



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure
Subject:	Business in the Community, Request for Support for a Community Garden
Date:	12 September 2013
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Lynne McCreery, Community Parks Outreach Manager

1.	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Council received a request in July 2013 from Business in the Community (BITC) for support with the development of a new community garden on the Albertbridge Road, as part of a cross-community growing project adjacent to a key interface area.
1.2	BITC is a not for profit membership body working with private and public sector organisations to address local community and wider sustainability issues in Northern Ireland. Belfast City Council has engaged in a range of activities with BITC over several years and is currently a BITC member organisation.
1.3	In 2012, BITC applied to Biffa Award, the Landfill Communities Fund distributor, for funding to support a new community garden project. BITC has been offered a £44,000 grant, (to which BITC has already made a 10% match funding contribution) by Biffa Award, subject to securing full planning permission by 30 September 2013. To date, a landscape architect has been engaged, outline design proposals for a garden with costings have been prepared (drawing provided at Appendix 1), and a Phase 1 Contaminated Land Survey completed. It is expected that full planning permission will be in place within the requisite timescale.
1.4	In summary, the project will do the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Convert part of a car park adjacent to BITC's offices, located on Albertbridge Road between Cluan Place and Paulett Avenue, to a community garden. The site is owned by BT (BITC's landlords) who have already formally given permission for the project. The community garden will exist on approximately half of the 800m² site, whilst the remainder of the site will retain a number of parking spaces;• Engage the local community in planning, development, maintenance

	<p>and ongoing use of the garden – as a resource for programmed cross-community horticultural activities, as a means of improving local health and well-being, and as a shared space for relaxation and play, and interaction between local residents;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an opportunity to enhance biodiversity in the area, integrating native species of trees, grass and shrubs, and using bird and bat boxes to encourage wildlife to the garden; and • Contribute to regeneration efforts in an area of low social and economic wealth, acting as a regeneration catalyst for the Albertbridge Road in line with current work on the Newtownards Road and the Connswater Community Greenway.
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2.	Key Issues
2.1	<p>The aims of the project are in line with Growing Communities Strategy 2012 - 2022. In particular the project closely aligns with the following strategic objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To support healthier lifestyles by providing growing opportunities to people of all ages; • To support and develop communities by building and encouraging ownership of and pride in the city's growing spaces; • To work to support environmental sustainability by ensuring that growing spaces and activities contribute positively to the local environment and support the attainment of sustainable development targets set for local government; and • To engage the wider community through inclusiveness in the development of shared growing spaces.
2.2	<p>Throughout the process so far, BITC has engaged with, and secured the support of, the local community and stakeholders, including the following processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face to face consultation - with a range of stakeholders including representatives from the following: Belfast City Council Parks and Leisure Department, Department for Social Development, Connswater Community Greenway, East Belfast Partnership, East Belfast Community Development Agency, East Belfast Mission; Community Change, East Belfast Sure Start Centre, PSNI and local political representatives. • A questionnaire survey - of local businesses, organisations and community groups (20 out of 30 questionnaires issued were completed) with the following results: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% of the organisations and individuals said that they would support the project; • No one indicated that they would not be interested in using the park; • 40% said they would use it monthly; • 40% said they would use it weekly;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20% said they would use it daily; and • 95% said they would like to be updated on the project.
2.4	<p>It is recognised that taking on responsibility for the ongoing maintenance of a new asset by the Council is likely to be unsustainable. Based on the outline design discussed with BITC, it is suggested that a sustainable option would be for the Council to assist for an initial period by developing the necessary local knowledge and skills to allow ongoing maintenance of the garden by its users. It is proposed that, through the Council's current contract with The Conservation Volunteers for community growing facilitation, in kind support is provided for a period of one year, to a maximum value of £3000, working alongside BITC and one or more nominated garden users through a programme of facilitated horticultural and community engagement activities.</p>
2.5	<p>It is proposed that the development of the garden will be led initially by a BITC project team working in conjunction with a Community Garden Action Group (CGAG) who will move forward with the garden's maintenance and ongoing management. It is proposed that the CGAG will comprise representatives from the local community stakeholder groups as well as individual residents of Cluan Place and the local environs.</p>
2.6	<p>BITC will conduct ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the project in order to ensure that any support provided contributes to the aims of the Growing Communities Strategy, appropriate evaluation measures will be agreed with BITC.</p>
2.7	<p>It is expected that the project will begin garden construction on October of this year aiming to be completed by March 2014, during which time a programme of community engagement and activity planning will be undertaken.</p>

3.	Resource Implications
3.1	<p><u>Financial</u> In-kind support would be provided to the value of £3000 maximum. This is in keeping with the level of support which may be allocated by officers to individual groups through the Growing Communities Strategy.</p> <p>It is expected that financial support to the value of £3600 would be allocated from an allowance made in existing revenue budgets. This is to meet the additional unforeseen cost for planning fees, professional design fees and survey fees.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Human Resources</u> No requirement for officer time additional to that already allocated to</p>

	managing the contract with The Conservation Volunteers is expected. BITC project team working in partnership with a CGAG will manage the community engagement and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the project.
3.3	<p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u></p> <p>The Council's involvement with the community garden would be for a limited period in a facilitation role, in line with the aims of the Growing Communities Strategy; the physical asset would remain under external ownership, management and public liability insurance; however it would contribute to the resources available to the residents of Belfast in line with the Council's wider aims and objectives.</p>

4.	Equality and good relations implications
4.1	There are no implications at this stage. However, equality and good relations factors will be taken into account in any activities delivered at the community garden or through the project.
4.2	The proposed project has been planned with cross community consultation and involvement and will meet the relevant requirements placed upon it by the Government's Landfill Community Fund scheme.

5.	Recommendations
5.1	<p>Members are asked to -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. approve BITC's request for Council support for the community garden project, and 2. approve that officers provide BITC with in kind support to a maximum value of £3,000 and financial support to a maximum value of £3,600, subject to BITC through monitoring and evaluation satisfying criteria to adhere to the Council's Growing Communities Strategy, 3. A legal agreement is drawn up to support the arrangements.

6.	Decision Tracking
6.1	All actions will be completed by Lynne McCreery, Community Parks Outreach Manager.

7.	Key to Abbreviations
7.1	Business in the Community – BITC
7.2	Community Garden Action Group - CGAG

8.	Documents Attached
8.1	Appendix 1 – Drawing of outline design proposal