



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	City Cemetery Gate Lodge – Response to Development Brief
Date:	16 January 2014
Reporting Officer:	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure, Ext 3400.
Contact Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Estates Manager, Property & Projects Department, Ext. 3493.

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	In September 2013 a Development Brief in respect of the former Gate Lodge, fronting Whiterock Road at the City Cemetery, was advertised in the local press, seeking proposals from prospective developers. The Brief sought proposals for development of the Gate Lodge in a sensitive manner which would respect the architecture of the original building and the nature of the immediately surrounding City Cemetery. The attached location map (Appendix 2) shows the extent of the proposed development site. By way of further background Members may wish to note this marketing follows a previous similar process some years ago, which resulted in appointment of a preferred developer but which the developer was unable to bring to a conclusion.
1.2	Within the draft Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan the site and the surrounding City Cemetery lies within an Urban Landscape Wedge and forms part of a Local Landscape Policy Area. The boundary wall along the Whiterock Road frontage of the Cemetery is 'Listed' by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. The Gate Lodge itself is not currently 'Listed'. The attached photographs (Appendix 3) illustrate the current dilapidated state of the property.
1.3	As part of the response to the Development Brief developers were asked to submit sketch layout plans and elevations of the proposed buildings indicating proposed external finishes, landscaping and car parking/access arrangements, a brief business plan and financial information regarding the scheme.
1.4	By the closing date for submissions only one response had been received. This was subsequently evaluated by officers. A summary of the proposal and the panel's comments are attached as Appendix 1 to this report.
1.5	The Development Brief provided a framework for the evaluation of proposals which scored different elements of the scheme against a pre-determined marking framework.

	<p>The framework attributed half of the available marks to 'Quality' elements and half to the developers 'Financial bid'. However the 'Financial bid' element was designed to weigh one Financial bid against another and was designed only to be used where more than one proposal is received. In this case only one proposal was received and thus only the Quality elements are scored. The 'Quality' elements are sub-divided into the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Main Attributes of the Scheme/Concept – 40% of 'Quality' score. 2. Deliverability of the Scheme – 30% of 'Quality' score. 3. Sustainability of the Scheme – 30% of 'Quality' score.
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2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>It is the panel's view that the submitted proposal falls well short of providing the Council with any view of the physical nature of the proposed development, the cost of the development, the financial sustainability of the development, or the deliverability of the scheme.</p>
2.2	<p>In view of the above the Committee is asked to consider the following options.</p> <p>Option 1. Authorise officers to engage further with the developer to ascertain further information regarding the nature of the proposed development and it's intended use and to bring a further report to Committee in due course. It is considered it could prove a lengthy process to bring the proposal to the position where a positive recommendation could be made to Committee.</p> <p>Option 2. Authorise officers to place the property on the open market for sale through a firm of chartered surveyors, without restrictions on its end use or the nature of any development on the site. This may result in development of the site with structures and/or a use which is not compatible with the adjoining cemetery. To bring a further report to Committee following marketing of the property.</p> <p>Option 3. To note that the submitted proposal is unlikely to result in a design, arrangement and finishes which would be sympathetic with the surrounding cemetery. To note that no financial projections have been submitted which would indicate the financial sustainability of the proposed use. In consequence Committee is asked to note there is limited scope for the current proposal to provide the desired compatibility and regeneration effect on the site and that the site should be retained in Council ownership and officers be provided with authority to consider alternative use of the site, potentially to include demolition of the property, landscaping of the site and its incorporation within the cemetery. A further report on options and financial implications to be brought to Committee in due course.</p>

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<p><u>Finance</u> None at this stage.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Human Resources</u> None at this stage.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u> The City Cemetery is a sensitive site which requires careful solutions which are in themselves sensitive to the locality as well as the history and heritage of the Cemetery itself.</p>

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	There are no equality or good relations issues associated with this report.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are recommended to authorise officers to consider alternative proposals for the site in accordance with Option 3 (i.e. the property to be retained in Council ownership and officers be authorised to consider alternative uses for the site) with a further report to be provided to Committee in due course setting out options and costs.

6	Decision Tracking
The Director of Parks and Leisure to provide an update report to Committee within 6 months.	

7	Key to Abbreviations
None	

8	Documents Attached
<p>Appendix 1 – Evaluation Panel summary of findings.</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Map showing location of the site outlined red and surrounding City Cemetery land shaded yellow.</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Photographs showing current condition of property.</p>	

APPENDIX 1

Overall approach to Evaluation.

The overall approach was to assess the Quality of the proposed scheme in terms of its overall concept, deliverability and sustainability. In order to cover the Council's obligations in relation to obtaining 'best price' as required by Section 96 of the Local Government Act (NI) 1972, the evaluation also incorporated a means of evaluating the net benefits to the Council from Financial Proposals submitted by different developers. The ability to evaluate and weigh one Financial Proposal against another was designed to be utilised only where more than one proposal was received.

Evaluation of Proposal received from Mr James McLaughlin.

1. Scheme Concept (40% of the 'Quality' score)

- 1.1 The nature of the proposed development stated at the beginning of the proposal is for use as a café and the sale of flowers "and other items required for grave-sites". Towards the end of the proposal Mr McLaughlin states "we will make the house habitable for myself to live in".
- 1.2 While the concept of a café and/or a dwelling on the site are relatively attractive the proposal did not include any drawings or sketches of any sort. Neither did it include any information regarding the size, design, finishes or nature of the proposed buildings and their ability to provide the proposed uses within the boundary of the development site.
- 1.3 Given the statements in the proposal regarding potential use of the site for dwelling purposes it is not entirely clear whether the proposed use of the property will be for a café/flower business or a dwelling or a combination of these uses.

2. Deliverability (30% of the 'Quality' score)

- 2.1 The evaluation criteria associated with 'Deliverability' sought identification of the estimated costs of the project and the degree of commitment from funders. It also sought information on any investigations of site conditions and the likelihood of obtaining Planning Approval for the proposed development. Information was also sought on the Developer's previous experience in delivery of schemes of this size and nature.
- 2.2 No information was provided on the likely cost of the proposed development. Mr McLaughlin indicated he would self-fund the construction cost of the scheme, however in the absence of estimated costings and any information on Mr McLaughlin's ability to provide such funds it is not clear whether there is an ability to fund any scheme.
- 2.3 The proposal does not contain any evidence of consultation with an architect or other professional advisers. No evidence was provided regarding consultations with Planning Service or other statutory agencies. Mr McLaughlin was confident mains services would be available to the property due to its previous use as a dwelling.

3. Sustainability (30% of 'Quality' score)

- 3.1 No information was provided on likely income or expenditure and the ability of the café and associated business to sustain itself has not been demonstrated.
- 3.2 The proposal states that Mr McLaughlin has spoken to local people regarding the proposed scheme and that positive feedback was received. There is no indication of how many people were spoken to, or whether those spoken to had relatives buried in the Cemetery.

4. Financial Proposals

- 4.1** As only one proposal was received in response to the Development Brief it is not necessary to apply a scoring weight to the financial element of the proposal.
- 4.2** The proposal did not include any information of potential financial income to the Council, neither did it seek a financial contribution from the Council to assist with the proposed development.
- 4.3** Mr McLaughlin's proposal states he would be interested in buying the land from the Council rather than leasing it. There is no indication of whether any payment would be made for purchase of the property.

5. Overall Score

- 5.1** **Bringing together the scores from 1 to 3 above, provides this proposal with a score of 15.8% of the total available 'Quality' marks. This low score reflects the absence of key information, in particular the absence of any indication as to the physical structures being proposed, the uncertainty as to the proposed end use and the uncertainties regarding the ability of the Developer to deliver a scheme.**