



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Parks and Leisure Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Controlled Burn on Cavehill</b>
<b>Date:</b>	14 November 2013
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Michael Largey, Community Parks Manager

<b>1.</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
	<p>The Council is represented on the Belfast Hills Partnership (BHP). At recent partnership meetings there have been discussions around the control of fires on Cavehill. The partnership has explored various ways of reducing fires and the potential damage caused by them.</p> <p>Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) have unlimited access to all areas of the hill so that they can react to fires as and when required.</p> <p>It has been identified that there are a number of areas on the hill that have developed large amounts of fuel build up. This fuel potentially can lead to serious fires that can cause damage to the heather and heath land but more seriously the underlying organic matter that can cause fires to burn for considerable amounts of time and are notoriously difficult to extinguish.</p> <p>All partners have stated that it would be beneficial to carry out controlled burns of excessive fuel on the hill to help reduce the potential for longer term damage to the environment.</p>

<b>2.</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
	<p>All controlled burns will be heavily risk assessed by NIFRS and will be marshalled by the fire service who will provide a full staff presence with fire appliances in situ. Council staff have engaged with NIEA and will continue to consult with them during the process. The Council will also ensure that all members of the partnership will be present with fire beaters to ensure fires are managed. All staff present will have the necessary equipment to stop the fire burning out of control.</p>

	<p>All standard site specific fire risk assessments will be visited prior to the event and updated accordingly.</p> <p>It is envisaged that this process will be carried out as a training exercise to give the partnership the ability to manage the growth of grassland, heath and heather with alternative methods of control.</p> <p>The areas for the controlled burn have been identified because of the large amount of fuel capable of burning vigorously. If this were to burn in the summer months it could be uncontrollable and cause serious damage to underground organic matter.</p>
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<b>3.</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>There are no financial contributions associated with this exercise</p> <p><u>Human</u></p> <p>The NIFRS will provide training to the partnership and any parks staff associated with working on Cavehill Country Park (CHCP)</p> <p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u></p> <p>The practice has proven in the past to have a positive impact on the natural environment, because of the amount and speed of regeneration after controlled burns. Nesting birds will use the same ground burnt over the winter period in the following spring,</p> <p>In consultation with NIEA every effort will be made to reduce the impact on wildlife. This process will take place at a time of the year when most animals will be in hibernation and the fires are more readily easily managed.</p>

<b>4.</b>	<b>Equality Implications</b>
	No equality implications

<b>5.</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
	That the Parks and Leisure Committee approve a series of controlled fires on Cavehill Country Park through the months of December 2013 and January 2014 at the discretion of the NIFRS with weather conditions applying.

<b>6.</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
	All decisions will be carried out by Michael Largey (Community Parks Manager)

<b>7.</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
	NIFRS: Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service CHCP: Cavehill Country Park BHP: Belfast Hills Partnership NIEA: Northern Ireland Environment Agency

<b>8.</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	None