



Subject:	Opening Hours Pilot (three park sites) and Forth Meadow Greenway opening hours - proposed community consultation exercises
Date:	Tuesday 11 th June 2024
Reporting Officer:	Stephen Leonard, Operational Director of Resource, Fleet and OSS
Contact Officer:	Eiméar McCullough, Lead Officer - OSS

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 or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To update Members on a proposed community consultation on the opening hours pilot for Falls, Woodvale and Ormeau Parks, and on the future opening hours of Forth Meadow Greenway.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked to note the content of the report.
3.0	Main report
	<u>Background</u>
3.1	Access to open spaces provides multiple benefits to the health and wellbeing of residents and is a vital component of creating sustainable and healthy communities. Belfast City Council has the responsibility of managing, maintaining and keeping these spaces safe for citizens, including managing access through gate locking to negate health and safety risks including ASB.

3.2	<p>As well as our own experience, research has shown that keeping parks open facilitates better use by communities and has the potential to reduce antisocial behaviour - for example with Connswater Community Greenway where the main 'spine' is lit and accessible 24/7. However, although some of our open-space sites are accessible at night, for the most part a 'dawn to dusk' opening hours pattern is followed with times changing as daylight lengthens or shortens.</p> <p><u>Committee Background</u></p>
3.3	<p>Following Notices of Motion relating to the provision of artificial lighting in parks and a request to review the hours that our parks are open to the public, Members will recall that People and Communities Committee agreed to recommendations of a report on Proposed Improvements to Parks and Open Spaces – Opening Hours Pilot at its meeting on 3rd March 2020 which referred to a pilot for 24 hour opening for Ormeau, Falls and Woodvale Parks over the summer months. This report is attached at Appendix 1.</p> <p>Unfortunately the pilot was not delivered due to the COVID pandemic and the associated restrictions which impacted officers' ability to consult with local groups at that time.</p>
3.4	<p>A further report on Proposed Improvements to Parks and Open Spaces was considered by People and Communities Committee at its meeting 10 November 2020 (report attached at Appendix 2). Members noted the substantial financial implications associated with the installation of lighting in all parks, and the lack of funding to support such a request. They also noted the new lighting investment that had occurred at a number of our open spaces in recent years, and agreed that officers would recommence work on the Opening Hours Pilot.</p> <p><u>Current Status</u></p>
3.5	<p>Since 2020, lighting has been added along the main spines of a number of new and existing open spaces including Páirc Nua Chollan, Lower Shankill Park and Marrowbone Millennium Park. Along with Forth Meadow Greenway and the Connswater Greenway, the Council now provide over 22km of lit pathways. Further lighting improvements are planned as part of the redevelopment Ballysillan Playing Fields through the Urban Villages Programme.</p>
3.6	<p>One of the 'Opening Hour Pilot' sites, Falls Park, has recently benefited from new lighting as part of the 12km Forth Meadow Greenway (FMG) Peace IV funded scheme in north and west Belfast. Now that the final section of the scheme has completed the proposed consultation on FMG opening hours will be an opportunity to consider deviating from the existing 'dawn to dusk' opening hours for each of the park sites along the greenway and the connecting sections. Consultation is required to ensure that the benefits and other impacts on residents and users, are considered at a local level.</p>
3.7	<p>ASB in some parks across the city remains a concern with an ongoing Static Park Warden Pilot currently demonstrating some success at Pairc Nua Chollann, Dunville Park and Woodvale Park. Members will be aware of the recent agreement for its expansion into Falls Park to counter ongoing ASB problems on the site.</p>
3.8	<p>Given the Forth Meadow Greenway consultation will seek views on the opening times for Falls Park, it is now an opportune time to test the viability of extended opening hour options for the other two pilot sites at Ormeau and Woodvale. This will enable the collation for each of the site's residents, users and partners views, including concerns, and also to take on board learning from any Static Park Warden Pilots, diversionary programmes, and interagency operational interventions at these sites. The pilot approach at Ormeau Park</p>

3.9	<p>also provides an opportunity to further consider the development of lighting options. This also presents an opportunity for the Council to maximise the potential benefits from DfI's forthcoming delivery of a pedestrian/ cycle bridge over the Lagan River, connecting the site and local area to the city centre via the Gasworks (2027).</p>
<p><u>Next Steps – Consultation Timeframe and Methodology</u></p>	
3.10	<p>It is proposed that a consultation and engagement plan for the Opening Hours Pilot will be developed over the summer and carried out in the autumn in parallel to the consultation and engagement exercise to consider opening hours of FMG (park sites and connections).</p>
3.11	<p>It is anticipated that a report detailing the outcome of both consultations will be brought back to People and Communities Committee for Members' consideration before the end of the year.</p>
3.12	<p>In line with what was agreed previously by Members for the 'Opening Hour Pilots' in addition to an online survey it is proposed that a series of local Information Sessions will take place to inform users and residents of the pilot proposals for each site with feedback captured on views and concerns of stakeholders. In addition to Members and Council's Legal Services, the PSNI and other partners will be consulted. A similar approach will be taken forward for Forth Meadow Greenway.</p>
<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p>	
3.13	<p>It is not clear at this stage what the budget implications would be in relation to any future extended opening pilots and changing the opening hours of the Forth Meadow Greenway. It is anticipated this will come at additional cost to the Council. These costs are not currently in revenue or capital estimates.</p> <p>Following the consultation phase a report will be brought to Members and this will provide further information on this.</p>
<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessments</u></p>	
3.14	<p>There are no Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessments associated with this report.</p>
<p>4.0 Appendices – Documents Attached</p>	
<p>Appendix 1 - P&C Committee report, 3rd March 2020 'Proposed Improvements to Parks and Open Spaces - Opening Hours Pilot'. Appendix 2 - P&C Committee report, 10th Nov 2020 'Proposed Improvements to Parks and Open Spaces'</p>	