

11. REALLOCATION OF FUNDS TO DARROCH RESERVE

Officer responsible Greenspace Manager	Author Kirsty Patten, Parks and Waterways Area Advocate - DDI 941-6702
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The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the reallocation for the remainder of funds from Macfarlane Park skate facility project to Darroch Reserve for the establishment of a playground. The Annual Plan Working Party has referred this matter back to the Board for decision. Should the Board recommend the reallocation of funds, the transfer can be actioned under the Greenspace Unit Manager's delegated authority.

BACKGROUND

Darroch Reserve

Darroch Reserve is located in northwest Belfast, allocated to Council as the reserve contribution from the surrounding sub-division of Rushmore Drive, Riegler Place, Greenmeadow Gardens and Langley Place. The Reserve is grassed and under Council maintenance. Darroch Reserve backs onto Langley Reserve, an important wetland area that extends through to the Groynes. The two reserves are separated by an ECAN stopbank, which gives Darroch Reserve an enclosed, manicured appearance, with the plan that any small scale development here would not impinge upon the 'wilderness' feel and conservation values of Langley Reserve.

The subdivision surrounding Darroch Reserve is particularly isolated in terms of access to play facilities in Belfast. Main North Road separates residents from the nearest reserve, Tyrone Reserve, and the distance to the closest play area is outside recommended Council Policy of 400 metres (Local Parks Acquisition Strategy – adopted by the Council 1997). Research in this area has also shown a high number of young families, most of whom would not send children across Main North Road to a play area.

A local residents' group contacted Council staff earlier in 2004 requesting that Darroch Reserve be developed with junior style play equipment. As this project was not on the Greenspace five-year budget, staff informed them that the fastest course of action was for the local residents to put in a submission to the LTCCP. They did so, with an **attached petition** of 81 signatures, which indicates support from a majority of households in this area.

Proposal

Greenspace staff have commissioned a playground design for Darroch Reserve, plus an integration plan to link this area with the adjacent Langley Reserve. As previously mentioned, there is a high number of young families in this area and play equipment will be mainly focussed toward a younger age group – toddler and primary aged children. The reserve area is reasonably small which will also limit the size and scale of equipment. The city plan setback rule for structures requires a ten metre distance from boundaries unless consent is obtained from neighbours. To fit the needs of local families, the development of this reserve could also provide an opportunity for an integrated play facility that would cater for children with disabilities. Depending on available funding and sponsorship, the inclusion of a fully wheelchair accessible 'Liberty Swing' may be a possibility. Research from other New Zealand cities has shown that the provision of disabled access equipment provides a local gathering point for families who have children with disabilities, facilitating social opportunities through recreation.

PROPOSED SOURCE OF FUNDS

Macfarlane Park – integration of skate facilities

Funding of \$22,500 was allocated this financial year to carry out the final landscaping and seating around a previously proposed skate area in Macfarlane Park. The Board deferred this project in February 2004, resolving that youth recreation opportunities in this area be looked at within the wider scope of the Acheson Avenue Urban Renewal Action Plan. The 2003/04 Greenspace Unit budget allocation for the skate facility was transferred to various projects in the Shirley area. On balance, there is no urgent need to carry out landscape work at Macfarlane Park, therefore the \$22,500 allocated this financial year would not be used, leaving it to be carried forward or reallocated. As there is already further funding on the 10 year Greenspace capital programme to carry out initiatives reached from the Acheson Avenue Urban Renewal Action Plan, reallocation of these funds will not adversely affect the delivery of longer-term goals for Macfarlane Park. It will however, give a more realistic timeframe to work through any issues that arise through the consultation process.

FUNDING

Should the Board approve the reallocation of funds, the Greenspace Unit will be able to finance the playground component of the development of Darroch Reserve over the 2004/05 financial year. Further development work such as the linkages with Langley Reserve, will be budgeted for once the final design has been approved.

CONCLUSION

This situation presents the Council with an opportunity to provide a safe playground in part of Belfast lacking in accessible recreational opportunities for young children due to geographical constraints. The local residents are particularly motivated toward working with the Council to bring forward funding for a playground, and have shown strong community need by initiating a successful local petition.

By reallocating the available funds from Macfarlane Park to the Darroch Reserve development, an area need could be fulfilled without impacting on future budget requirements.

Staff

Recommendation: That the Board approve the reallocation of \$22,500 from Macfarlane Park to the proposed Darroch Reserve playground development project.

Chairperson's

Recommendation: That the staff recommendation be adopted.