



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Parks and Leisure Committee
Subject:	Belfast Zoological Gardens – when Hollywood met Hazelwood
Date:	12 March 2015
Reporting Officer:	Rose Crozier, Acting Director of Parks
Contact Officer:	Mark Challis, Zoo Manager

1.	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Zoo has been approached by the Northern Ireland producers of a new film called 'Zoo'.
1.2	The film is based on the true story of Denise Austin, the zoo's famous 'elephant angel', who cared for Sheila the elephant during the second world war. Denise secretly walked Sheila from the zoo each evening to the backyard of her terraced home on the Whitewell Road, where she cared for and comforted the young elephant during the Belfast Blitz.
1.3	The film has a target audience of 7 to 13 year olds. It is a family film, and is intended for a market that is traditionally strong but under represented in the market place. Many top grossing films are, like the 'Zoo', family films.
1.4	Filming is taking in Belfast, and in Hamilton, Ontario. Hamilton has been chosen as it still retains red bricked terraced housing similar to that of 1940's Belfast, and due to its proximity to a 4 year old elephant living in African Lion Safari in Toronto. This elephant has been used before in films and commercials, and will play the role of 'Buster'.
1.5	Filming will also take place in Belfast, including some scenes to be shot in the new zoo area, incorporating views of the Cave Hill, and the old zoo area, where some of the existing 1930's cages, which are currently in poor condition, will be dressed and renovated to resemble the animal enclosures of the period.

1.6	Careful use of filming techniques and CGI will recreate 1940's Belfast, and will include such iconic Belfast landmarks as the Cave Hill and the dockyards.
1.7	The producers have significant industry support, including the British Film Institute, NI Screen and the Irish Film Board. Principal filming is likely to start in August 2015, and they are likely to be on the zoo site in October 2015. The film has a budget of £4M.
1.8	Casting is ongoing, the producers envisage an adult cast of well known and recognisable actors, to support the child actors. Art Parkinson (Game of Thrones) is already signed up.
1.9	The producers are considering the possibilities of European and Canadian launches and release of the film in 2016.

2.	Key Issues
2.1	The producers of a new film, scheduled for filming in 2015 and release in 2016, have made contact with the Zoo regarding a film called 'Zoo', based on the story of the Zoo's famous elephant angel.
2.2	The film is set in 1940's Belfast, and is targeted towards the family market.
2.3	Some filming will take place in the zoo, though minimal disruption to zoo operations and visitors is expected.
2.4	A successful film, of this genre, has the potential to be very positive for Belfast and the Zoo, and provide significant global marketing opportunities.

3.	Resource Implications
	<p><u>Financial</u></p> <p>There are no immediate financial cost implications to the Zoo.</p> <p><u>Human Resources</u></p> <p>There are no immediate resource HR implications.</p> <p><u>Asset and Other Implications</u></p> <p>The film has an ability to provide for significant marketing opportunity for the Zoo. During filming, there will be some filming in the zoo grounds, both old and new zoo, but impacts to normal operations and visitors, especially given the time of year, are expected to be minimal.</p>

4.	Equality Implications
4.1	It is considered that there are no equality or good relations implications.

5.	Recommendations
5.1	The Committee is asked to note the above report and to approve the use of the Zoo grounds for filming.

6.	Decision Tracking
6.1	None required.

7.	Key to Abbreviations
7.1	None

8.	Documents Attached
8.1	None