



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Falls Park Gate Lodge
Date:	14 August 2014
Reporting Officer:	Rose Crozier, Assistant Director of Parks and Leisure
Contact Officer:	Stephen Walker, Departmental Portfolio and Programme Manager

1.	Relevant Background Information
	<p>The purpose of this report is update the Committee on the potential refurbishment of the Falls Park Gate Lodge. Members may recall that the Gate Lodge, which is located at the main entrance to the Park at 512 Falls Road, is included within the Falls Park Masterplan and is included on the Capital Programme as an emerging project.</p> <p>A short piece of work was commissioned to establish options with which to inform a decision on how best to move forward. This report sets out the current position.</p> <p>The Gate Lodge was built in 1879, although it is not currently listed. It has a total floor area of 115 square metres over two floors; this includes an extension which post dated the original construction. It was originally configured as a ranger's lodge and consisted of a lounge, living room, kitchen and bathroom on the ground floor and three bedrooms on the first floor. The lodge was damaged by fire in 2000 and has remained unused since that time. The building was secured and galvanised metal sheeting was placed over the roof to protect its structural stability. As a result the building remains intact and is structurally sound, subject to a more extensive survey.</p> <p>Following a quotation exercise, a consultant was appointed to undertake an options appraisal which would:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review the condition of the building;

- Identify potential future uses of the building; and
- Establish potential options

Condition of the property

A condition survey of the property was completed which concluded that the structural integrity of the building remained intact and could be refurbished. These findings were mainly based on observation and it may be necessary for a more detailed survey to be undertaken at a future date.

Preliminary Consultation

To establish potential uses of the Gate lodge some preliminary consultation was carried out at a local level. In general the main points emerging were:

1. The Gate Lodge should be refurbished and brought back into use;
2. The future use should complement the park and be accessible to the community;
3. The primary function should be to promote the park and be a focal point of reference for information about the park including planned events and activities;
4. The Gate Lodge should be refurbished as a flexible building to enable it to be responsive to seasonal and community variations in demand;

In addition to the general points above, a number of more specific suggestions were put forward:

- a. The provision of a café area;
- b. A genealogical resource within the building;
- c. Additional car parking;
- d. The provision of a soft play area for toddlers;
- e. Office accommodation for local groups working within Falls Park such as the Friends of Falls Park or Feile an Phobail;

Given the location of the Gate Lodge there was a strong sense that the Council should bring the building back into use and to promote its use and that of the park not only for the local community but also for visitors to the city and residents from all parts of the city. Within this context the above suggestions are indicative of a desire to establish Falls Park as an open space of value and importance.

In addition to the suggestions around potential future use, it was suggested that there may be an opportunity, at the appropriate time, to consider community management of the asset once it has been refurbished possibly through seeking expressions of interest from suitable groups or organisations.

Identification of Options

Several generic options were considered as a means to providing a sense of direction in moving forward with the project.

Option 1 – Demolition

Option 2 - Council to renovate building for its own administrative purposes;

Option 3 – Council renovates and extends the building and manages it as flexible community facility;

Option 4 – Council invites expressions of interest from 3rd party investors; and

Option 5 – Council refurbishes and extends existing building, specifies end use for building and seeks a 3rd party to manage it;

Following discussion with the Falls Park Masterplan group options 3 and 5 were considered the most appropriate at this time.

It should be noted that any proposal may be subject to obtaining planning permission.

Proposed way forward

It is proposed that, in principle, the Council agree to refurbish the original building, demolish the existing extension and construct a new extension which would be fit for purpose and would meet the emerging needs of the park and the community it serves. It is suggested that the additional 140 sq metres could potentially be used as a 70 sq m flexible space and a further 70 sq m for a café area; however, this is open to further discussion. A total space of 220 sq m would be provided.

Other considerations

As part of the overall Masterplan for Falls Park, consideration is being given to the construction of an integrated Service Depot which would merge the existing Depots at Falls Park and the City Cemetery in to a single facility. The existing Depot at Falls Park is located immediately adjacent to Falls Gate Lodge and it is suggested that any refurbishment of the Gate Lodge be aligned to the new Service Depot with the potential to incorporate the existing service depot footprint within the refurbishment plans for the Gate Lodge.

In addition, members may be aware of the Rapid Transit proposal for the City. It has been highlighted that the Rapid Transit development may have implications for the existing entrance to the City Cemetery. At this point the exact implications are unclear, further consideration of this is required however, it may be necessary to reconfigure the entrance to the cemetery and the location of the Cemetery Office.

2.	Key Issues
	<p>The main issues for the Committee to consider are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Gate Lodge is currently included on the Capital Programme as an emerging project; no further action is required at this time; 2. The existing Gate Lodge is structurally sound and there is evidence of local support for its refurbishment and its being brought back into use; 3. The project is linked to the proposals for the Service Depot and the two projects should be aligned; 4. Clarification is also required in relation to the implications of the Rapid Transit proposal vis-à-vis the entrance to the City Cemetery which could require Capital investment.
3.	Resource Implications
	<p><u>Financial Implications</u></p> <p>The financial cost requires further work around the scale and scope of the proposed refurbishment.</p> <p><u>Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no additional human resource implications</p> <p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u></p> <p>The refurbishment of the Gate Lodge and its subsequent return to use would enhance the offering of the park and offers the potential to make a positive contribution in meeting local community needs.</p>
4.	Equality Implications
	There are no equality implications
5.	Recommendations
	The Committee is asked to note the report.
6.	Decision Tracking
	A report will be brought to the Committee no later than March 2015 to update it on the project.
7.	Key to Abbreviations
	None
8.	Documents Attached
	None