



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Belfast Zoological Gardens – construction of bat flight and release enclosure
Date:	10 April 2014
Reporting Officer:	Rose Crozier, Assistant Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Mark Challis, Zoo Manager

1.	Relevant Background Information
1.1	Belfast Zoo has worked closely with the Northern Ireland Bat Group for many years.
1.2	The Northern Ireland Bat Group, with whom the Zoo has long standing relationships, has successfully applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant to construct a bat rehabilitation and release enclosure in the zoo.
1.3	The Zoo site lends itself well to such an enclosure, and is envisaged that the enclosure will be a valuable addition to the Zoo's suite of native species facilities, and provide for excellent visitor information and education opportunities.
1.4	Following consultation with the HLF, once the build is complete, the NI Bat Group would like to transfer ownership of the enclosure to the City Council.
1.5	The Committee is asked to consider allowing for the construction of the bat enclosure in the zoo, and that ownership, which includes liabilities such as maintenance, insurance, and reinstatement at the end of the useful life of the enclosure, to be transferred to the Council.
1.6	The NI Bat Group attend many of the zoo's native species events, including our native species weekends, and representatives from the group lead the 'bat evenings' that take place throughout the summer. The zoo provides access to facilities for the Bat Group's committee meetings

	and for the junior Bat Group evening events.
1.7	As well as their education and community roles, the Bat Group provides a rescue and rehabilitation role that rescues bats, both displaced adults and spring/summer born infants that require hand rearing, for eventual release.
1.8	The Bat Group has identified that permanent facilities for the flight training and rehabilitation of these rescued bats is needed, usually during the late spring and summer period, and reasoned that such a facility should be on a safe site, ideally where bats are already known to live, where access is good for servicing the facilities and managing the bats, and perhaps where the enclosure might be somewhat discrete but where significant numbers of visitors might be able to learn more about bats in Northern Ireland and the work of the Bat Group.

2.	Key Issues
2.1	In discussion with the NI Bat Group, it became clear that the Zoo was uniquely positioned to provide a site for such a facility.
2.2	The enclosure will be designed for the short term holding of native species of bats, and will allow sufficient space for the rescued bats to recuperate and undergo rehabilitation prior to release. It is currently planned that the enclosure will be of weld mesh construction, approximately 8 x 4 x 3m high. It is also confirmed that planning permission is not required in this instance, as the potential build falls within permitted development.
2.3	Subsequently, the NI Bat group made a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for grant funding of a bat rehabilitation and flight enclosure.
2.4	Further, a suitable site has been identified for the enclosure within the zoo. Situated near the Lion's Den Restaurant, and near enclosures for other native species kept in the zoo, ie red squirrels and barn owls, there is space for the enclosure to be positioned a little distance from the main visitor path, but with the production of high quality signage, significant numbers of zoo visitors could learn and understand more about the Bat Group's and the Zoo's work with native species.
2.4	It is proposed that access to the enclosure for NI Bat Group members for caring for any bats kept in the enclosure will be made available during normal working hours, and access to the zoo site itself will be provided and managed via normal established procedures. The NI Bat Group will undertake all day-to-day care of the bats whilst the enclosure is in use.
2.5	The NI Bat Group have discussed ownership options of the enclosure itself with HLF, and consider that once the build is complete, ownership of the enclosure should be transferred to the Council. The specification of

	the proposed bat enclosure will be subject to approval by the Council.
2.6	It is envisaged that a form of licence will be drawn up with the NI Bat Group that will allow for the construction together with appropriate legal agreement for the subsequent transfer of ownership to the Council, and the Council will then enter a management arrangement with the NI Bat Group.
2.7	There are good indications that such a facility will be extremely useful to the valuable rescue and rehabilitation work of the NI Bat Group, and provide visitors with another example of the Zoo working closely with local wildlife and wildlife groups.

3.	Resource Implications
	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>There are no financial implications during the build phase, as this will be covered by the grant. If ownership of the enclosure is transferred to the City Council, there will need to be some allowance for annual maintenance, though there will be few other costs as we will not pay rates on the enclosure, and there are no utilities (electric, water, gas) in the enclosure.</p> <p><u>Human Resources</u></p> <p>There are no immediate HR implications, though there will be some resource implications in the identification and preparation of legal issues and documents.</p> <p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u></p> <p>If ownership of the new enclosure is transferred to the City Council, the enclosure will provide a further attraction for the Zoo.</p>

4.	Equality Implications
4.1	There are no Equality and Good Relations Considerations attached to this report.

5.	Recommendations
5.1	<p>The Committee is asked to note the above report and it is recommended that;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permission is granted to proceed • Appropriate legal agreement is drawn up with the Northern Ireland Bat Group • Ownership will transfer to the Council once the build is complete <p>and that all of the above in accordance with standing orders and the</p>

	approval of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is obtained.
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6.	Decision Tracking
6.1	None required.

7.	Key to Abbreviations
	HLF – Heritage Lottery Fund N I – Northern Ireland

8.	Documents Attached
	none