



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Ballysillan Playing Fields
Date:	15 November 2012
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Pete Murray, ASB Coordinator

1.	Relevant Background Information
	Members will recall the presentation that was brought to committee in August 2012 by Councillor Lee Reynolds and the residents of Deerpark Gardens. The presentation outlined several issues of antisocial behaviour which had serious and detrimental effects on their homes and lives. The following report summarises their requests for actions that will reduce the impact of the antisocial behaviour on their homes and lives. (See Appendix 1: Deerpark Residents Presentation).

2.	Key Issues
	<p>The Deerpark residents have consistently reported the following antisocial behaviour issues affecting a number of different areas within the Playing Fields and around the periphery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sectarian attacks• Use of Quads and Motorbikes• Substance abuse. <p><u>Sectarian Attacks</u></p> <p>The Deerpark Residents feel that they have endured a disproportionate number of attacks on their homes in comparison to other properties neighbouring the park and are inclined to believe the root cause is sectarianism. The geography of the area gives the geographic advantage of height for missiles to be thrown from the raised ground of the playing fields into or onto the houses in Deerpark Gardens cul de sac.</p> <p>The attacks have persisted over many years. This is supported by information from Neighbourhood Officers within the PSNI. Recently the PSNI has reported an increase of sectarian fighting between youths in the park and an increase of</p>

missiles thrown into the homes of the Deerpark residents. The primary concern of the residents is the potential for serious or fatal injury and to a lesser extent, damage to property.

Use of Quads and Motorbikes

Residents have also reported the danger and nuisance caused by use of motorised vehicles through the playing fields. The PSNI have stated that they would be very supportive of any actions to reduce this activity.

Substance abuse and “high risk activity”

The residents are concerned that the playing fields are currently open to youths to use as a venue for consuming alcohol and drugs. There are a number of open access points which could be used to gain entry at any time and hiding places which are littered with drug paraphernalia. Residents are also noting that youths who use the park at night are engaging in other high risk (sexual) activities.

Deerpark residents requests

The residents are requesting that the council formulates a plan and takes action quickly. They have endured the ASB issues for many years and they feel that previous interventions have not worked. Council evidence indicates that the playing fields experience significant ASB, however, what sets the playing fields apart is the serious and consistent reports of sectarian behaviour.

The residents recently met with a council officer and an officer from the PSNI to prioritise a series of specific actions to reduce the ASB noted above. Their requests are as follows:

1. Construct a “ball stop” fence placed at the boundary of the Deerpark properties to prevent missiles being cast into the residents properties. (see Appendix Two: Ballysillan PF Map)
2. Erect a new fence across the park to facilitate unrestricted access around the rear of Alliance Parade properties but restrict access to the playing fields after closing time. (see Appendix Two)
3. Enhance the gate to the rear of the Iceland building to restrict access from motorised vehicles and youths to the playing fields. (see Appendix Two)
4. Implement a programme of woodland management around specific wooded areas to remove hiding places for youths to drink in. (see Appendix Two)

(All of these areas are marked with red lines on the Appendix 2 map)

Estimated costs

The approximate cost of the above proposed actions are as follows:

1. Proposed ball stop fence at 120m long x 14m high: **£48,000**
2. Proposed fence and gate at 100m and 2.8m high: **£7000**
3. Proposed enhancement to gate: **£1000**
4. Proposed woodland management: **£5700**

The residents agreed to prioritise the above actions but also made requests for the following items to be considered should the initial actions prove ineffective:

- Increase the height of boundary fencing
- Install a hanging garden structure to protect Deerpark homes (an example exists on the Newtownards Road)
- Install lighting through the park
- Increase use of CCTV

	<p><u>Previous and current interventions</u></p> <p>As various issues were previously reported to the council, officers have already implemented a number of interventions around the site:</p> <p>Environmental</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional fencing and gates to the rear of Deerpark gardens • Thinning of woodland areas to increase visibility • Planting mature trees to deflect missiles <p>Enforcement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased joint approach between PSNI and BCC <p>Current/Future Environmental interventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSD are replacing fencing around the boundary of the playing fields along Ballysillan Road and Wheatfield Drive • The boundary hedges around the Bowling pavilion and the Ballysillan Road are being reduced • Ongoing thinning of woodland areas to increase visibility <p>Current/Future Enforcement interventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular patrols by BCC officers and PSNI officers. <p>Current/Future Education interventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement activities for young men and women (such as midnight soccer, coaching and fitness or dance programmes) are being initiated in MUGA and leisure facilities across North Belfast and will include Ballysillan Leisure Centre.
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3.	Resource Implications
	<p>The costs of implementing the prioritised actions total £61,700 which it is proposed could be drawn from existing departmental resources budgeted for ASB Programme for the year 2012-13. Resources budgeted for Outreach and Participation will support proposed engagement activities.</p> <p>There will be minimal impact on the future work of the ASB programme in other areas of the city as the ASB programme is designed to respond to parks areas in proportion to reports, evidence and level of risk. There is also resources within the ASB budget available, as the planned interdepartmental Youth Outreach tender was not completed.</p> <p>These costs are in proportion to reducing the high risks associated with the reported sectarian, criminal and antisocial activities. Based on the available evidence, there are few comparable park areas experiencing such high risk threats to multiple homes in other parts of the city.</p>

4.	Equality and Good Relations Implications
	<p>As the intentions behind previous attacks have been identified as being sectarian, officers are working with the Council's Good Relations Unit to ensure that community representatives are kept informed and consulted with throughout the process.</p>

5.	Recommendations
	Members are asked to note the contents of the report, consider the requests from the Deerpark residents (See 2.2 and 2.4) and approve the resources required to implement the prioritised actions requested (See 2.2 and 2.3)
6.	Decision Tracking
	Any decision required regarding the lower priority requests (See 2.4) will be brought back to committee at a later date.
7.	Key to Abbreviations
	ASB: Antisocial behaviour BCC: Belfast City Council CCTV: Closed Circuit Television DSD: Department of Social Development PSNI: Police Service for Northern Ireland
8.	Documents Attached
	Appendix 1: Deerpark Residents Presentation Appendix 2: Ballysillan Playing Fields Map

