



Kirklees
METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

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Report of the

Culture and Leisure Scrutiny Panel

Review into

The Feasibility of Using Sites for Skateboarding

May 2000

Kirklees Metropolitan Council

INTRODUCTION

Members of the Panel which considered this issue at scheduled meetings on 18 September 2001, 14 November 2001, 15 January 2002, 19 March 2002, 16 April 2002 are:-

Councillors Briggs (Chair), Allonby and C Smith

Lead Officer: Cliff Stewart, Head of Personal Services Resources Group

Committee Administrator: Julie McDowell

The Panel is grateful to Mr J Fletcher, Assistant Head of Leisure and Recreation Services (Parks and Open Spaces) who presented information and accompanied Members on visits to the Greenhead Skate Park and Aggro Verts Indoor Skate Park, Ravensthorpe on 12 December 2001.

The Panel is grateful to Ms A Dickinson and Ms J Walker, Development Officers (Young People's Service) who undertook surveys of students at Whitcliffe Mount School and Spen Valley High School.

The Panel would also like to thank the 736 students who took part in the surveys to find out how popular the activities of skateboarding/roller-blading are and whether there is demand for a local facility.

The Standing Cultural and Leisure Scrutiny Panel have investigated the feasibility of utilising sites for skateboarding as part of its work programme in the Municipal Year 2001/2002, which was approved by the Scrutiny Committee on 14 August 2001. The Review was undertaken as a result of the growing interest in skateboarding provision and a number of recent requests to the Leisure and Recreation Service for outdoor facilities in Kirklees.

Terms of Reference:

The Terms of Reference were:-

To consult with existing and potential users and to examine current provision, with a view to establishing demand.

The Review focused upon potential demand for outdoor facilities due to the fact that the private sector is concentrating on indoor facilities. The Panel heard from Leisure and Recreation Services that costs and operational implications would mean it is unlikely the Authority would be involved in this type of provision.

Background Papers:

Report by John Fletcher to the Cultural and Leisure Scrutiny Panel 14 November 2001 on provision of facilities for skateboarding, BMX bikes, Inline skates and scooters.

INFORMATION AND EVIDENCE

The Panel heard that there is growing national demand for facilities designed specifically for skateboarding, In-line skating, BMX bikes and scooters. This is reflected in Kirklees where a number of requests for facilities have been received by Leisure and Recreation Services.

Young People have identified Thornhill, Thornhill Lees, Cleckheaton, Birstall and Heckmondwike as potential sites.

Existing Provision

The Panel heard that two new outdoor Skate Parks were developed in 2001 at Greenhead Park, Huddersfield and Sands Recreation Ground, Holmfirth. Both facilities were in the main funded by sources outside the Council although Leisure and Recreation Services has accepted responsibility for their management and routine maintenance.

The Sands Skate Park was developed by the "Sands MUGA" Project Group of young people guided by Officers from Community Development Services. The project attracted funding from a number of sources and the first phase of development, a skateboarding area and sheltered seating area was completed in Spring 2001 at a cost of £45,000. The site is modest in appearance but with high quality ramps and sturdy equipment. The Panel heard that this site has been popular with youngsters.

The Greenhead Skate Park was developed in 2001 following concerns about increased skateboarding in Huddersfield Town Centre and serious damage being caused by skateboarding in the streets to stonework, street furniture, concrete etc. This led to Huddersfield Pride financing a major development costing £85,000. The ramps were laid out in an old tennis court in Greenhead Park to a configuration chosen by representatives of the skateboarders and were constructed of good quality materials.

On 12 December 2001 Councillors Briggs and Allonby accompanied by Mr J Fletcher visited the Greenhead Skate Park and spoke to users. The facility is popular and many skaters use it regularly. It is also used by skateboarders from outside Kirklees. Users told the Panel that they liked to visit a number of Parks, that they use the Greenhead facility every day in Summer and three days in Winter. Skaters said that the inexperienced younger ones could get in the way but people helped each other out. Mr Fletcher informed the Panel that consideration could be given to employing a Development Worker to teach young skaters although this would mean the introduction of a charge to use the facility.

The Panel was informed that local residents have experienced a degree of nuisance and certain abuse due to the presence of the Greenhead Skate Park and that the Park did attract an element of misuse. The Park was not supervised by a member of staff but generally the Park Keeper kept an eye on it and locks it at night.

The Panel received information from a local resident that local residents were not consulted about the Skate Park, no proper planning was undertaken, it has a detrimental effect on the area, there is anti-social behaviour from users, traffic problems and lack of action by Police. The resident expressed the view that the Skate Park should have been built in the middle of Greenhead Park so that there would be no impact on residents. The Panel heard that the Leisure and Recreation Service has screened the Park from the view of local residents.

For comparison purposes Members of the Panel visited Aggro Verts Indoor Skate Park in Ravensthorpe, at present the only indoor provision in West Yorkshire.

Leisure and Recreation Services Position

The Council's present policy on facilities for wheeled activities is to take an enabling role, helping organisations to develop initiatives in order to realise their aspirations without necessarily committing the Authority to resourcing developments. The Leisure and

Recreation Service is responsible for the maintenance and repair of the developments at Sands and Greenhead Park. It was unclear what the longer term maintenance and repair implications will be, these sites have been accepted on the understanding should any major problems be encountered they may have to be removed from use rather than repaired or replaced.

The Authority has achieved a great deal in the development of facilities at little actual cost to the Council. However the Leisure and Recreation Service has limited capacity to deal with new liabilities and sustainability may be a serious concern.

John Fletcher informed the Panel that development of a facility itself stimulated demand, and based on experience at Greenhead Park hundreds even thousands of users could emerge given appropriate facilities. Transport issues also had to be considered as many young people from North Kirklees did not have access to the facilities at Greenhead Park or the Sands.

Regional Position

The Panel heard that the Leisure and Recreation Service has undertaken a survey amongst neighbouring Authorities, which confirms that the position is much the same regionally as in Kirklees. Most Authorities focus resources on equipping a few major sites with a small amount of equipment in satellite locations. Most Authorities use steel ramps (cheap and noisy) with only Sheffield having a concrete Park similar to Kirklees.

Surveys Undertaken at Whitcliffe Mount and Spen Valley High Schools

The Panel commissioned three surveys of students at Spen Valley High School (11 to 16 year olds in the Upper and Lower Schools) and Whitcliffe Mount, 13 to 16 year olds to ascertain how popular skateboarding/roller-blading is and what the level of demand is for an outdoor facility in the area. This area was chosen because a group of young people from Whitcliffe Mount School had requested a Skate Park in their area. Summaries of the survey results are attached as Appendix 1.

The three surveys were undertaken between December 2001 and April 2002. The Schools' Councils assisted in designing the surveys which asked questions on a range of hobbies and leisure activities in order to determine how important skating is to young people in terms of their priorities. A total of 736 forms were returned, 501 from Whitcliffe Mount and 235 from Spen Valley High School.

The results show that, in the context of a wide variety of sports and other leisure activities, skateboarding and roller-blading are not significant in the lives of students at Spen Valley High School. In the Lower School roller-blading was the 5th most popular activity with 5% (four people) of the votes and skateboarding was equal 17th with just one vote. In the Upper School only three people chose skateboarding/roller-blading. When asked to choose from a list of 8 developments they would like near their school, amongst Lower School pupils an outdoor skateboard area was chosen by 15% of voters (13 young people) and amongst the Upper School it got 5 votes.

At Whitcliffe Mount School outdoor sporting activities are significantly more popular, although skateboarding and roller-blading are not as popular as activities such as swimming, mountain biking, ice skating or athletics. In terms of the most popular activities skateboarding was chosen by 3% (14 boys), although 168 young people either roller-blade or skateboard at least once a month and 63 young people would like to but there is

nowhere to do it. When asked to choose from a list of essential developments they would like near their school the number of young people who chose an outdoor skateboarding area was 15%, 3rd out of 6 options.

The Spen Valley High School (Lower School) results were also reported to the Spen Valley Area Committee on 15 January 2002 as part of a discussion on Leisure and Recreation. Since that meeting minor improvements to Spenborough Baths have been made, the most popular request for development amongst Lower School pupils.

CONCLUSIONS

The Panel noted that there is mixed demand for a skateboarding facility in North Kirklees but if a facility was developed it is likely that it would be well used. This is based on experience at the Greenhead Skate Park.

The Panel noted that the Council is not in a position to fund a facility without assistance from outside agencies. However if funding became available an existing Leisure and Recreation facility with a hardcore surface and no longer well used could be developed as a skate board park in an area where there is demand for it. The Panel noted that it is the view of the Leisure and Recreation Service that such a development, if funding was available, would be an improvement of the open spaces and an improvement in the range of facilities available to young people. The Panel also noted that any such development should be located so as to have a minimum impact upon local residents. It was considered that prior to any future development of a facility that demand should be established in the first instance.

The Panel acknowledged that youngsters from the North Kirklees area find it difficult to travel to the Skate Parks in South Kirklees due to problems with public transport.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Cabinet Member, Director and Head of Service are urged to seek external funding as a matter of priority and are requested to give high consideration to this issue in the next budget round.

**DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
Councillor John Smithson**

**Liberal Democrat Councillor for
ALMONDBURY WARD**

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29 August 2003

When replying please quote the reference below:

DL917/JS/RB/JH

Councillor Andrew Palfreeman
Chair of Scrutiny
Scrutiny Office
Town Hall
Huddersfield

Dear Councillor Palfreeman,

**Cultural and Leisure Scrutiny Panel
The Feasibility of Utilising Sites for Skateboarding.**

I have been asked to comment upon the report of the Cultural and Leisure Scrutiny Panel published in May 2002. The report recommended

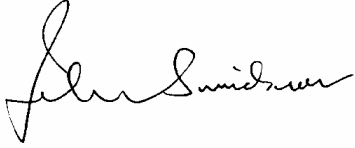
"That the Cabinet Member, Director and Head of Service are urged to seek external funding as a matter of priority and are requested to give high consideration to this issue in the next budget round."

This recommendation is aimed at the establishment of a skatepark facility within North Kirklees and in overall terms this is agreed. However you will be aware of the difficulties involved in attracting the scale of funding required, perhaps as much as £125,000, based on the cost in 2001 of developing the site at Greenhead Park in Huddersfield. There is also the question of the additional revenue costs which would result from such a scheme.

However, I have asked Richard Brooker to investigate potential funding sources and to begin work on identifying the most suitable location in order to prepare a scheme for consultation purposes. I know that Richard's Officers are already in contact with groups of young enthusiasts in both Birstall and Cleckheaton and based upon principles established in the Greenhead project these young people will be involved from an early stage in assisting the preparation of the proposals.

I trust this to be satisfactory and look forward to watching the project in North Kirklees develop.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Smithson', written in a cursive style.

**COUNCILLOR JOHN SMITHSON
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
CABINET MEMBER RESPONSIBLE FOR
LEISURE AND RECREATION**