

5. DARROCH RESERVE – PLAYGROUND AND LANDSCAPING DEVELOPMENT

General Manager responsible:	General Manager City Environment
Officer responsible:	Greenspace Manager
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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Board approval of the amended Darroch Reserve development plan (**attached**), following community consultation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Funding has been allocated in the current financial year for play equipment at Darroch Reserve and enhancing the wetland reserve behind the playground area. A concept plan was prepared incorporating suggestions from the local community with some future maintenance requirements/concerns also designed into the plan to enable all development to occur over the same period.
3. The plan suggested:
 - Playground equipment such as a climbing frame, slide, swings and spring toy.
 - Specimen trees, landscaping and paths at the proposed Darroch Reserve playground.
 - Grit paths and sections of boardwalk through the Darroch Reserve wetland area.
 - An ongoing maintenance programme to clear vegetation from waterways and regenerate the wetland with appropriate riparian plant species.
4. The draft concept plan was distributed to approximately 160 residents, with consultation also carried out with local community interest groups. Seventy-two submissions were received with all but one supporting the proposed development plan.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

5. The proposed plan for Darroch Reserve is programmed in the Greenspace Unit's capital budget for development over the 2005/2006 financial year. Specifically:
 - \$30, 000 Otukaikino River (Riparian Development)
 - \$15, 000 New Playground Development

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board:

- (a) Approve the amended concept plan for Darroch Reserve playground and wetland area.

CHAIRPERSON'S RECOMMENDATION

That the staff recommendation be adopted.

BACKGROUND ON DARROCH RESERVE PLAYGROUND AND LANDSCAPING DEVELOPMENT

6. 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 part of the Otukaikino wetland that extends through to the Groynes. The two reserves are separated by an ECAN secondary stopbank.
7. The subdivision surrounding Darroch Reserve is geographically isolated in terms of access to play grounds. In 2004 a local residents group contacted Council staff proposing that Darroch Reserve could be developed with junior style play equipment. The group submitted this request to the Annual Plan with an attached petition of 81 signatures, which indicated support from a majority of households in this area.
8. The Greenspace Unit did not have funding allocated to develop Darroch Reserve as a playground and requested a reallocation from a previously deferred Macfarlane Park skate facility budget. The Board subsequently approved a funding reallocation of \$22, 500 in August 2004.
9. A draft concept plan was distributed in June 2005 throughout the local community for comment on the options presented. There was strong support for the initiatives suggested in the plan. Many respondents took the time to suggest improvements to the design details – a summary of the recurring feedback is outlined below:
 - Some respondents asked for the playground area to be fully fenced (with access gates).
 - There was some feedback on the range of equipment suggested – although not shown as an option on the concept plan, a flying fox was requested several times.
 - Picnic tables and a barbeque were mentioned for enhancing a family atmosphere.
 - A couple of respondents pointed out the need for shade, specifically shade sails.
 - Various maintenance improvements were recommended.
10. In light of the responses received, project staff propose adding picnic tables and extra seating at the sites suggested.
11. To restrict both vehicle access and children running onto Rushmore Drive the reserve will have a post and cable fence across the front with shrub beds to break up the visual barrier.
12. At this development stage shade sails are not an option because of cost. If suitable trees are available elsewhere in Belfast, it may be possible to transplant semi-mature specimens onto site for natural shade. The Board may also consider funding a shaded area for Darroch Playground from a future budget.
13. The area available for play equipment is reasonably small due to the city plan setback rule for structures that generally requires a ten-metre distance from boundaries. Size and scale of equipment is therefore limited at this site. Although it is acknowledged that there is a desire for a flying fox in this playground, the available area at this site is insufficient when safety fall zone requirements are also taken into account.
14. As part of the initial design process, negotiation is being carried out with ECAN regarding using the contour of the stopbank for a slide, access path and some planting. A freestanding slide structure will be used if this design does not fit with ECAN's stopbank protection guidelines.
15. If approved, development work at Darroch Reserve would be concentrated on the playground with the installation of play equipment, pathways and low fencing. Projects at the wetland area would include the continued removal of weed plants and clearing around the waterway. The optimal time for planting is the autumn season, from April next year, and the development work in the playground and wetland would occur from this time. Further work around the wetland such as the pathways, boardwalks and additional planting would be staged from 2006/07 and funded from existing waterways budgets.