

Outdoor Skate Park Facility

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that discussions to construct a purpose built outdoor Skate Park in Belfast have been ongoing for some 5/6 years with limited progress. Members may also recall that the Community & Recreation Committee at its meeting on 15th February, 2005, agreed to support a skateboarding event in the Ozone/Ormeau Park Complex on 24th June 2005. In agreeing to support this event there was awareness that the event itself could help us to gauge the level of demand for a more permanent outdoor Skate Park facility for Belfast.

The event took place and was a huge success, with over 4000 people attending. It proved the need for providing a Skate Park for Belfast and on the day a survey took place to find out the views of Belfast's skating community. Questions in the survey included details such as where a potential skate park might be and various questions regarding its design.

More recently, through the work of the Belfast City Council Youth Forum Facilities and Youth Provision sub group, including an online survey, the need for a Skate Park has again been highlighted.

Also at the most recent Children & Young People All Party Steering Group an update was given by officers on the ongoing work in relation to developing a Skate Park. At this meeting Members expressed their frustration with regard to the length of time that such a project has been debated with limited progress.

However more recently Council officers have been working closely with the Skaters and have achieved the following:

- Identified a potential location for a Skate Park at Nelson Street
- Engaged with Consarc who prepared concept drawings of what the park might look like. (Appendix A & B shows photographs of Skate Park facilities in other locations so Members can get a better idea of what it might look like)
- Agreement in principal for the development of a Skate Park from Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHC) the landowners in a letter dated December 2006 (Appendix C)

NITHC to date have been very supportive of our proposals mainly due to two key reasons. Firstly the area of land identified as the potential site is of very limited use due to its location and layout however it does lend itself well to a Skate Park type facility. Secondly NITHC have highlighted that more recently some antisocial behaviour has started to take place on the site in the form of underage drinking and substance abuse and they would see the Skate Park facility as a positive step to helping to address some of these issues.

The Skaters:

- Have become a recognised / constituted group called B.U.S. (Belfast Urban Sports)
- They have applied for and are currently awaiting charitable status
- They have been instrumental in identifying potential funding
- They are continuing to develop their network of skaters
- They have consulted with the skating fraternity and have agreed that the Nelson Street site is appropriate

Council officers have continued to facilitate meetings with B.U.S. and relevant stakeholders. BCC has also provided assistance from their Funding Advice Officer, Sports Development Unit, Events Unit, and the Development Department and have initiated a process where B.U.S. will put together a concise Sports Development Plan by the end of January 2007.

The relationship which the Council develops with BUS will be a key component in helping to make the Skate Park a success and we very much see it as a partnership. The detail as to how exactly the

partnership will work is yet to be fully worked up however the concept is that BCC will take the lead in securing funding and constructing the facility. BUS in turn will work more on the sports development side of the project including providing on-site coaching, organising events and competitions. Their involvement will in no way restrict public access to the facility for casual users.

It should be highlighted that NITHC were keen to enter into any future lease/license agreement with BCC as apposed to BUS hence BCC being the lead partner.

Key Issues

Having identified potential funding sources the process has accelerated over recent weeks.

There are two potential sources of particular interest at the moment:

1. Sports Council for Northern Ireland - Building Sport
2. Brighter Belfast – Landfill Tax Credit

The key reason why this project has been accelerated over recent weeks is because a deadline has been set for the 26th January 2007 to the Sports Council's Building Sport fund for applications to have been received with no dates released for any future rounds of funding.

Following on from the initial costings presented by Consarc in September 2005 and subsequent uplifts for inflation and contingencies as directed by the Development Department it is anticipated that the total cost of the Skate Park will be approximately £260K. With up to £130K (50%) potentially available from the Sports Council; and up to £50K potentially available from the Landfill Tax Credit Fund this would leave the Council with having to meet a minimum shortfall in the region of £80K.

A project proposal form regarding the Skate Park has been submitted to the Capital Programme for 2006/07 although to date nothing has yet been agreed by Members.

In relation to ongoing revenue costs for similar type facilities research to date has highlighted that there would be a relatively low revenue cost due to the mainly concrete type construction of the Skate Park. This research has identified that a figure in the region of 10% of the total capital cost of the project which in this case would equate to approximately £26K per annum.

Resource Implications

Financial

Based on the original concept drawings produced by Consarc and subsequent additional uplifting as suggested by the Development Department it is anticipated that the total capital cost of the Skate Park will be in the region of £260K with an anticipated annual revenue cost of £26K per annum. If the external funding is secured there will be a minimum shortfall of £80K to be met by BCC.

Human Resources

If approved by Committee there will be a requirement on officer time from the Policy and Performance Manager Community and Recreation, the Children and Young People's Coordinator to oversee the project and from Legal Services in relation to the lease/licence agreement and officer time will also be required to project manage the scheme from the Development Department.

Asset and Other Implications

In order to progress the application it will be essential to get agreement on the lease/licence agreement with NITHC. The initial discussions which we have had with NITHC would suggest that other than a token 'peppercorn rent' no other costs would be incurred.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that Committee give approval for submission of a funding application to the Sports Council NI Building Sport Fund.
- It is recommended that Committee give approval for submission of a funding application to the Landfill Tax Credit Fund.
- It also recommended that Committee agrees to part fund the construction of a Skate Park by agreeing to meet a minimum shortfall of £80K.
- Members are also requested to provide some direction on if/how we should progress with this project if all or part off the external funding is not secured.

Key to Abbreviations

B.U.S – Belfast Urban Sports

NITHC – Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company”

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations and agreed, in the event that external funding be not secured, that a further report in relation to the matter be submitted for its consideration.