



Subject:	Proposed Improvements to Parks and Open Spaces 'Opening Hours Pilot'
Date:	3 rd March 2020
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services Ryan Black, Director of Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Stephen Leonard, Neighbourhood 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 the committee considered a report on 'Proposed Improvements to Parks and Open Spaces'. This report referred to the possibility amending the Opening and Closing Hours of Parks but highlighted the need for more work to be done to consider the feasibility of this approach. This report provides an update on work carried out to date and proposes a pilot scheme for the 24 hour opening of 3 further parks in the City, to improve accessibility and promote further animation.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is recommended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the contents of this report and, subject to consultation, agree to pilot the 24 hour opening of Ormeau Park, Falls Park and Woodvale Park for a trial period in the summer of 2020.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>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.</p>
3.2	<p>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.</p>
3.3	<p>Belfast Open Spaces Strategy (BOSS) will provide a road map on how the public want to use our Parks and Open spaces over the next 10 -15 years. A public consultation exercise on the strategy has just been completed. The strategy proposes a number of strategic principles (SPs), namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide welcoming shared spaces • Improve connectivity • Improve Health & Wellbeing • Support place-making and enhance the built environment • Increase resilience to climate change • Protect and enhance the natural environment • Be celebrated and support learning
3.4	<p>Subject to Council agreeing the BOSS strategy, the next stage will see the development of an action plan outlining key activities under each of the 7 strategic principles.</p>

3.5	In an effort to test some ideas and, based on customer feedback and other project opportunities (i.e Peace IV Shared Spaces), it is proposed to 'pilot' 24 hour opening across 3 parks sites.
3.6	As part of this pilot the identified parks will be supported through an improved animation programme to support the promotion of these spaces and makes them more adaptive to the needs of city life.
3.7	Other cities, like Paris, have found that by keeping parks open they become better used by communities, which in turn brings spaces to life and has the potential to reduce anti-social behaviour.
3.8	<p>We currently lock our parks in order to negate the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and Safety risks to the public • Issues that cannot be addressed in relation to anti-social behaviour • Environmental restrictions
3.9	The proposed pilot will run from the start of June to the start of September and during this time the identified Parks will remain open 24 hours a day. The pilot scheme will be subject to ongoing review and evaluation
3.10	It is proposed that information sessions will take place where users and residents will be informed of the pilot and these will be used to record and listen to any concerns raised. Members will receive feedback on this prior to the commencement of the pilot. The PSNI and the Council's legal Services department will also be consulted.
3.11	<p>If members are agreeable to this recommendation, both these parks will join a number of parks and gardens that are already open or partially accessible at night. These currently include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barnetts Demesne • Lagan Meadows • Connswater Greenway • Belfast Castle/Cavehill country Park • Ligoniel Park • Clement Wilson Park

3.12	Wedderburn park, Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon Park and Mary Peters Track are examples of Parks that are partially closed in that the main gates are closed but pedestrian access available is still available to these areas.
3.13	Both the PSNI and our own Safer Neighbourhood Officers monitor these parks. The need for additional patrols in these parks will be considered a part of the consultation with PSNI.
	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u>
3.14	The costs of any of the improvements referred to in this report have not been included within existing budgets.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.15	There are no known Equality, Good Relations or Rural needs implications.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None