

Extract from minutes of meeting of Parks and Leisure Committee Thursday, 9th October, 2008

Playground Provision – Eversleigh Street/Sliabh Dubh

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“Relevant Background Information

Officers from Parks and Cemeteries have been involved in discussions with local residents and other statutory agencies including Belfast Regeneration Office and Fold Housing Association. These discussions have centred on the need for a play area within the newly constructed Sliabh Dubh Housing Estate in West Belfast and for a similar facility in Eversleigh Street in the East of the City.

The Committee is reminded that at its meetings in January and February 2008 it received reports related to the provision of a playground at Eversleigh street in the Woodstock Road area. The Committee has agreed that the Council would seek the acquisition of the land from the Housing Executive at nil cost, would provide project management and design support to the community and would support the community in attracting external funding to meet the capital cost of the project.

The Committee is advised that a scheme has been prepared and the Department for Social Department (Physical Renewal Branch) has agreed to meet the capital cost of the work at Eversleigh Street (£192k).

Officers have been approached by local residents from Sliabh Dubh estate, Springfield Road, regarding the provision of a playground. Officers advised the residents that while the Council supports the need for play facilities for local children it was not in a position to meet the capital costs. Following further meetings between Officers from Belfast Regeneration Office, Fold Housing Association and the Council, the Department for Social Development agreed to meet the cost, estimated to be in the region of £160k.

The land is currently owned by Fold Housing Association which has agreed to transfer the land at nil cost to the Council.

Key Issues

The Committee is asked to note the following points:

1. Residents from the Eversleigh Street area have no access to junior play facilities;
2. Sliabh Dubh is a new housing estate in West Belfast, in excess of 200 units have been constructed with no play facilities. Planning Policy Statement 8 (PPS 8) requires that play provision be provided where there are 100 new housing units, unfortunately this scheme pre-dates PPS 8;
3. The Department for Social Development has agreed to meet the capital cost of both projects (total cost is in the region of (£350k) on the basis that the Council agree to accept the transfer of land and undertake the management and maintenance responsibilities associated with playground provision;

4. Officers from Parks and Cemeteries are currently reviewing playground provision and will bring forward, to a future meeting, a draft framework to guide decisions as to playground provision. However, in both cases, Officers are satisfied that there is local need due to the lack of play areas in the vicinity of local housing.

Resource Implications

The Members have stressed that one of their key requirements in the new governance arrangements is to take control of the Council resources at a strategic level. In order for this to be done, it is considered that this section of the new reporting structure needs to be much more robust.

Financial

The Committee is asked to note that the capital cost of provision will be met by the Department for Social Development.

The schemes will have revenue implications. The acquisition will represent additional, stand alone, facilities, which will need to be inspected and cleaned. It is estimated that the cost of this will be in the region of £1,500 per annum per site. This does not take account of damage to the facility through vandalism or use.

Members are asked to note that the typical life expectancy of play equipment and the surface would be approximately 10-12 years, again depending on levels of use and abuse over time. Members should be aware that these items will require replacement in the future.

Human Resources

This project will require Officer time from the Landscape Planning and Development and the Estates Management Unit.

Asset and Other Implications

These projects will add to the Council land holding and will, upon completion, increase the number of playgrounds to 76.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. agree to acquire the land at Eversleigh Street and Sliabh Dubh at nil cost to the Council and authorise officers to enter into the necessary discussions and the appropriate agreements in respect of the land;
2. agree that Officers from Landscape Planning and Development continue to provide support to the communities and undertake the project management of the project;
3. agree to accept the management and maintenance responsibilities associated with the new facilities and to the inclusion of additional provision within the revenue estimates for 2009/10 and for subsequent future years;
4. agree that the facilities be added to the Council's insurance schedule;
5. agree that the Landscape Planning and Development Unit continue to manage the projects; and
6. agree that the projects be forwarded for inclusion in the list of capital projects at no cost to the Council."

The Committee adopted the recommendations within the report.