



## Belfast City Council

**Report to:** Parks and Leisure Committee

**Subject:** Land at Slievegallion Drive

**Date:** 14 October 2010

**Reporting Officer:** Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure

**Contact Officer:** Cathy Reynolds, Estates Manager, Property and Projects

### Purpose

To update Members on the position in relation to the site of the former Social Security Offices at Slievegallion Drive, adjoining an area of Council owned land; and to ascertain if they would wish to have the acquisition and development of this site considered as part of the Council's Capital Programme, to be considered by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

### Relevant Background Information

The site of the former Social Security offices at Slieveban Drive/Slievegallion Drive was recently declared surplus by the Department of Finance & Personnel, and the availability of the site was trawled to all public sector bodies under the LPS Central Advisory Unit trawling process. The subject site extends to an area of 0.93ha (2.3 acres) and adjoins Council owned land at Slievegallion Drive which is currently used as informal open space. A location map is enclosed at Appendix 1.

Members will be aware that a pitches strategy is currently being prepared by officers for their consideration, and whilst it is indicating a need for Gaelic pitches, the Council's land at Slievegallion hasn't been specifically prioritised. The Council's land could accommodate a soccer pitch without the need for additional lands, but it is not big enough for a Gaelic pitch. Historically a Gaelic pitch was marked out on the Council's site; however this did not meet the current minimum size requirements of the GAA.

Given the tight (3 week) timeframe for lodging expressions of interest with LPS, an initial expression of interest was therefore made to LPS by Council Officers in respect of the Social Security Offices site, with a view to potentially developing this site together with the Council's existing land, for the purpose of a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Gaelic hybrid pitch, changing facilities and car parking. This was on the basis that further detailed consideration would be required in terms of working up costs, ascertaining its strategic fit with the emerging pitches strategy and affordability and prioritisation

within the Council's Capital Programme. Expressions of interest to LPS are not binding in any way but provide a further timeframe within which more detailed consideration can be given as to whether the land should be acquired.

However, the NIHE via their nominated Housing Association is also interested in acquiring the site for social housing purposes and North & West Housing Association has been nominated to develop the site in the event that they can acquire the lands. DSD have indicated that funding would be available for site acquisition in this financial year although North & West Housing Association have indicated that as their acquisition would be subject to planning and appointment of design team etc it is essential that they commence this process within the next couple weeks.

Given the site's suitability for housing, LPS have confirmed that the value of the site will be based on housing value and not open space/recreational values. The indicative site valuation provided by LPS is £1M/£1.25M. It should also be noted that there are considerable differences in level between the Council's land and the subject site, which would result in significant increased development costs and a requirement for retaining structures as well as ball stop and additional perimeter fencing.

Detailed costings to acquire and develop this site can only be prepared when there is more clarity on the nature and specification of any facilities to be provided and an agreed valuation for the site. However, indicative figures at this stage would indicate a cost of circa £3.5/£3.7m which reflects that the land value will be based on housing land values; development of a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation hybrid pitch (with additional costs due to level differentials between the two sites), retaining structures, changing facilities, and demolition of the existing offices. In addition, empty rates would be payable in respect of the social security offices pending demolition.

Council officers have also been in discussion with the principal of the de La Salle College with a view to ascertaining potential for developing a soccer pitch on the Council's Slievegallion site. Discussions on this are at a preliminary stage and whilst funding will remain an issue, the cost of development of the Council's site for soccer will be considerably less than the estimated cost of £3.5/£3.7m (as above) as there will be no site acquisition costs, demolition costs or increased costs as a result of site level differentials.

There are other sites in the area which could be suitable for GAA pitches, for e.g. the Council's land at North Link, which is within close proximity of Slievegallion.

LPS have advised that a Ministerial Briefing was held recently in respect of this site and following this it was agreed that, in light of the two competing interests, a timetable must be put in place to ensure that the decision making process of assessing which interested party has the greatest need is completed as soon as possible. LPS have informed the Council that they are required to prepare a business case for the proposed use by 10 November and confirm that funding is available for the transfer this financial year. Both parties are to submit their business case and the Minister will have to agree which need has the greater priority. If no business case is available from the Council by 10 November its interest will be withdrawn and a transfer to the nominated Housing Association will be progressed accordingly.

Members should be aware that given the tight timeframes no decisions have been made as to the suitability or prioritisation of this site as a potential Gaelic pitch and

there is currently no identified funding for development of these lands. The acquisition and development of these lands would have to be considered as part of the Council's Capital Programme which will need to go the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

### **Key Issues**

- Site of former Social Security Offices at Slievegallion Drive, declared surplus by DFP, trawled to all public sector bodies by LPS. Adjoins Council owned land currently used as informal open space.
- Initial expression of interest made to LPS, with a view to potentially developing this site together with the Council's existing land, for the purpose of a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Gaelic hybrid pitch, changing facilities and car parking.
- NIHE via their nominated Housing Association also wish to acquire land for purposes of social housing.
- Business Case to be submitted to LPS by 10 November, together with confirmation that funding will be in place this financial year.
- Indicative site acquisition and development costs are likely to be in the region of £3.5M /£3.7M.
- The subject site has not been prioritised as a Gaelic pitch in terms of the emerging Pitches Strategy and there is currently no identified funding in the Capital Programme for site acquisition or development of these lands.
- If the land value for the site was based on open space (recreational use) this would be a reasonable acquisition for future pitch provision and therefore the committee could ask the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to consider acquiring the site as part of this year's capital programme. However, given the site's suitability for housing and the LPS indicative valuation of £1m/£1.25m it does not appear to be value for money for pitch provision given the limited funds available for capital works.
- This land is shown as white land in the BMAP and whilst this has no specific zoning as it lies within the development limit and has been previously developed the presumption will be in favour of development. However it should be noted that the valuation has not been agreed yet and will be subject to negotiations between LPS and the purchaser.

### **Resource Implications**

#### Financial

Detailed costings to acquire and develop this site can only be prepared when there is more clarity on the nature and specification of any facilities to be provided and an agreed valuation for the site. However, indicative figures at this stage would indicate a cost of circa £3.5/£3.7m, with future ongoing maintenance and renewal cost implications. There is currently no identified funding in the Capital Programme for this proposal.

#### Human Resources

Staff Resource to progress any proposals.

#### Asset and Other Implications

The development of the subject land together with the Council's adjoining lands would result in an improved recreational facility for this area.

<b>Recommendations</b>
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It is recommended that, given the current proposed site acquisition costs, the Committee inform the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that this does not represent a value for money proposition for pitch provision and therefore the expression of interest should be withdrawn.
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<b>Decision tracking</b>
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Director of Parks and Leisure to implement decision of the committee by 11 November 2010.
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<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
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LPS: Land & Property Services NIHE: Northern Ireland Housing Executive
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<b>Documents attached</b>
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Appendix 1: Location Map
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