



Subject:	Proposed Improvements to Parks and Open Spaces
Date:	10 th November 2020
Reporting Officer:	Ryan Black, Director of Neighbourhoods Services
Contact Officer:	Stephen Leonard, Neighbour Services Manager (South)

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	Members will recall that in December 2019 this committee received an update report on a number of requests from Elected representatives for a range of improvements to our Parks and Open Spaces. This included a notice of motion relating to the provision of artificial lighting in Parks and a request to review the hours our Parks are open to the public.
1.2	In March 2020 members will also recall that this committee agreed to pilot the opening of 3 parks in the city for 24 hours from the start of July to the start of September. It was agreed that this was a pilot scheme would be subject to ongoing review and evaluation. It was also agreed that information sessions would take place where users and residents would be informed of the pilot and these will be used to record and listen to any concerns raised. It was agreed that members would receive feedback on this prior to the commencement of

	the pilot and both the PSNI and the Council legal Services department would also be consulted.
1.3	The 3 sites chosen for the pilot were Ormeau Park, Falls Park and Woodvale Park.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report and;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the substantial financial implications of installing lighting in all parks and note that there is no capital financing associated with this. Given this it is recommended that a feasibility study is undertaken into the lighting requirements for different parks (e.g. City Park, Neighbourhood park). Members are also asked to note that lighting has been installed at a number of parks over the past few years as part of a number of recent capital projects and it is further recommended that the learning from these projects is factored into the above feasibility. • Agree that officers recommence work on the Opening Hours Pilots previously agreed and bring a report detailing the outcome of the consultation and engagement to the March 2021 meeting of the People & Communities Committee.
3.0	Main report
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.1	Our green and blue infrastructure including our Parks affects the quality of life for everyone in our city. It helps to define a sense of place and the character of our communities; provides important spaces for recreation with associated health and wellbeing benefits and strengthens the resilience of our natural environment to change. Protecting these assets and enhancing the benefits that they provide is therefore integral to the future of Belfast.
3.2	From the start of the Pandemic parks and greenspaces have played a major part in relation to meeting both physical and mental health needs, during times when access to the outdoors has been limited. Research has shown on numerous occasions that parks and green spaces provide multiple benefits to the health and wellbeing of residents and are a vital component of creating sustainable and healthy communities.
3.3	This is a transformational time for our city, with the Belfast Agenda setting out shared commitments across public services to an ambitious vision to create a better quality of life for us all.
3.4	In order for our Parks and Open Spaces to work effectively they will need to be well designed, regularly maintained and appropriately funded. This needs to be recognized and

	<p>used to help attract sustainable funding to ensure the benefits from any future improvements are fully realized.</p>
3.5	<p>The Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan (GBIP) sets the strategic spatial framework, vision and five strategic principles for the future delivery, management and enhancement of the whole green and blue infrastructure network; helping to meet the outcomes envisaged in the Belfast Agenda's vision. It is supported by a number of other strategies which focus on specific sub-sets of green and blue infrastructure, such as the Belfast Open Spaces Strategy (BOSS).</p>
3.6	<p>Belfast Open Spaces Strategy (BOSS) provides a road map on how the public want to use our Parks and Open spaces over the next 10 -15 years. An update Report on BOSS was brought to SP&R in March and under delegated authority the following recommendation was agreed. 'The Committee is asked to note the update on the draft BOSS consultation process and agree the proposed changes and actions set out at Appendix 1 and the production of the final Strategy document.' Officers will shortly be making the required amendments to the strategy document and this will be published.</p>
3.7	<p>Over the next 12 months, Officers from across City and Neighbourhood Services will work with colleagues across the Council to begin to develop action plans under each of the seven Strategic Principles and these will be brought to members for approval. Within the context of our transformational places approach future action planning will also seek to maximise public assets and funding by engaging and working with partners, such as DfI and DfC to identify other strategic opportunities like the Belfast Urban Greenway and the Bolder Vision for Belfast to identify funding opportunities and work up proposals.</p>
3.8	<p>Provision of Artificial Lighting to our Parks</p> <p>In the December 2019 report members were informed that we currently have approximately 300 km of road and pathways in our Parks and Open Spaces and pilot work was required to identify potential sites and work up proposals. This pilot would also need to consider the outcomes benefits and risks/issues etc. including any impact on crime and ASB, any impact on landscape character and wildlife habitats and ultimately costings in relation to purchasing and installing the equipment and any associated revenue and maintenance trail. Due to Covid this work has not been undertaken to date.</p>

- 3.9 Members are asked to note the substantial financial implications of installing lighting in all 300km of road/pathways in our parks. Members will also be aware of the current limitations of the capital financing budget and that there is no capital financing associated with this proposal. Given this it is recommended that a feasibility report is undertaken into the lighting requirements for the different types of parks within the Council's park portfolio as it will not be a 'one size fits all' model in terms of need (e.g. City Park, Neighbourhood park) . Officers from C&NS will work with the Physical Programmes Department on working this up. This will then allow officers to develop up fully costed proposals. This will then be reported back to Committee once undertaken Members are also asked to note that lighting has been installed at a number of parks over the past few years as part of a number of recent capital projects (see Appendix 1) and it is further recommended that the learning from these projects is factored into the above feasibility. Officers will also collate information on those parks and spaces that have lighting in order to promote their possible use in the winter months.
- 3.10 Members are further asked to note that any proposals for lighting will be required to be recommended to the SP&R Committee to be added to the Capital Programme as a Stage 1 – Emerging Project and will therefore need to be considered in the context of the organisational financial position.
- Amending the Opening and Closing Hours of Parks**
- 3.11 Due to Covid the 24 hour pilot for Ormeau, Woodvale and Falls Park did not take place. Officers were unable to carry out any consultation with local groups, seek the views of legal services and the PSNI and put together any animation programmes for the sites in question.
- 3.12 Members will also be aware that due to Covid 19 restrictions we were unable to close our Parks during the initial lock down period. At the start this presented few problems however as we began to emerge from lock down our Parks experienced increased Anti-Social Behaviour, vandalism and damage. A number of assaults also took place. Following complaints from the public and elected representatives we began locking our parks again. There is the added concern that should Parks remain open over the winter months the absence of lighting increases the possibility of accidents, additional crime and ASB.

3.13	<p>Prior to amending the opening hours of our Parks further consideration of the risks is therefore required. The opening times for our Parks can be accessed via the following link https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/parks/a-z. The council has currently no capacity within the existing Open Space & Street Scene service to staff Parks outside of these hours.</p>
3.14	<p>If members are content officers can re-start the pilot proposal and begin consultation with local groups, legal services and the PSNI. Officers could also start to look at animation proposals for these spaces. Officers will report on the outcome of this work to the March 2021 committee.</p>
	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p>
	<p><u>Artificial Lighting In parks</u></p>
3.15	<p>Members will be aware of the current limitations of the capital financing budget and that there is no capital financing associated with this proposal, therefore any proposals for lighting will be required to be recommended to the SP&R Committee to be added to the Capital Programme as a Stage 1 – Emerging Project and will therefore need to be considered in the context of the organisational financial position.</p>
	<p><u>Amending the Opening & Closing Times of Parks</u></p>
3.16	<p>The council has currently no capacity within the existing Open Space & Street Scene budgets to amend the opening and closing times of parks outside of the current working times.</p>
	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.17	<p>There are no known Equality, Good Relations or Rural needs implications.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix One: List of Parks with lighting as part of capital redevelopment schemes