

Parks and Leisure Committee

Thursday, 12th March, 2015

MEETING OF PARKS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Newton (Chairman);
the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Hendron);
Alderman Rodgers; Councillors Beattie,
Convery, Corr, Cunningham,
Hanna, Haire, Kyle, Mac Giolla Mhín,
McCabe, McNamee, Ó Donnghaile
and Thompson.

Also attended: Councillor Spence.

In attendance: Mrs. R. Crozier, Assistant Director of Parks
and Leisure; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Alderman Robinson and Councillors Attwood, Hussey, Mullan and Verner.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 24th February were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

"Homeless Pod" at Jubilee Gardens

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 24th February, it had considered a report which outlined the issues which had arisen for the Council as a result of the placing, without permission, of a 'homeless pod' at the Jubilee Gardens. At that meeting, the Committee had expressed its concern and had suggested that the issues raised should be addressed on a multi-agency basis. Concern was expressed also that the organisation which had placed the pod at the site, that is, Common Law NI, had failed to engage meaningfully with the Council to resolve the matter. Accordingly, the Committee had agreed that an invitation to attend the meeting be extended to Common Law NI, and that an invitation be extended also to a range of statutory bodies – particularly the Northern Ireland Housing Executive – to discuss the matter with a view to finding a longer-term resolution.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting two representatives of Common Law NI, both of whom had requested that they remain anonymous, together with Mr. D. Marley,

Homelessness Services Unit Manager with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Ms. R. Rowledge, Director of the Council for the *Homeless* (NI), a charity which represented *homelessness* agencies throughout Northern Ireland.

A representative of Common Law NI advised the Committee that the pod had been placed within the Jubilee Gardens to raise awareness of homeless issues in Belfast. He reported that the pod had been situated in the space to coincide with the coldest period of the year and that it had been removed from the site in late-February. He added that the “temporary experiment” was considered to have been concluded. He outlined the arrangements which had been put in place to ensure that the pod was cleaned on a regular basis and emphasised that it had been placed at the site to offer an alternative for homeless individuals to use should no other outlet be available.

The representatives of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Council for the Homeless outlined the range of services which were available for the homeless across Belfast. It was emphasised that, whilst acknowledging the good intentions of those who had placed the pod on the site, both the Housing Executive and the Council for the Homeless had been opposed totally to its use as an alternative to existing services. Mr. Marley pointed out that the Housing Executive had sought to raise awareness of the wide range of services which existed for so-called ‘rough sleepers’, and stated that the homeless pod had created a perception that there were little or no services available.

In addition, concern was expressed by Ms. Rowledge that the pod had created a situation whereby homeless individuals would become more vulnerable to attack. She suggested that the homeless pod was, in essence, somewhat degrading to individuals, since it encouraged isolation and created serious issues regarding health, hygiene and safety.

Members pointed out that the charity had placed the Council in an invidious situation by placing the pod on its land without consultation. Concern was expressed that, should a serious incident have occurred at the site, the Council could have been held responsible and, as such, it was regrettable that the charity had acted without consulting the Council.

In response to a specific question regarding the Common Law NI’s future intentions for the homeless pod, it was confirmed that it was likely that the pod would be located again within Belfast. The deputations then left the meeting.

The Committee welcomed the fact that the Common Law NI had attended the meeting and entered into dialogue with the Council, and it was requested that officers continue to engage with the charity. However, in respect of the suggestion by the charity that the pod might be re-located as part of a further experiment, the Committee agreed, should the pod be placed on Council property, that it would be removed due to the health, hygiene and safety reasons stated previously.

Noted.

Rapid Transit - Potential Impact on Belfast City Cemetery

The Committee considered the following report:

“1. Background Information

Members will be aware of the proposals regarding a rapid transit transportation system for the City. One of the proposed routes is to link the Colin Town Centre in West Belfast with Belfast City Centre; the route will incorporate the Falls Road.

As part of the process DRD has undertaken a feasibility study to look at a number of options regarding access and egress arrangements at Belfast City Cemetery. Members will be aware that the cemetery remains operational, although there are no new burial plots available. The current main gate access is only adequate to accommodate a single vehicle at a time and this is the only vehicle access point.

Members are asked to note that there are currently three potential access points:

- Access 1 is the current main entrance at the roundabout at the junction of Falls Road / Whiterock Road;
- Access 2 is further along the Falls Road
- Access 3 is further up the Whiterock Road

The Department considered 4 options within the context of the current potential access points.

Option 1 – Signalisation of the current access point at the main entrance (Access 1);

Option 2 – Provide separate access and egress arrangements which would require retaining the existing entrance as ‘in only’ and creating a new ‘out only’ egress in to the Whiterock road, adjacent to Foxes Lodge (Access 3);

Option 3 – Opening of the Falls Road gateway;

Option 4 – Opening of the Whiterock gateway;

The report outlines a series of benefits and dis-benefits associated with each of the options together with indicative costs.

The Department has concluded that Option 2 is the preferred option 2 on the basis of:

- That this represents a least cost option;
- There is minimal disruption and associated construction works;
- The administration of the cemetery can continue as at present with no alteration to its location; and
- The signalisation of the junction at Whiterock Road / Falls Road can be implemented with again minimal disruption

Council Officers have revised the proposals and agree in principle, subject to further discussion with DRD, that Option 2 is the preferred option.

2. Key Issues

Members are asked to note that discussions need to continue to establish the precise nature of the alterations required to accommodate a one way in one way out vehicle management system and to agree costs. In addition, as noted in the report it will be necessary to control access to the gateway and these discussions will need to take place. It is anticipated that consultation with local residents will be required as part of this process.

3. Resource and Equality Implications

None.

5. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee support in principle Option 2 and authorise Officers to continue discussions with DRD to reach an appropriate agreement with."

The Committee agreed to adopt Option 2 as outlined within the report.

Sure Start - Land at Stewart Street

The Committee was reminded that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee had, at its meeting on 22nd February, 2013, endorsed a recommendation of the South Belfast Area-Based Working Group that financial support of £150,000 from within its Local Investment Fund be awarded to Sure Start to enable the construction of a modular building on the Council-leased land at Stewart Street. It was reported that Sure Start had requested that the Council would agree to sub-lease a small area of land for that purpose at Stewart Street, an outline of which was tabled for the Committee's information.

The Committee agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that, in accordance with Standing Orders 46 and 60, it would sub-let the land at Stewart Street to Sure Start for the purpose outlined, subject to the drawing-up of an appropriate legal agreement.

Easement and Wayleave - Newtownards Road

The Committee was informed that Landmark East was overseeing the construction of the East Belfast Visitor Centre on a vacant site at 402 Newtownards Road. It was reported that a request had been received from Landmark East seeking approval to install an electricity cable, water and gas supplies to the site through adjacent Council-owned land, an outline of which was tabled for the Committee's information.

The Committee agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, in accordance with Standing Orders 46 and 60, that it would agree to enter into an arrangement with Landmark East for the purpose outlined, subject to the drawing-up of an appropriate legal agreement.

Urban Skate Park

The Committee considered the following report:

"1. Relevant Background Information

- 1.1 The department has received a request from Prime Cut Productions to host a theatrical based outreach programme and schedule of performances in Bridges Urban Skate Park later in the spring.**
- 1.2 Based in Belfast Prime Cut Productions is a theatre company in residence at The MAC, and is one of Ireland's leading independent theatre producers. Established in 1992, the company has produced some of the island's most memorable and thought-provoking theatre. They are committed to providing audiences with challenging and outstanding theatre which reflects and interrogates some of the most pressing issues of our time.**
- 1.3 The project is entitled 'the stories of us' and is funded by Belfast City Council, Children in Need and the Lloyds TSB foundation. It is a youth based project working with young people from the greater Belfast area and will engage over 200 people from 10 different organisations. The event organiser has also identified current day to day users of the space as another group to include in the project. Early consultation indicates that these users are keen to get involved.**

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The project is funded by the Good Relations unit and the organisers have chosen Bridges as a neutral space that promotes changing attitudes and shared space. This project will compliment and reinforce the hard work that the Parks and Leisure department has delivered to date at the park through the Peace III Urban Bridges project.
- 2.2 The event organiser has requested free use of the site for the period of the outreach programme and finale performances.
- 2.3 The event organiser intends to ask for a nominal donation of up to £5.00 from members of the public who attend the theatrical performances. Prime Cut Productions has placed significant importance on this financial donation as it will highlight to the young people involved the importance and value of their hard work.
- 2.4 The team that will use the space are highly experienced in managing performances in public spaces and will ensure that all health and safety aspects are met to the satisfaction of Council officers. An event management plan will be completed along with risk assessments and a copy of employers and public liability insurances will be submitted to the Council in advance of the project commencing.

3. Resource and Equality Implications

None.

4. Recommendations

It is recommended that Committee approve the request for:

1. The free use of the space for the theatrical based outreach programme with 3 finale productions; and
2. That a charge of up to £5.00 be levied on those who attend the performances.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Feile an Phobail Request

The Committee was informed that a request had been received from the organisers of the annual Feile an Phobail seeking permission to use the Falls Park and the City Cemetery for a range of events which would form part of the West Belfast Festival in 2015. The Assistant Director reported that the Festival would take place from

2nd till 11th August, however, the actual dates for the events indicated had yet to be finalised:

- Carnival Parade – the Falls Park;
- Teddy Bears' Picnic – the Falls Park;
- Feile Family Entertainment Day – the Falls Park; and
- Guided Historical Tours of the City Cemetery - for which a charge will be levied by the tour operator.

The Assistant Director reported also that Occasional Licences would be sought by the organisers for the sale of alcohol, together with an Entertainments Licence for the period of the Festival. In addition, it was anticipated that further requests would be received to host additional events in other departmental facilities, such as the Andersonstown Leisure Centre.

Accordingly, the Assistant Director recommended that the Committee grant approval for the use and hire of the Council facilities for the events, as set out, on the conditions:

- that the event organisers resolve all operational issues to the satisfaction of the Council;
- that an appropriate legal agreement be prepared by the Town Solicitor;
- the organisers pay a bond of intent to the Council; and
- that the event organisers meet with all the statutory requirements.

The Committee granted the approval sought.

Belfast Zoological Gardens

Friends of the Zoo - Fun Run

The Committee was informed that a request had been received from the Friends of Belfast Zoo seeking permission to hold a fun run within the grounds on a date to be determined in late-May. The Assistant Director reported that the event, which would seek to raise funds for the Zoo and local charities, would take place over a 5 km course and would involve approximately 700 competitors.

The Committee granted permission for the fun run to take place at the Belfast Zoo, subject to the drawing-up of an appropriate legal agreement.

Sheila the Elephant - Zoo Film

The Assistant Director reported that the Department had been approached by the producers of a film entitled 'Zoo' seeking permission to film scenes within the facility. She explained that the film would portray the true story of Denise Austin, the Zoo's famous 'Elephant Angel', who cared for Sheila the elephant in her back yard off the Whitewell Road during the war years. The Committee was advised that the filming was

due to commence in October and that the film would be aimed at a younger audience.

The Committee granted permission for the Zoo to be used for the filming as requested, subject to the drawing-up of an appropriate legal agreement.

Last Meeting of the Committee

The Chairman pointed out that it was the final meeting of the Committee prior to the implementation of Local Government Reform. He paid tribute to the Members, particularly those who would be standing down from the Council, for their work over the past number of years and thanked also the officers for their work and dedication.

Chairman