



Belfast City Council

Report to: Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Subject: Sports Village Concept – North Foreshore

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RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Members will be aware that Crusaders Football Club have previously floated proposals to relocate their ground Seaview to potential new stadium locations at either Grove Park or Valley Park, Newtownabbey together with ancillary sports based facilities.

Council rejected the idea of allowing Grove Park for such a venture, Crusaders preference, however, remains a Belfast location and since that Council decision in 2009 they have further worked up the Sports Village concept.

Crusaders have partnered with Newington Football Club another North Belfast club that has major difficulties with its ground to propose a flagship project that not only provides tangible benefits for both clubs but also addresses the major social issues of reconciliation and a shared space in a deeply segregated North Belfast.

While still at concept stage the proposal envisages locating the Stadium/Sports Village on the North Foreshore.

KEY ISSUES

The proposed Sports Village complex comprises a 4000 – 6000 seat stadium with restaurant and corporate function facilities, 70,000 sq ft of commercial let retail, office and educational facilities aimed at sports related business, a number of training pitches, soccer dome, 65 bed hotel together with car and coach parking space. The estimated cost of providing the facility as envisaged and excluding land values and some infrastructure is around £35m. In terms of

land take the proposal would require a minimum of 25 acres in the South West area of the site. A copy of a Crusaders/Newington presentation is attached for information (Appendix 1).

To date Crusaders/Newington have received funding from SIB to consider governance arrangements for the Sports Village model. In essence a partnership with the Council is envisaged whereby Crusaders/Newington would raise the capital to undertake the scheme and the Council would provide land. The Sports Village would create some jobs and provide some financial return which would be shared by the partnership or put back into the Sports Village. The value of the Council land would be reflected in a number of ways over and above the jobs and financial return noted above. There would be a community approach to the Sports Village which could address a number of the Council's corporate objectives such as Good Relations; Placeshaping; Younger and Older People; Healthy Lifestyles; Sport; Tourism etc.

In short the governance of the Sports Village would be separate from the clubs on a 'not for profit' but 'income generating' basis.

The Council's current position in regard to the North Foreshore is based on extensive community consultation at the time of the Big Lottery Bid for Giant's Park and Council agreed the following in regard to the land in question – approximately 21 acres for an Eco Business Park, 20 acres for Port related warehousing and 7 acres for a Park and Ride site. There has been a planning application submitted based on the above uses together with waste and open space use for the remainder of the site.

Although progress has been made in regard to firming up planning issues there has been more limited progress in terms of identifying resources for delivery. Consequently proposals such as that from Crusaders/Newington arise and are at least worthy of consideration if they provide a delivery route for a product the Council deems in line with our overall objectives.

Council Officers have already begun to reconsider the detailed components of the overall masterplan given the changed economic environment and the Sports Village concept could be considered in that masterplan review.

Inevitably, however, choices will have to be made as it may not be possible to meet the space requirements of the various interests on the site. Issues which may well arise will include the economic feasibility of one scheme over another, the opportunity cost of using part of the site for a social benefit over a commercial return, the practicality of doing all or individual elements of schemes given the environmental liabilities and technical difficulties of the site. However there can be no answers to the above without further work.

Crusaders/Newington have requested the Council's 'in principle' support for the concept. In addition they would like Council Officers to formally consider an appropriate legal vehicle for a possible joint venture. A key third point is that they would want the Council to act as sponsor on an SEUPB bid all of course subject to a feasibility study, economic appraisal and all legal, planning and technical issues being fully addressed. Crusaders have also noted that SIB have indicated funding support for an economic appraisal and masterplan revision.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

No additional resources required from Council at present.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that the North Foreshore masterplan is being revisited due to the changed economic climate it is recommended that the Council agrees in principle the Crusaders/Newington request and that Council Officers follow up on the details with the clubs and SIB.
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DECISION TRACKING

An update report could be provided in September/October 2009.

DOCUMENTS ATTACHED

Appendix 1 – Crusaders/Newington presentation

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