



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Responses to Wilmont House Development Brief
Date:	22 March 2013
Reporting Officer:	Gerry Millar, Director of Property and Projects, Ext: 6217
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Council hold Wilmont House and Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park on title that requires the Council to use the premises for the greatest good of the citizens of Belfast.
1.2	At its meeting on 22 June 2012 the Committee approved the advertisement of Wilmont House for disposal on a 25 year lease by way of a Development Brief. This ratified the decision of the Parks and Leisure Committee of 14 June 2012.
1.3	Members are reminded that issue of the Development Brief followed a previous call for Expressions of Interest in developing the facility to which some six responses had been received.
1.4	Initial enquiries from a number of interested parties, following issue of the Development Brief, were encouraging, but unfortunately only one proposal was received by the closing date.
1.5	The proposal received envisages a seven year (minimum) refurbishment which would be carried out by trainees and apprentice labour in conjunction with a number of organisations who may be able to provide funding and supply trainees for the project. The project would be managed and operated by the responding Developer who would take a lease for the duration of the refurbishment and return the building back to the Council on conclusion of the works (the cost, if any, to be paid by the Council for return of the refurbished building is not stated). The Council would be invited to determine at the outset what sort of end use it envisaged and the refurbishment plans would be developed accordingly.
1.6	While the above concept may have merit in assisting with skills development in the construction sector, the submitted proposal lacks some key information, particularly in relation to the level of commitment of those organisations who may be able to provide trainees and apprentices. In addition there was insufficient evidence of a commitment by funders towards materials costs and an absence of any supported example costings.
1.7	In issuing the Development Brief the Council sought evidence of the financial

1.8	<p>sustainability of the proposal over a minimum of ten years. Because of the nature of the proposal it is unable to provide longer term sustainability and in any case, as mentioned above, the proposal lacked sufficient evidence of the availability of funding to support its 'restoration' objectives over the anticipated life of the project. In summary the submitted proposal does not provide officers with sufficient confidence that it can be carried through, although as mentioned above, the concept, or elements of it, may have some merit.</p> <p>Further information on the proposal received is contained in Appendix 1 to this report.</p>
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2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>Following the conclusion of the Development Brief process Committee is asked to consider a number of options.</p> <p><u>Option 1.</u> Proceed with the submitted proposal. Please see comments above and at Appendix 1 in relation to the submission and its evaluation.</p> <p><u>Option 2.</u> Retain the property and leave it to deteriorate i.e. maintain the status quo.</p> <p><u>Option 3.</u> Retain the property and carry out repairs at Council expense to stabilise and preserve the structural integrity of the building fabric and thereafter consider its longer term future.</p> <p><u>Option 4.</u> Enter discussions with the parties who previously expressed an interest in redevelopment of the property through the Expressions of Interest process (this includes the respondent to the Development Brief) and parties who have subsequently expressed interest, with a view to developing a fuller understanding of their present level of interest and if some form of co-operative joint scheme and working arrangements involving one or more of the parties, or another party or parties, might be feasible.</p>

3	Resource Implications
3.1	<p><u>Finance</u></p> <p>i) The submitted proposal (Option 1) appears to show there may be no capital costs to the Council (although this is not entirely clear). The Council's exposure to subsequent revenue costs would remain uncertain.</p> <p>ii) Re (Option 2) maintaining the status quo. On account of the substantial repairs required to the property no planned maintenance resource is currently allocated to Wilmont House by Facilities Management. In 2011/12 Parks and Leisure Department incurred out of hours security costs in the region of £46,000 in relation of the building.</p> <p>iii) Option 3 the cost of remedial works of this nature have not yet been estimated but could be substantial. In the absence of a proposed end use there would be no certainty around the cost effectiveness of such works. If remedial works were to be carried out the Council would necessarily start to incur on-going maintenance costs following their completion in order to ensure any investment in remedial repairs was not eroded.</p> <p>iv) The financial implications resulting from potential collaborative working</p>

	(Option 4) are not presently known.
3.2	<u>Human Resources</u> Resources from Parks and Leisure Department and Estates Management Unit and Legal Services would be involved in implementing Options 1 and 4. Resources in Parks and Leisure and Facilities Management would be involved in Options 3 and to some extent in Option 2.
3.3	<u>Asset and Other Implications</u> The purpose of the Expressions of Interest and Development Brief processes was to alter the present situation in an effort to bring a sustainable use to this Listed Building which occupies a central position in this prestigious Park. The Brief sought to provide a use with some vibrancy rather than the more negative impact of long term vacancy and its associated consequences. Alternative uses remain desirable and further investigation of a potential joint scheme could be worth pursuing.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	There are no equality or good relations issues associated with this report.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Committee is recommended not to proceed with the proposal submitted in response to the Development Brief and to inform the Developer accordingly, Committee is further recommended to proceed with Option 4 above and authorise officers to engage with those parties who have previously expressed an interest in the development and restoration of Wilmont House, through the Expressions of Interest process (and subsequently) with a view to establishing if it would be feasible to marry-up any of their proposals (potentially to include third party proposals) in a joint scheme. A further report would be brought to Committee in the autumn (or sooner if a definitive position is quickly established) outlining the results of discussions and an appropriate way forward which would take account of relevant procurement practices. An update report will also be submitted to the Parks and Leisure Committee regarding the decision of this Committee.

6	Decision Tracking
	Director of Property and Projects to ensure a report is prepared for Parks and Leisure Committee and a further brought to September Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at the latest.

7	Key to Abbreviations
	None.

8	Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – Details of submission received in response to Development Brief.