



**Belfast City Council**

<b>Report to:</b>	Parks and Leisure Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Northern Ireland Tourist Board Tourism Development Scheme - funding of Belfast Zoo playground
<b>Date:</b>	9 August 2012
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Rose Crozier, Assistant Director, Parks and Leisure
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Mark Challis, Zoo Manager

<b>1</b>	<p><b>Relevant Background Information</b></p> <p>The Tourism Development Scheme (TDS) is the programme devised by Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) to allocate capital funds made available from the Executive Budget to tourism related capital projects. The TDS is a competitive process and requires applicants to make bids for funding from the scheme.</p> <p>Members will recall that a successful application to this fund for £250,000 grant support in 2006 culminated in the building of the new entrance, visitor centre and shop facility at the zoo in 2008.</p> <p>The NITB TDS for 2011-2013 was launched at the end of November 2011. An application to the NITB TDS was made in January 2012 for a 50% contribution from the scheme towards a new playground for the zoo.</p> <p>Members will recall the Parks and Leisure Committee report of 12 August 2010 regarding the Parks Playground Improvement Programme. The report highlighted the poor condition of the zoo’s playground, which needed a wider range of play activities to reflect the visitor numbers, and recommended: ‘The Zoo is a major tourist and visitor attraction and should provide a play area consistent with its status as a major attraction. It is therefore proposed that a major redesign of the Zoo play area be undertaken and that it be put forward for inclusion in the capital programme.’</p> <p>During 2011, staff from the Parks Landscape Planning and Development department designed a new scheme for a proposed playground at the zoo. The plan presents an enhanced facility, which will better cope with increased visitor numbers now attending the zoo, provide a wider range of play equipment suitable for a variety of ages and abilities, and which creates better</p>
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	<p>links and learning opportunities between play and the key themes of the zoo, ie animals, habitats and biodiversity.</p> <p>At its meeting on 12 January 2012, the Parks and Leisure Committee agreed to support the application to the NITB TDS for an enhanced playground facility at the subject to agreement on funding by Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. Further, the Committee agreed that any commitment by the Council would be subject to the zoo project being awarded the TDS grant funding, and subject to further scrutiny depending the success of 2 other Council applications for TDS funding.</p> <p>Our application to the NITB TDS of January 2012 was not successful. However, the zoo was contacted in June 2012 by NITB to provide an update as the project had been placed on a reserve list, and more recently, in July 2012, we have been advised that the zoo's playground redevelopment project will now proceed to a full economic appraisal.</p> <p>Part of this full economic appraisal includes the preparation of a full business plan for the project, and we have been asked to provide updates to information relating to matching finance.</p>
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<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
	<p>The zoo made an application to the NITB TDS 2011-2013, which was initially unsuccessful.</p> <p>The TDS is a competitive process, and offers up to 50% grant funding for eligible projects.</p> <p>The need for redevelopment of the playground at the zoo has been a priority since the Parks and Leisure Committee report of June 2010. A plan for a new playground was developed during 2011. The new scheme has a budget cost of £430,000.</p> <p>In July 2012, the NITB advised that the Zoo's playground project is to be scrutinised by a full economic appraisal, and we have been asked to provide an update regarding matching finance.</p>

<b>3</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
	<p>Should the application to the NITB TDS for a 50% grant towards the cost of a new playground at the zoo be successful, it is anticipated that, with Members support, the remaining 50% costs (ie £215,000) for the project will be made via a financial contribution from the Council's capital programme subject to approval by the SP&amp;R Committee.</p> <p>Members will be aware that in September 2011, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed that the Council would make two other applications to the NITB TDS, for conference facilities at the Waterfront Hall and for the relocation of the Belfast Welcome Centre (BWC).</p>

<b>4</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Considerations</b>
	The provision of an enhanced playground at the zoo will provide improved play facilities to a greater number of visitors, of a wider age and ability range than is currently available.

<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
	Members are asked to support the zoo's application to the NITB TDS for an enhanced playground facility at the zoo during the full economic appraisal phase of this application.  The Committee is asked to refer the project to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for inclusion in the Council's capital programme.

<b>6</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
	Mark Challis, Zoo Manager

<b>7</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
	TDS – Tourism development Scheme NITB – Northern Ireland Tourist Board BWC – Belfast Welcome Centre

<b>8</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	Appendix 1 – Plans for Belfast Zoo Playground