire project was secured in March 2007 based on initial concept drawings and the long term sustainability of the project has been secured through a management and maintenance agreement with Belfast City Council.

The initial concept design incorporated several community elements designed to encourage community activity along the route and to engender a sense of community ownership within the project. One key element of this was the provision of a number of community gardens on the CCG for use by voluntary and community organisations and schools operating along the CCG route. The purpose of these gardens is to encourage the community to utilise the outdoor space, promote community ownership of the CCG, contribute to improved lifestyles for local residents, and develop horticultural skills and expertise within the community.

The initial concept drawings identified a site adjacent to Laburnum Playing Fields and Clarawood Estate as a potential location for these gardens.

2. Current Position

Since the initial concept drawings were produced and funding secured for the project there has been significant progress made to deliver project outcomes, in developing more robust design drawings for the project and selecting a preferred materials pallet. This follows the appointment of McAdam Design as Employers Agent for the CCG part of whose remit was to develop the CCG design to the point where design and costing were sufficient to enable East Belfast Partnership to proceed to appointing a Design and Build Contractor to deliver the capital element of the project.

Through consultation with BCC Parks Department, Roads Service, Rivers Agency, PSNI and other statutory and community partners McAdam Design have further developed the design and materials pallet to a level where it is now possible to proceed to full design and build tender.

As part of ongoing community engagement with the project the CCG team has held a large number of public meetings, consultations and presentations to both individual residents and community organisations in the area. This has been supported by a number of community activities along the CCG route including volunteering taster sessions as part of our Integrated Volunteer Development and Training Programme being delivered by Conservation Volunteers.
Our engagement with the community and residents has led the CCG Team to reconsider the number of community gardens required and the location of these gardens. Community groups consulted have indicated that locating all the community gardens adjacent to Clarawood Estate as detailed in the initial concept drawings does not reflect existing need for access to green space for growing in the Inner East Belfast area in particular.

Inner East Belfast has been defined by Government as the four electoral wards of the Mount, Ballymacarrett, Woodstock and Island and are in the top 10% most deprived wards in Northern Ireland as identified by the 2005 Noble Indices of Multiple Deprivation. These four wards score particularly poorly in relation to Physical Environment, Health and Education indicators.

Housing in these wards is predominantly high density, urban, terraced property with no gardens access. Several community organisations in the area have indicated that they would be very interested in assuming control of a community garden to enable their users/members to access space to grow their own fruit and vegetables but would not be in a position to travel to the proposed garden sites to do so. In their opinion the proposed location would be deemed relatively inaccessible situated, as they are, so close to Belfast’s outer ring.

Groups that have so far expressed an interest in acquiring a community garden are;

- **Imago Project** – A mental health befriending project based in east Belfast taking referrals from GP’s, Community Psychiatric Nurses and health visitors.

- **CODA** - A community drug awareness programme operating in east Belfast and work with drug and alcohol abusers

- **Area Youth Project** - BELB’s east Belfast Area Youth Project working with young people in the east of the city on an outreach basis.

- **East Belfast Surestart** Providing support and parenting skills for mothers/fathers and are interested in utilising community space for growing/planting and Green Gym type activities.

Each of these organisations has indicated that access to a community garden would enhance their project delivery. Both Imago and CODA have indicated that they would use a community garden to provide a focus for their clients and operate a garden around the Green Gym model.

The Area Youth Project has indicated that they would use a garden as a means to promote ownership in the environment and the greenway and as an educational resource developing horticultural practical and theoretical skills in young people from the area.

In addition other community organisations in the area such as Connswater Community and Leisure and Bloomfield Community Association have indicated that there is an interest within their community for the development of either community gardens or a community orchard, accessible to their community, along the CCG route.

### 3. Options
The Connswater Community represents a huge opportunity not just for the people of Belfast but also for Belfast City Council in terms of looking at new and innovative ways of engaging the community with our green and open spaces. In an urban environment, particularly an urban environment with limited access to green space for growing, provision of space for local residents to plant and grow has been adopted by councils and local authorities across the UK.

Belfast City Council currently has 4 garden sites across Belfast with one, Belmont gardens, situated in the east of the city. These gardens are heavily oversubscribed with large waiting lists. Belfast City Council is currently reviewing garden provision and developing an garden strategy for council run garden sites.

Currently there is no provision of community gardens in East Belfast and we are unaware of any such council run facility anywhere in the city.

A number of Options present themselves of which we have considered the following;

**Option 1**
Do nothing
No gardens, community or otherwise, to be located along the CCG route. This Option was rejected as it was felt there was both a need within the community for these gardens and a willingness within the Voluntary and Community sector to develop and deliver community gardens, particularly in the Inner East Belfast area.

**Option 2**
Develop community gardens in line with the initial CCG concept proposals with approximately 10 community gardens situated adjacent to Laburnum Playing Fields. This option was rejected due to the relative inaccessibility of the site, particularly for potential users located in the Inner East Belfast area were identified need for access to space for growing was highest.

**Option 3**
Locate a smaller number of individual community gardens at accessible locations along the CCG route. Gardens should be located closest to areas where need is greatest and community demand/ownership can be supported through strong community infrastructure.

4. **Recommendation**

After careful consideration of community opinion, need and best practice models in other areas of the UK the Connswater Community Greenway Team would, therefore, recommend that Belfast City Council approve the location of 3 community gardens along the CCG route, focusing locations on the Inner East Belfast area. This area has the strongest community infrastructure in terms of existing, well established community organisations and is also the area in which community organisations have expressed an interest in establishing and maintaining community gardens. We would suggest that we pilot one or two gardens adopting a phased approach to delivery at a location/locations to be agreed with Belfast City Council.

In addition to the benefits to the local community in terms of opportunities such as Green Gym programmes etc... community gardens would be a useful tool in terms of attracting new users to parks and green spaces along the route.

BCC will be submitting the completed CCG for a Green Flag award. With one of the key judging criteria listed as community involvement, community gardens in the parks
represent an opportunity to clearly demonstrate community involvement in management, maintenance and development of the parks.

Having consulted the most recent drawings and discussed this issue with local community organisations we would consider that the provision of a community garden or, indeed, a community orchard in the following areas would best address need and represent the best opportunity in terms of longer term sustainability.

1. Flora Street Walkway
2. Dixon Playing fields
3. Orangefield Park

We would recommend that the exact location of these gardens should be arrived at through discussion between Belfast City Council Parks Department, the CCG Team and McAdam Design although in the attached drawings CCG preferred locations are identified in red.

5. Way Forward

Once agreement has been reached on potential locations for Community Gardens, community organisations are requested to submit an expression of interest in securing a site. CCG would undertake an exercise to promote and advertise availability of community gardens utilising existing CCG Outreach Centres and East Belfast publications and newsletters such as EBCDA’s quarterly community newsheet. Expressions of interest received should detail intended programmes of work and outline what the organisation hopes to achieve from the garden.

- Expressions of interest will then be judged by a panel representative of Belfast City Council and the Connswater Community Greenway Project and plots allocated and the extent of management and maintenance agreed.

- Plots would initially be developed and funded under the CCG Project with advice from both BCC parks and Conservation Volunteers NI who have been appointed to deliver the CCG Integrated Volunteer Training and Activity Programme.

- Plots would be designed to ensure they are full accessible for all users, using raised beds etc…

- Training, advice and support would, initially, be provided by CVNI under the CCG umbrella ensuring key individuals within the relevant organisation had the necessary skills to manage a garden and teams of volunteers. Training would be provided through CCG’s Integrated Volunteer Training and Activities Programme.

- BCC and successful applicants will enter into a fixed period maintenance contract in respect of each garden with BCC agreeing to maintain external fencing, lighting and services etc… whilst the successful community organisation will agree to maintain and tend the actual garden itself. BCC will already have contract templates for use on their current garden sites, these could be developed to reflect their requirements in respect of community gardens.
• Contracts will be drafted to include conditions around maintenance that will allow BCC to terminate the contract should maintenance conditions not be satisfied.

• Given that each of these gardens will be located within an existing BCC park, park staff would be best placed to monitor maintenance and usage and on occasion deliver training as part of a parks outreach programme. To be agreed with Parks Department.

6. Conclusion

The Connswater Community Greenway, with its £40 million investment in green and open spaces in east Belfast represents a significant opportunity for both the community in east Belfast and Belfast City Council in terms of transforming the way people think about and use their green spaces. Aside from the impact the CCG will deliver in terms of the physical environment in east Belfast and increased access to enhanced, high quality green space major social benefits can be achieved in relation to heath and well being, education and community confidence and safety.

Provision of community gardens at the location suggested represents an opportunity to encourage people into the parks and encourage people to develop healthier lifestyles.

Piloting these gardens in much the same way as others across the UK have done will allow us, for a relatively small initial investment and with no real drain on existing resources within council, to encourage community involvement with and ownership of the parks, contributing to the key judging criteria required for Green Flag status for our parks.

We are, therefore, seeking Belfast City Council approval to proceed with the development of the community garden element of the project, their assistance in identifying and securing site locations and their agreement in terms of the development of a management and maintenance plan for community gardens along the CCG route.

Proposed garden pilot sites are identified by the sign below in the following google maps.
Expression of Interest for Community Gardens

This form is designed to enable local east Belfast community organisations to register their interest in developing and operating a community garden along the route of the Connswater Community Greenway (CCG).

Since the initial proposals for the CCG were developed a key element of the project has been the provision of and support for a number of community gardens along the route. It is envisaged that these gardens will be used by fully constituted local community groups and that support for their sustainable development and use of will be provided by the CCG Team and our key partners, Belfast City Council.

Completed expressions of interest will be used to determine community interest in developing community gardens and help both Belfast City Council and the CCG Team to determine the best locations on which to pilot the community garden scheme.

Applicant Details
1. Name of community organisation: .................................................................

2. Contact details (name/telephone/e-mail):
   Name: ............................  Telephone: .................  E-mail: .....................

   Postal Address: ...........................................................................................

3. Preferred location for community garden: ......................................................
   Please visit www.communitygreenway.co.uk and view design drawings. These can be used to identify your preferred location.

4. What are the main motivations behind your proposal to engage in community gardening?
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   ....................................................................................................................

5. What skills or experience, if any, do you or members of your organisation have in relation to the management and maintenance of a garden?
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Completion of this form does not in any way guarantee allocation of a community garden to your community organisation. We propose to follow up on each questionnaire completed for further information and the CCG Team will arrange a site visit to a similar project ahead of a proper application process and once potential garden locations are
Terms of Reference

Position: Greenway Action Team
Responsible to: Connswater Community Greenway Programme
Location: East Belfast
Duration: The Connswater Community Greenway is a 5 year programme to develop and support a new linear park in east Belfast. Whilst it is expected that volunteering will be supported throughout the life span of the programme it is anticipated that the role of the community and volunteers will be sustained post programme completion through the provision of community gardens, community adoption schemes and other community led programmes and initiatives.

No. of vacancies: Initially 12 volunteer posts. There are sufficient resources for 12 training places to be supported and the number of volunteers appointed and trained on horticultural/environmental issues will be dependent on training requirements of those appointed.

Background

The Connswater Community Greenway will create a 9km linear park through East Belfast, following the course of the Connswater, Knock and Loop Rivers, connecting the open and green spaces and remediating the Connswater River itself. The Greenway will reconnect the communities of East Belfast and restore the rivers as community assets. It will create vibrant, attractive, safe and accessible parkland for leisure, recreation and community events and activities.

It will provide immediate benefit to the 40,000 people living in the wards adjacent to the river. Specifically, the Connswater Community Greenway will directly improve the living environment, reinstating a valuable amenity for local people and provide opportunities for improving health and well being. The Project will act as a catalyst for physical and economic development and improve access and connections for local communities to open spaces reintroducing a sustainable wildlife corridor through the heart of East Belfast.

There are a number of open spaces along the course of the river which are underused because they are inaccessible, unsafe and unconnected to the communities in their hinterland. The people have turned their back on the river which is currently dirty and smelly and inhibits positive uses. This Project will deliver benefits from the Castlereagh Hills to Belfast Lough and beyond, turning a seriously underused, and at intervals, blight on the landscape into a community asset that will become an immediate living landmark.

2. Vision
The vision is to develop a safe, accessible, sustainable greenway which is an inspirational living landmark that improves the quality of life for the people of East Belfast, now and for future generations.

3. Role of the local Greenway Action Team

The role of local volunteers is critical within the Connswater Community Greenway Programme. The project will bring many environmental benefits to local communities preserving and enhancing the existing natural habitats. Following initial community consultation a need was identified for training and education for local people to enable them to fully appreciate their physical environment. By developing a network of environmental expertise across the area we will be able to work with local communities and visitors to the area to assist with the ecological management and maintenance of the Connswater Community Greenway. Roles within the Greenway Action Team will be varied and, were possible, tailored to the specific interests of those volunteering to participate. It is likely that the role will encompass some or all of the following depending on the level of commitment offered by volunteer members;

- to provide local expertise in conservation skills/amenity horticulture which they can transfer their skills to their community,
- To engage with the community, East Belfast Partnership and key stakeholders on horticulture issues (supported by CCG staff),
- To assist the local community to use the CCG by becoming involved in the development and delivery of community allotments, community adoptions schemes for sections of the CCG, Green Gyms etc...
- To support and encourage volunteering on and participation with the Connswater Community Greenway Programme.
- To ensure that the views, idea's and concerns of their local community are represented throughout CCG Programme delivery.
- Organise and lead guided eco walks and tours along the CCG route for local residents and visitors to the area.
- To pass on either existing or new skills to members of their local community.

This list is not exhaustive and volunteering will be tailored to meet the specific interest areas of volunteers where possible

4. Benefits

The Greenway Action Team will be provided with fully accredited training funded by the CCG to ensure they have the necessary skills required to support their role within their community/area. Further support will be provided through the Connswater Community Greenway staff team and network of supporters.

All reasonable volunteer expenses, in line with the CCG volunteering policy document, will be met through the Connswater Community Greenway Programme.

Individuals involved will play a key role in the development and delivery of a nationally important and award winning regeneration scheme within their local area that will transform the environment for local communities leaving a lasting legacy for future generations.
Will make a contribution to the development of a conservation and horticultural skills base within the CCG area maintaining and enhancing an important wildlife corridor in East Belfast.

5. Estimated time commitment

This will vary throughout the life of the programme and beyond. Initially, if training is required, volunteers will be required to participate in an accredited training programme to ensure that they have the skills and support in place to represent both their community and the Connswater Community Greenway Project.

The total monthly commitment to the project should not exceed 15 hours per month (aside from training) through volunteering days and planting and work days along the CCG route although this may vary dependent on requirements of both the volunteer and their local community. The Greenway Action Teams may assume some responsibility for the management and maintenance of community allotments on behalf of their local community organisation as the project develops which may involve additional hours.

Essential Criteria

An interest in the natural environment.

An interest in the local community.

Desirable Criteria

Previous experience in a horticultural or community based organisation.