



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee.
Subject:	Acquisition of land at Blacks Road
Date:	13 June 2013
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure, 3400
Contact Officer:	Stephen Walker, Principal Parks and Cemeteries Development Manager, 3510 Cathy Reynolds, Estates Manager, 3493

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	DOE NIEA and DRD Roads Service own adjoining sites at Blacks Road which together extend to approximately 4.49 acres (shown on the attached map at Appendix 1). The site comprises derelict land and has been identified as an area of anti-social behaviour. The majority of the site is owned by NIEA, with Roads Service owning a smaller portion which includes the frontage onto Blacks Road.
1.2	At present, the area is within Lisburn City Council area however it is adjacent to Belfast City Council's boundary, and will fall into Belfast City Council revised boundary post local government reform in 2015.
1.3	Lisburn City Council agreed at a public meeting in 2008 to take the lead in appointing a suitably qualified consultant to undertake landscape proposals for the redevelopment of the site, through consultation with the local community and other key stakeholders. Groundwork NI was commissioned who undertook community engagement and has drawn up proposals to turn this disused site into a park for the use of the local community (shown on the plan attached at Appendix 2). Proposals include new secure fencing around the site, visitor parking, wildflower meadow, paved seating area, grassed recreation area and way finding signage.
1.4	It is considered that neither NIEA nor Roads Service would be the suitable organisation to operate and maintain the proposed park and it is believed that it would be better to be Council operated. Belfast City Council has been approached to acquire and manage the site, given that it will shortly fall into its administrative area.

2	Key Issues
2.1	Groundwork NI has been successful in securing 'Sharing our Space' Peace III funding, comprising £315,000 within part of a wider £3.1 million package for various sites. Time constraints attached to the funding require the works to be undertaken by March 2014. It is proposed that after this date, the Council become responsible for ongoing maintenance.
2.2	Following discussions with Roads Service, we understand that transfer of their parcel could not occur in sufficient time to allow the proposal to be undertaken within the funding deadline, due to their requirements to undertake a trawl of the land amongst all public sector bodies in line with their land disposal requirements. Roads Service advises that they could grant a licence for works in order to facilitate works within the funding timescale. This would be on condition that the Council undertakes to acquire the site on completion of works, so that Roads Service is not left with a new park to manage and maintain.
2.3	Roads Service has indicated that they would transfer their site to the Council at market value, to be determined by LPS. Acquisition of the site would be conditional on agreeing satisfactory terms with LPS. It should further be subject to any necessary planning consent being in place and satisfactory title being held.
2.4	NIEA is seeking DFP approval to offer to transfer their parcel at nil cost to the Council. They advise that a transfer can be expedited through provisions in the Nature Conservation & Amenity Lands (NI) Order 1985. An existing access right to Colin Glen Golf Club would be reserved.
2.5	To allow Groundwork NI to proceed as soon as possible and work within the funding timeline, either Groundwork or their contractor would enter a temporary licence with NIEA, with the Council agreeing to acquire the site after completion of works. Acquisition by the Council should be subject to any necessary planning consent being in place and satisfactory title being held and subject to agreeing terms with LPS for the acquisition of the adjoining Roads Service site.
2.6	Members should note that the site contains Japanese knotweed, which there is a legal duty for landowners to manage. Groundwork NI proposes to treat Japanese knotweed this Summer but as their involvement in the site would come to an end in March 2014, further treatment would become the responsibility of the Council.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No acquisition cost would be payable to NIEA. • Roads Service has indicated that there would be a cost for licence and transfer of their land, with the value to be determined with LPS. The cost is not yet known however the area of land concerned is relatively small and its current use is open space. • The maintenance and operational cost of the park is estimated to be in

	<p>the region of £31,000. This amount is not currently budgeted for Area South West and would need to be taken into account in the next budgeting round.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treatment of Japanese knotweed is estimated to be in the region of £100 per annum. Approximately half of the Japanese knotweed identified lies within the Roads Service site. It may be possible to offset the cost of treatment on this part of the site by seeking a reduction in the land price, which is common practice for abnormal costs.
3.2	<p><u>Human Resources</u></p> <p>Resource from Estates and Legal Services is required to complete the acquisition. Thereafter Parks and Leisure staff resource will be required for ongoing management.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u></p> <p>A 4.49 acre site will be added to the Council's assets. The site will be held by Parks and Leisure.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	Equality implications will be considered if the proposal progresses.

5	Recommendations
5.1	<p>Committee is recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To approve in principle the acquisition of the Roads Service land after completion of works, subject to satisfactory outcome of investigations and subject to agreeing terms with LPS. Proposed terms will be reported back to Committee for approval at a later date. • To approve in principle the acquisition of the NIEA land at nil cost, after completion of works and subject to satisfactory outcome of investigations and subject to agreeing terms for the acquisition of the adjoining Roads Service site.

6	Key to Abbreviations
	<p>NIEA – Northern Ireland Environment Agency DOE – Department of the Environment DRD – Department of Regional Development DFP – Department of Finance and Personnel LPS – Land and Property Services</p>

7	Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 – Map to show Blacks Road site Appendix 2 – Plan to show Groundwork NI's Park proposal</p>