



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Parks and Leisure Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Alexandra Park – review of management arrangements</b>
<b>Date:</b>	10 April 2014
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Caroline Wilson, Neighbourhood and Development Manager

1.	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
	<p>Under the Peace III Programme, Groundwork NI was awarded funding to deliver the Reconciling Communities through Regeneration programme. In consultation with the Council and the local community, Alexandra Park was chosen as a specific project with a budget allocation of £50,000 towards physical regeneration work. Parks and Leisure Committee formally endorsed the project in June 2009.</p> <p>The formal arrangement for Groundwork NI to facilitate meetings of the Alexandra Park steering group ended in March 2013. Since then, the group has continued to meet on an interim basis with meetings chaired by Ciaran Shannon from Groundwork NI (in his role as Chair of the Duncairn Community Partnership).</p> <p>Subsequent to the end of the funding period, Committee agreed in August 2013 to undertake a review of the management arrangements. The terms of reference for the independent review are agreed as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. To independently review with relevant stakeholders the successes and areas of improvement for the Alexandra Park regeneration process</li><li>2. To scope a management structure, business planning and management approach, which balances community ownership and public accountability, based on good practice elsewhere</li><li>3. To make recommendations going forward for consideration by Parks and Leisure Committee.</li></ol>

	Julie Harrison was appointed as an independent consultant to undertake the review.
--	--

<b>2.</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
	<p>In reviewing the contextual materials and a series of one to one conversations, the consultant observed the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– All stakeholders were supportive of the substantial work that has been delivered to date by the steering group in partnership with the Council to re-vitalise and regenerate Alexandra Park;</li> <li>– Steering group members indicated that Groundwork NI has provided a valuable role in chairing meetings to date and securing the initial grant-aid from SEUPB;</li> <li>– All participants were open and positive in their engagement with the review process, recognising that this was a useful point to review progress and plan for the next phase of development.</li> </ul> <p>In reviewing progress, it was noted that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. While there was good involvement from local people on the steering group in its initial stages, attendance is now more from paid community workers and statutory agencies;</li> <li>b. There was a genuine effort in 2010 to connect with local people on proposals for the park. The response rate to the survey is in keeping with what would be expected of a neighbourhood survey of this type, but attendance at the consultation events appears to have been limited;</li> <li>c. Some participants expressed concern over the traditional 'Friends of' model as too prescriptive and needed adaption for the local context, especially to address the particular good relations issues in the locality;</li> <li>d. Related to this, there was a need for an intensive outreach resource to sustain the relationships around the regeneration process and to be able to respond to any good relations/community safety issues quickly;</li> <li>e. While elected representatives were invited to the steering group, there was less structure/regularity in the formal reporting mechanism back to the Council's Parks and Leisure Committee. This meant that progress on the development plan did not have the visibility it deserved or needed and there is a need for greater clarity in relation to decision-making processes between the Council (as owner of the park) and local engagement mechanisms;</li> <li>f. On an informal basis, North Belfast Memorial Orange Hall raised issues in relation to the quality and safety of fencing between the Hall and the park which could be improved;</li> </ol> <p>In conclusion, the consultant highlighted that every participant</p>

demonstrated commitment from all parties to the ongoing regeneration of Alexandra Park and to adjacent communities. The issues highlighted above demonstrate the importance of a clear strategy for the park and a mechanism for ensuring a balance between local voice, community ownership and the Council's strategic role as a provider of community and leisure services across Belfast.

On the basis of the review, the consultant made the following recommendations, for the consideration of Committee:

**1. Consultation and community engagement**

Council may wish to consider the frequency of consultation that is appropriate for its parks and public spaces, what standards are set for community engagement work by external partners such as Groundwork NI and how this might fit with current and proposed governance arrangements.

**2. Reconnecting with local residents**

The steering group and elected representatives should be encouraged to reach out to local residents who no longer attend and encourage their involvement again to ensure that local experience and aspiration is fed in to planning and management of the park.

**3. Improving connections with neighbouring properties**

Given practical considerations such as the nature and upkeep of fencing for properties adjacent to the park, consideration should be given to extending steering group invitations to the North Belfast Memorial Orange Hall and Elim Church.

**4. Involvement of elected representatives**

In relation to concerns over information flow in relation to the opening of the pedestrian gate adjacent to Dunmore Avenue, it is recommended that elected representatives are invited to quarterly meetings of the steering group and that minutes of meetings are circulated by email.

**5. Structure of steering group**

It is recommended that Council consider working with the current Alexandra Park steering group and local residents to review the existing terms of reference and formalise a locally-appropriate 'Friends of' group. This would help to clarify relationships and could attract local people back into discussion in relation to the park. It could also facilitate external funding opportunities and begin to create greater consistency across the city.

**6. Chairperson**

It is recommended that consideration is given to rotating the Chair between members, perhaps on a quarterly basis, so that capacity and ownership of the process is enhanced. This may require investment by

	<p>Council for administrative support to ensure that meetings are scheduled and minutes circulated accordingly. Such a change may best be facilitated as part of discussion on the potential establishment of a 'Friends of' group for the park.</p> <p><b>7. Looking to the future</b></p> <p>It is recommended that following the establishment of a 'Friends of' structure potential funding streams for capital works in the park are identified. Future funding could be a catalyst for a refreshed structure and engagement process around the park. When thinking about the future of the park a review of relevant policies including specific initiatives by DSD and OFMFDM may offer opportunities for Alexandra Park and surrounding communities.</p> <p><b>8. Connecting to the formal decision-making process of Council</b></p> <p>As part of the structural review to create a version of a 'Friends of' group, it is important that this is within the public accountability frameworks of Council, as the asset-owner. There needs to be greater regularity in formal engagement with the Council in the planning and implementation process for the park.</p> <p><b>Benefits to Council</b></p> <p>There are a number of key benefits to the Council in continuing to work collaboratively with local stakeholders in this way:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Encourages local civic stewardship in Alexandra Park, to protect the Council's asset and local biodiversity</li> <li>– Links the Council's programme of work to established existing networks e.g. with schools</li> <li>– Potentially draws down additional external funding for capital and revenue proposals</li> <li>– Fulfils Green Flag standard principles for 'good' community engagement</li> <li>– Connects to wider government good relations and regeneration priorities</li> <li>– Contributes to wider strategic outcomes related to promoting good relations, healthy living, protection of the environment and vibrant, safe neighbourhoods.</li> </ul> <p>It is expected that a representative working group would present a refreshed steering group structure and a development and consultation plan to Committee by October 2015.</p>
--	---

<b>3.</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>Community engagement expenditure within revenue budgets.</p>

	<u>Human Resources</u> None <u>Asset and Other Implications</u> As asset owner, any further asset-related developments will be presented to Committee for its consideration, prior to implementation.
--	--

<b>4.</b>	<b>Equality Implications</b>
	There are no equality and good relations implications at this stage. Screening of any emerging development proposal and annual plan will be undertaken in the future which is likely to include positive good relations impacts.

<b>5.</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
	Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Consider the recommendations outlined above, provide any feedback and endorse the final recommendations;</li> <li>– Based on the recommendations, authorise officers to convene a representative working group to review the existing terms of reference, develop a locally-appropriate structure and initiate planning for the next year, for consideration by Committee in autumn 2014.</li> </ul>

<b>6.</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
	Responsible Officer: Neighbourhood and Development Manager. Actions to be completed by October 2014

<b>7.</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
	None

<b>8.</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	Appendix 1 – Original terms of reference for Alexandra Park Steering Group (2009)

## **Appendix 1: Original terms of reference for Alexandra Park steering group (2009)**

### **Purpose:**

The steering group has been established to plan and oversee the development and regeneration of Alexandra Park through a community development and cross community approach

### **Aims:**

1. To work in partnership with Belfast City Council, PSNI, NIO Groundwork NI and other agencies regarding the regeneration of Alexandra Park.
2. To work in partnership with other agencies around issues of contested space and promoting the Park as a 'shared space' and to work towards increasing use of the park.
3. To promote peace building and develop worthwhile, long-lasting relationships at the local level with community representatives, organisations and groups who share a common interest in the regeneration of Alexandra Park.
4. To work in partnership with other groups and agencies and to actively lobby and network with relevant agencies.
5. To source, apply and secure additional funding for the regeneration of Alexandra Park and promote its sustainability.
6. To proactively involve young people in any future proposals and developments in relation to Alexandra Park.

### **Membership:**

Membership of the steering group will be inclusive and representative of the wider community living in the surrounding environs of Alexandra Park and who share a common interest in the development and environmental regeneration of Alexandra Park as well as promoting its active usage in a positive and beneficial manner.

### **Meetings:**

It is envisaged that the steering group will meet approximately every month and will have the opportunity to invite relevant stakeholders to attend as and when necessary. The venue of the meetings will be arranged at the end of each meeting but for the foreseeable future will be held in the Regeneration Resource Centre at Groundwork NI.

### **Servicing of Meeting:**

The minutes of the meetings will be taken, written up and circulated by Groundwork NI.