

## Parks and Leisure Committee



Chaired by Councillor Gareth McKee, the Parks and Leisure Committee is responsible for the planning and delivery of the Council's Leisure, Parks and Cemeteries functions. Its specific responsibilities include the control and management of the Council's parks and leisure provision, leisure and sports development, conservation, landscaping, Belfast Castle and Malone House, crematorium and cemetery services, Belfast Zoo and a range of parks and leisure events and activities.

### Chairman's message

Significant work has taken place with the citizens of Belfast over the past year to create an active, healthy and vibrant city. The Parks and Leisure Department has worked towards improving the quality of life and wellbeing of citizens, with the support from our staff, external partners, elected members, community groups and funding from the Investment programme.

### Highlights for 2013-14 include:

The **Corporate Leisure Transformation Programme** has gathered momentum this year, we're investing £105 million to modernise and revitalise our leisure provision across Belfast. This investment is needed to improve the health and quality of life of our citizens and you'll see dramatic improvements, over the next ten years, as we enhance the service with greater outreach, fresh programming and new products. This will be at no additional cost to the ratepayer.

The **Mary Peters Athletics Track** was re-opened, following a £3 million refurbishment, complete with an international standard eight-lane track and seated spectator stand, providing a modern athletics/sporting facility for the Greater Belfast area and Northern Ireland as a whole. The opening event for the track, saw over 1,100 spectators attend and 461 participants.

The new **John Luke Bridge in Clement Wilson Park** was opened for walkers and cyclists to use. The £200,000 project is part of our Investment Programme, and replaces the old bridge that was on site for more than 50 years.



We were awarded £2.3 million grant towards the £4m refurbishment of the **Tropical Ravine** in Botanic Gardens, the refurbishment will not only conserve the building's historic nature, but will restore the unique features and add interactive and digital exhibits which will bring more users into the park to exercise and enjoy.



We are continuing with our **community gardens** project in different parts of Belfast, funded by Peace III and the Public Health Agency monies. We now have **thirteen community gardens** and have delivered facilitated community growing sessions to people of all age groups and abilities, who come together in a spirit of social cohesion to grow their own fruit, flowers and vegetables, while encouraging them to be active outdoors.



We have delivered a programme of **city-wide events**, including Rose Week, Spring Fair and Autumn Fair and delivered a range of health and wellbeing programmes and activities across the city, including our summer scheme and Active Communities programmes. The department has continued to deliver the Safer Neighbourhood programme of work to help tackle **anti-social behaviour** and help people feel safer in our parks and leisure facilities. Some of the youth/ diversionary programmes supported include; summer camps, first aid, sports and coaching, lantern parade and week end bird programme.



Belfast has a proud tradition of boxing and many of the city's boxing clubs continue to produce successes at a local and international level. Following last year's **Amateur Boxing Strategy** launch, the programme is now being rolled out across the city to schools, youth groups and boxing clubs.

This year, the department achieved the highest standard of quality and management available for parks and open spaces by gaining a total of **twelve Green Flag Awards**, making us the best Green Flag performing local authority in Northern Ireland.



## Over the year, we:

Encouraged people to have healthier, more active lifestyles, making the best use of our assets contributing to creating safer, healthier, engaged and more active communities:

- Provided a service for almost 1.8 million leisure facilities users.
- Worked with almost 1,500 participants throughout 84 planned urban sports events, activities and programmes at Bridges Urban Sports Park.
- Provided services to almost 6,500 Boost members at our leisure centres
- Provided £225,000 in sports grants to help clubs, organisations and elite athletes, and supported the participation of an estimated 20,000 people into sport.
- Encouraged over 2,000 participants to get rowing through Redgrave Rowing project.
- Delivered a city wide events programme including Rose Week, Spring Fair, Autumn Fair and park fun days entertaining over 179,300 people.
- Funded and supported “Couch to 5K” a programme supporting new runners to begin exercising in a safe and engaging way, attracting almost 3600 participants.

Enriched the city’s cultural and tourism offering:

- Attracted over 240,000 visitors to Belfast Zoo.
- Belfast Zoo was recognised at the NI Tourism Awards 2013 as Winner in the Best Visitor Experience Category.
- Hosted 775 events, including weddings, conferences and meetings, and welcomed 190,000 visitors to Belfast Castle and Malone House.

Promoted positive relations and shared space:

- Delivered a Midnight Soccer Intervention Programme, in partnership with North Belfast Play Forum, which attracted nearly 4000 participants.

Improved quality of life by reducing inequalities and tackling disadvantage, delivering a range of health and wellbeing programmes and activities:

- Delivered almost 16,000 coaching hours to 22,500 people on the Active Communities Programme.
- Supported 371 sports clubs and 235 schools and community groups through sports development and biodiversity programmes i.e. Park Life programme.
- Provided swimming opportunities to more than 6000 children in our ‘Make a Splash’ scheme.
- Delivered a ‘Try it’ sports programme engaging with 20 primary schools and over 800 children.
- Welcomed 19,500 children to our summer scheme programmes across ten leisure centres
- Referred 1,000 patients to the Healthwise scheme.

Created a greener city playing a key role in protecting and linking the city through our parks, open spaces and greenways:

- Managed and maintained to high quality standards 250 parks, open spaces and leisure assets across the city, covering an area of approximately 3,000 acres.
- Improved park quality so that 69% of residents live within 1000m of a Green Flag rated park.
- Continued to manage and maintain 12,500 street trees.