

## Comments on SkatePark Report from Clare Megarity, representative of the Campaign for a Botley Skatepark:

14/01/2013

Sections of the report highlighted by Clare Megarity for special attention are shown thus:

Clare Megarity's comments are highlighted thus:

Names of those included in the working party would be useful please.

Councillors Julia Hammett (Chair of Working Party), Ag MacKeith, Pauline Allen, Neil Clark, Roy Clark, Robin Carr

### Executive Summary

- The proposal to locate a skate park in the Upper Louie Memorial Field raises many concerns, including noise, anti-social behaviour, loss of environmental heritage and imposing a potentially time-unlimited cost-stream and management responsibility onto the Parish Council. Were Cumnor Parish and VOWH asked if they would consider contributing to these?
- The main concern is that a skate park is intended for a very narrow target demographic, mainly boys and young men, aged approximately 10 to 19.

The highlighted text is incorrect and misleading, see page 51 of the report where Mirabelle Mack answers the question regarding usage asked by Councillor Hammett. 'Males in the age range 5 to 45 are predominantly using the park. Some females do use the park but they are in a minority.' Also at the Mobile Skate park girls WERE using this and one parent who had previously refused to sign the petition on the grounds of her daughters would not use it approached us and signed.

Also, owing to the site's location being relatively far from the main centre of population in North Hinksey, combined with the steep gradient of the approach routes, it may be that the skate park will not be sufficiently used to justify the substantial expenditure of public funds.

When we carried out the petition we explained where we were asking for the skate park to be placed. Many commented on remembering the old bowl. In retrospect it would have been sensible to include on the petition a box for- would use it? would you travel to it by bike, foot or car? The usage at the mobile skate park was very high, unfortunately we did not ask all users if they were in the parish and whether or not they rode up the steep gradient to reach it, however there were no issues with cars dropping off children so I would presume many made their way up, the EXCITEMENT spurring them on. Many children I spoke to were very excited and looking forward to having a skate park in NH. Many parents who signed the petition commented on not wanting to drive to skate parks but to have one in walking, cycling, scooting distance. No comments were made that it would be too far up the hill and they would still drive to it.

- It is questionable whether a Parish Council should be expected to have responsibility for a facility on this scale. Other skate parks in the area are managed at district, county or city levels.

My concerns from reading the whole report in some depth that there may be some confusion with the scale of the facility. Many children and parents who attended the meeting in the pavilion to look at possible parks with councillor Mackeith expressed they would be happy with a small reasonably priced park.

Are the other parks you talk of on a larger scale in a larger community? Are small parks managed by parish councils?

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## Notes and Caveats

- This report does not set out deliberately to influence the outcome of the debate nor does it set out to come to a conclusion or recommendation to the R&A Committee.
- Some of the information and arguments presented may be considered favourable to the petition, others unfavourable. There is no implied guarantee that the weight of the arguments will add up to being of equal weight.
- While the intention is that the facts and arguments presented in the report are broadly correct, no warranty or guarantee to that effect is given or implied.
- The broad nature of the arguments based upon specific factual and numerical data lies well inside the margin of error arising from reasonable estimates where precisely precise data has not been readily available. Minor faults in factual accuracy in this report will not be accepted as undermining the validity of the arguments based upon them.

Unfortunately the report largely focuses on the negative implications of a Skate park. It is very disappointing to see little research into the positive aspects. Had we been including in the working party as requested, we would have been happy to assist with this research. There are several errors and I would disagree that the report is broadly correct.

Page 9 under paragraph "Access"

As discussed at greater length below, about 80% of the likely users live outside comfortable walking distance from the site especially in view of the steep gradient, and so are more likely to be brought to the site by car.

They predominately will ride and scoot. My son rides up the hill on his paper round every morning, several Matthew Arnold children bike up the hill daily.

The site lies within reach of cyclists, but it should be noted that there is a risk these may be tempted to go at excessive speeds on the return journey down the hill.

Matthew Arnold children do this on a daily basis and some adults occasionally too. Do they enjoy the risk? Research shows young males especially like to take risks. My son takes risks on his BMX at skate parks that is part of the appeal to him. Would research show that this type of risk taking is healthy and natural, I think I have read this to be true.

Page 9

## Proximity to housing

A skate park should be situated far enough away from housing so as not to cause a noise nuisance to nearby residents.

I agree. When I have visited my son Ryan at the Iffley park I am pretty sure the houses there are closer than the proposed park would be. Were any residents opposite this park asked about noise levels I would be happy to research this. Also is there the possibility of looking at further up the field if the proposed site is too close? Has the law changed since the bowl was there?

The site is about 180m from the nearest houses. However, because the site is on higher ground noise travels down the hill and is likely to be a nuisance at a far greater distance than this. Indeed teams playing football can be heard some distance away. In fact, during the Jubilee celebration when a temporary skate park was erected in the car park, reports of noise nuisance were received. (See Appendix letter from Louie Memorial Field Neighbourhood Watch Area).

It was unfortunate the mobile skate park was noisy, however a permanent construction would not be as noisy and also it is proposed to be in the upper field. The mobile park was set up in the lower field. Our hope was that the park would be attractively landscaped. Has it been researched whether the park could be landscaped with staggered trees to achieve extra drainage and noise reduction?

## Available Space

The space available, (subject to confirmation), is approximately 40 metres long by 30 metres wide. The maximum space is thus about 1200 square metres. The space is sufficiently far away from overhanging trees with attendant problems of falling leaves or other tree debris falling on the surface. It should be noted that the intended footprint of a new skate park would extend over and beyond the site of the old skate bowl, so this would need to be completely excavated. (Further noted under the "costs" section below.)

Is this true of the smallest park? My belief is you can design your own park, therefore you would be able to chose the size.

Page 9 (contd.)

## Proximity to Other Leisure Facilities

By common **anecdotal** observation, the MUGA which cost £67,343 is not an intensively used facility and the Trim Trail which cost £7,244 is used even less. The teenage shelter is used by students from Matthew Arnold School during term time and those using the MUGA.

one - sided, unreliable.

Judging by **anecdotal** evidence and common observation, the teenage shelter is particularly favoured by smokers and late night drinkers and generates a considerable amount of litter.

How is this relevant to the Skate park request? Are the local PCO'S involved in solving this issue? Are these children from NH parish?

Page 10

## Availability of toilet and other facilities, shelter, refreshments etc.

The Louie Memorial Pavilion is only open for specific purposes at specific times, like hosting football matches, or evening meetings. For it to be open more often would require manning and enhanced security.

Parents actively involved in the skate park campaign have discussed the possibility of opening the pavilion from 4 - 6pm (light evenings) to sell healthy snacks, drinks and to have an adult in the vicinity. A voluntary

parent rota could be agreed. I myself am willing to sign up to Thursday and also Friday if needed. This would be profit making and could go towards the maintenance of the park.

## Lighting

At this site there is no lighting adequate for a skate park. Many years ago, provision was made for floodlighting over the area now occupied by the MUGA alongside, but this is not operational owing to vandalism and also because of **significant** local opposition to floodlighting the site by night.

Football is a great sport to play in flood light conditions especially in the winter months when many other sports are not so. It is unfortunate the flood lights are not operational, Botley boys may have been interested to hire the MUGA if they were working. Ryan my son plays for them but their flood lit pitch has been water logged. Is there documentation to support the significant local opposition?

However, advice has been received from the Police via the Neighbourhood Watch group that lighting would be most inadvisable as it would encourage late night use, noise, consumption of alcohol in a public park and quite possibly other, more serious, anti-social behaviour.

The skate park campaign fully support this and agree it would not be advisable to light the park.

Page 11

## Biodiversity and nature conservation

In the case of a skate park, this could take the form of suitable bunding and planting of low-growing and variegated native species of wildflowers and shrubs. High-level growth would of course not be suitable on account of excessive obscuring of the facility and possible shedding of material onto the skate park surface.

High - level planting could be suitable if staggered, evergreen and far enough away as to not obscure the park.

## Original Deed of Gift

When making the original gift of this land, a Deed of Gift was drawn up with the following stipulation about how the land was to be used:

“for the purpose of Cricket, Football, Tennis, Hockey or other games or recreations or otherwise preserved as an open space”.

As stated on page 7 this was by the Kingerlee family in 1939. The first Skate Park ever built was Carlsbad in 1976.

It has been claimed that the deed stipulates that the Fields are specifically for the “recreational purposes”, meaning that it should be fitted out with sports or “recreation” facilities of one type or another. It should be noted that in fact there is no presumption for recreational facilities in preference to open space. The choices are equally valid and equally within the spirit of the deed.

The Skate Park campaign did not make this claim.

## Uniqueness of the site

The petition **assumes** that a skate park must be installed in the upper Louie Memorial Field.

This would arise out of the fact that the Parish has direct control over very few sites, so there is very little choice as to where a skate park might be sited.

The 736 NH residents signed a petition requesting a skate park in NH where the old bowl was situated using the £12,000 insurance money. Where else would be suitable in NH parish?

Page 12

The Demand

**Appendix Pauline's**

Appendix Pauline? Is this page 28 of the document? As my son Ryan pointed out at the meeting last night in sycamore road 2 boys signed the petition (himself and his brother) and this states 1. This begs the question how many other numbers are incorrect?

Pages 12/13

## The Target Demographic (within North Hinksey)

For the purposes of this report, the assumed target demographic for a skate park is taken as boys aged 12 to 19, though it is acknowledged that it may be slightly wider than this, both older and younger. For the purpose of this analysis we will look at the age range 10 to 19. Within this age-range, the number of returns (inclusive) within this age range (within North Hinksey only) was:

Boys aged 10-19	58
Girls aged 10-19	38

Possibly incorrect numbers

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## How did the Campaign present the need for a skate park?

There were also 2 visual photo collages.

1. Illustrates the undesirable nature of not having a skate park, young people hanging around the precinct and skating and biking in unsuitable places, with prohibitions preventing skate park type activities.
2. Shows recent skate parks, complete with fencing, hedging and landscaping.

It is unfortunate these are not included.

There is an implied **assumption** that a skate park will be used for its intended purpose.

Experience and observation of behaviour around the existing facilities does not suggest that this is an easy case to prove.

Yes it is hoped the children of NH who have requested this facility will use it, otherwise why ask for it?

Benches in such situations are also prime targets for vandalism. The benches near the

Abingdon skate park are covered in what most people would consider to be rather unpleasant graffiti.

Our hope is adults and children will use these benches in the day to watch children and young adults doing tricks and having fun together at the park (possibly the parish councillors too). Do adults watch children on the benches at Abingdon? Are the benches in the lower memorial field used for late night drinking?

There is an **assumption** that a skate park will primarily be used by families. It may be true during the day, some of the time, but there will be other times when it will not be true, and the skate park will be dominated by unaccompanied older males.

Many NH families signed the petition so yes it is hoped they will use it otherwise why sign it? Children and their parents have asked me about the progress on the councils decision.

### Were the respondents simply agreeing to the general proposition?

The general point is that the petition presented its case in terms with which most people of good will would find it difficult to disagree

The majority of adults and children who signed the petition sheets I did, told me they wanted one to use, or because they agreed children need a safe place to ride and they were very supportive.

### Was the entire cost of the project explained?

To those who asked yes it was.

Page 17/18

### Where do most of the respondents live in relation to the proposed site?

Local NH children who have themselves initiated this petition travel to Abingdon, Didcot, Radley and Iffley.

Page 18

### The 2011 Household and Schools questionnaire

Please could we see a copy of this questionnaire, I remember filling it out and it was very long. Could the reason so few were returned be the length?

Page 20

### Who pays? Sources of funding capital and running costs

What are the costs to the Parish council in previous years for the bowl?

A skate park will lead to increased quantities of litter being deposited in the LM Upper Field and it will be unrealistic to expect volunteers to clean it up. It will require regular, possibly daily, litter clearance and this will be a further addition to costs.

Litter picks would be done with the children if this was the case, to educate and discourage them from doing it again.

Page 21

### Value for Money and Out of Area Use

Once a skate park is up and running, it will attract users from outside the parish. North Hinksey lies next to considerable centres of population, in the form of Dean Court and, of course, the western parts of the City of Oxford itself.

A small park would not be so attractive to out of area users.

## Management issues

A skate park is an advanced facility that has to be actively managed. If a skate park were built, the responsibility for a wide range of issues would fall on the Parish Council.

I would happily help, maybe other parents too?

## Safety Issues

ROSPA has made it clear that wheeled sports facilities are considered to be "high risk". However, ROSPA goes on to stress that a user who suffers an injury on a facility does not have a credible case for damages unless it can be shown that the operator was negligent. If there is a proper inspection regime in place, and if the facility is kept in a reasonable state of repair, a case for damages is unlikely to have any chance of success and in high profile cases, suits have been thrown out and costs awarded against the claimants.

Skate parks have signs to protect the council from liability. I have photos of these if you would like to see them.

## Safety Inspection regime

The Parish Council will be responsible for instigating a weekly safety inspection regime. This regime will be more intensive than the existing regimes already in place for the children's play area, the MUGA and the Trim Trail.

Parent rota?

Page 22

Crime and Disorder. (Pictures of a skatepark with graffiti and litter)

Where are some positive pictures too, I have plenty.

Page 23

## Impact on Other Users

One of the features of modern life is that older people, when they are on their own, can feel intimidated by groups of young people

Our hope is that older people will not feel intimidated and that they will feel welcome to sit and watch, if they would like to.

## Noise

From their very nature, skate parks can be noisy places  
In the case of the LM Upper Fields, the nearest houses are about 180m from the proposed site, which is very close to the 200m advised standard minimum distance. The fact that the park is on higher ground relative to other areas may also be a problem. Noise travels down the hill to affect houses over a much larger area than just a 200m radius. Currently, even ordinary noise arising from football matches on the Upper Field can be distinctly heard way down the hill on the far side of the Copse.

This would need to be considered in great depth to minimize noise to local residents.

## Neighbourhood Watch

On October 23<sup>rd</sup> a meeting of Neighbourhood Watch was held.

We would have gone along had we been invited.

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## Other Possible Sites for a Skate Park

The Petition has only been presented to NH Parish Council and focuses on only one site. A skate park is on a much larger scale than a skate bowl. For all other skate parks in the area at least 3 sites and often many more were assessed for suitability.

736 signature were gathered from NH parish, the site appears a good one being next to the pavilion, other sporting facilities and it had one previously which has the insurance funds.

Fogwell Road Contains a BMX track. Cumnor Parish Council have turned down an approach to build a skate park on the grounds that there is insufficient parking near the grounds.  
**Why?**

Page 27

Pie chart showing Total Population 4580, Adults Signed 559, Children Signed 138, Not Signed 3883.

We were unable to cover the whole population with the petition unfortunately, so I think this at a glance is misleading.

Page 28

Table showing girls and boys by road in order to assist estimating distance of respondents from the site.

	Girls	Boys	Total
Sycamore Rd	3	1	4

1 boy in Sycamore Road is incorrect as said earlier in my comments. How many other numbers are incorrect?

Page 39

## Letter from Neighbourhood Watch to Chair of R&A Committee, Councillor Julia Hammett

People at our meeting noted that the proportion of young people in the area is very small and wondered how many local people would actually use a skate park and indeed why the LM field is being targeted. Should there not be a review of a number of possible sites? There is really no comparison between a Skatepark and the old 'Bowl'. The rationale for building the MUGA had been that 'the school will use it.' Those with kitchen windows backing onto the field said that the MUGA is almost never used. Matthew Arnold pupils certainly don't play in it-but have been seen balancing on the top of the 'walls' and on the basket ball net.

I think this is repeated information.

Page 40

## Neighbourhood Watch Letter last paragraph

You may ask why people are not writing to you directly. I get the feeling that people are reluctant to write as they do not want to become involved in an angry campaign against

their neighbours. I am therefore writing on their behalf and at their request and preserving anonymity. I have restricted this letter to reporting of things that members of Neighbourhood Watch members have said and very much regret the fact that the Skatepark Campaign has led to such feelings of frustration.

It is quite frustrating for the skate park campaigners not to be involved or invited to any discussions.

It is a great pity that a facility such as the Botley Bowl has been damaged in such a way. Over the years it has provided great fun and sport for hundreds of skateboarders, in-line skaters and riders.

A positive!!

Page 53

### Comments from Police Statement about Faringdon Skatepark

The park is situated a long way from residential properties, so no noise issues. The downside to this is there are also no toilet facilities anywhere close by, which has led to complaints from the neighbouring cricket pavilion with reference young people urinating behind their building, or, hassling them to use the cricket club toilets, (which they won't allow).

This seems unfair and a no win situation. Were would be acceptable for them to go to the toilet? Should they pop home and back?