

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Finance & Resources
DATE	11 May, 2010
DIRECTOR	Gordon McIntosh
TITLE OF REPORT	St. Machar Outdoor Centre – Sunnyside Road
REPORT NUMBER:	EPI/10/137

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This Committee's meeting of 12 November, 2009 considered a report on the future of the St. Machar Outdoor Centre and approved a long list of recommendations. The main purpose of that report was to give the local community a six month "breathing space" to investigate and bring forward proposals for the future use and development of the site. This report describes their proposals and invites Members to approve a list of recommendations for the future use of the property.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee :-

- (a) approve in principle the grant of a five year lease of the St. Machar Outdoor Centre (to be renamed Sunnybank Park) to the Sunnybank Park Group, on terms and conditions to be negotiated and agreed between the Group and the Head of Asset Management & Operations (at a rent of £1 per annum, if asked); and
- (b) remit it to the City Solicitor to formally conclude the lease, on terms and conditions as are necessary to protect the City Council's interests.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

If the Committee approves the report's recommendations, there will be no ongoing revenue costs for the property, other than any essential Health & Safety costs that occur in the period up to the start of any lease to the Sunnybank Park Group. At the date of the Committee's meeting, the pavilion on site should be either demolished or in the process of being demolished, at the City Council's cost. Also, our legal liability to maintain and protect the Category B Firhill Well on site might require expenditure, up to the start of any lease to the Sunnybank Park Group (although in the last few years, the City Council haven't required to spend any money on this).

4. SERVICE & COMMUNITY IMPACT

The Housing & Environment Committee meeting of 13 January, 2010 considered and approved a report on "Community Gardens Policy on Council owned land". The present proposal by the Sunnybank Park Group is very compatible with the recommendations made in that report.

The scope of this Policy covers the environment in its widest sense including not only our local environment but also our global environmental impact. That report links to the updated Single Outcome Agreement and Community Plan 2008-2011 in respect of:

National Outcome 11 - We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others;

National Outcome 12 – Environmental Protection ;

National Outcome 14 – Reducing Environmental Impacts, this Policy also links to the Council's Policy Statement ,Vibrant Dynamic & Forward Looking ,in terms of reducing the Council's carbon impact.

An Equalities and Human Rights Impact Assessment was undertaken for the report on "Community Gardens Policy on Council owned land", submitted to the Housing & Environment Committee meeting of 13 January, 2010 and is appended to this report. This policy creates opportunities for communities to impact positively on their local environment. There are added benefits for community cohesion as well as potential educational and health benefits. Locally produced food and plants can assist in increasing biodiversity, reducing food miles and creating knowledge as to how the environment works. Community Gardens should create better access to the environment for all groups including those with disabilities. This Policy is a subset of the Draft Sustainable Environment Strategy for Council Properties, which was approved for consultation at the Policy and Strategy Committee 10 June 2008. A Strategic Environmental Assessment is being undertaken as part of that process.

5. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

No other implications, other than those already mentioned.

6. REPORT

6.1 The meeting of the Finance & Resources Committee of 12 November, 2009 considered a report on the future use of the St. Machar Outdoor Centre, owned by the City Council (held on Arts & Recreation Account) and identified on the attached plan. The report recommended that the Committee:-

- (a) declare its intention of retaining the St. Machar Outdoor Centre under Council control for the next six months and to meet only revenue costs for essential health and safety works to the property;

- (b) indicate to the local community that in the next six months, the Council would look to all those parties who had indicated an interest in having the Centre retained for public use to come together in a single body, to agree a clear development scheme for the use of the various parts of the site;
- (c) indicate that the Council would look to that body to fully investigate the availability of external funding to implement some or all of their development ideas;
- (d) offer the body appropriate assistance of Council officers, if requested;
- (e) remit to the Head of Resources Development and Delivery to open “without prejudice” negotiations with the body, if appropriate, to fix the terms and conditions of a management agreement, lease or other means of tenure of the Centre, for the period after May, 2010 on the basis that no capital or revenue costs will be met by the Council;
- (f) authorise the Head of Resources Development and Delivery to demolish the pavilion;
- (g) note the advice of the Head of Resources Development and Delivery on the listed Category “B” status of the Firhill Well on site; and
- (h) to instruct the Head of Resources Development and Delivery to report back to the meeting of the Finance and Resources Committee on 6 May, 2010 on the outcome of these remits, with an invitation to that Committee to decide upon the future use of the property.

The Committee resolved (per Item 3 on pages 2 – 4 of the Minutes) :-

- (i) that the recommendations contained within the report be approved; and
- (ii) that, in addition, the Head of Resources Development and Delivery be requested to investigate the possibility of capping the electricity and water services to the St. Machar site and to advise the Sunnybank Park Steering Group of the outcome of that investigation.

6.2 Those members of the local community with an interest in the future of the property (known as the Sunnybank Park Group) have contacted the report author with the following outline proposals:-

- (a) that the St. Machar Outdoor Centre be renamed “Sunnybank Park”
- (b) that the City Council grant the Sunnybank Park Group an initial five year lease of the property, at a rent of £1 per annum, if asked;

(c) that Members consider and approve the Sunnybank Park Group's Business Plan which has been produced after considerable work in the last five months. (A final version of the Business Plan is currently available in the Members Library). The draft Plan continues to evolve rapidly. If the Committee wish, representatives of Sunnybank Park Group are happy to attend the Committee meeting on 11 May and answer Members questions on the detail of their proposals. The key elements of the Business Plan are :-

- Sunnybank Park Group, are a group of local people, with a diverse range of organisational and practical skills, including running voluntary organisations, park management, gardening, wildlife, allotments, fundraising, business development, and community organisation. We are brought together by their enthusiasm for making a greenspace that we can be proud of in our area, and that acts as a catalyst for community development locally.
- Our proposals are based on the results of consultation with local people. The initial consultation was undertaken by the Old Aberdeen Community Council. We have, and continue to, undertake further consultation to determine the level of support for our proposals. So far the response has been overwhelmingly positive.
- We propose the creation of a number of new entrances to the park, giving much better access than at present. We envisage that this will both reduce opportunities for anti-social behaviour and significantly improve the connectivity of the surrounding communities, including the University. We would also like to create a new circular walk linking these access points, to cater for the popularity of walking in the park and encourage people to use the park as a through-route.
- We understand that the facilities of the Outdoor Centre cannot be restored. However, we would like to improve the former tennis court area for sports and recreational use. This would be particularly aimed at teenagers, and designed in consultation with them. We are very keen to ensure the local youth are not neglected. We are pleased that the City Council intends to continue to maintain children's play area; this would function as an integral part of Sunnybank Park.
- We have applied for funding for a food-growing area for the local community, including allotments, raised beds and group plots. There is a shortage of allotments in both the City and the locality. Many people have already expressed an interest in this.
- We wish to improve the area for wildlife and to plant a community orchard. The historic 'Gibberie Wallie' will be restored and want to enhance it by making a low-maintenance formal garden out of the old bowling green in front of it, capitalising on the feel of this space.

- We have established a constructive partnership with the University of Aberdeen. They have agreed to manage the land they own adjacent to Sunnybank Park as a wildlife garden linked to the Park. This will increase the effective area of the park considerably.
- Our proposals contribute to a diverse range of local and national strategic policy outcomes. This help towards meeting many of the National Outcomes associated with all five of the current national administration's Strategic Priority areas: Wealthier and Fairer; Healthier; Safer and Stronger; Smarter; and Greener. Locally, they contribute to the outcomes of our: Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement, policies within the Local Development Plan, specifically the Urban Green Space Policy; the Allotments Policy, the Nature Conservation Strategy, the emerging Open Space Strategy, and a range of other policies, plans and strategies associated with, but not exclusive to, greenspace, health, carbon reduction and biodiversity.
- The strength of the proposals, and the depth and range of potential benefits they can bring, is demonstrated by the wide range and quality of the partnerships they have established in a short time. Two partnerships of which we are particularly proud are: Greenspace Scotland, the government policy advisory body on greenspace in Scotland. And Aberdeen Greenspace Trust, our local greenspace experts. Both parties have expressed particular interest in working very closely with them.
- We have conducted initial investigations of potential funding sources for our proposals. We are convinced we can raise all the money required for the proposals from these sources. We have applied to the Climate Challenge Fund for money which would go to the creation of a new growing space for the local community. We have also had discussions with Aberdeen Greenspace, who have agreed in principle to funding many of the access and wildlife improvements that we are proposing. Overall, our investigations have highlighted well over £500,000 of potential relevant funding streams to help realise our proposals.
- We will establish a monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework for the project to ensure that our work is effective and the outcomes are communicated to the relevant people.

6.3 Planning Implications - The St. Machar Outdoor Centre (Zoned as Urban Green Space and Green Space Network (as per The Aberdeen Local Plan 2008), the site (or part of it) could be suitable for a Community Garden, wildlife garden and/or allotments. Access to areas of green space including community gardens etc are important to local communities especially for those that do not have gardens of their own. Community gardens, wildlife gardens and allotments provide many benefits to local communities including improving health through the encouragement of physical activity and providing a place to relax. They provide educational benefits for the young and old plus an opportunity


for communities to get involved and take responsibility of their natural environment. Green spaces improve health and well being plus overall quality of life. As well as the benefits that a Community Garden (etc) brings, sites that have been developed with the involvement of the community are usually well used and well looked after.

- 6.4 In property valuation terms, this Planning designation clearly shows that the property does not have any commercial value. As such, officers advice is that a decision by the Committee to lease the property to the Sunnybank Park Group for five years, at a rent of £1 per annum, if asked, won't require the City Council to apply for Scottish Government consent, in terms of Section 74 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

7. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

Jim Argo, Principal Estates Surveyor (Management & Revenue)

 jamesargo@aberdeencity.gov.uk

 01224 52(3118)

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Business Plan produced by the Sunnybank Park Group