

# Provision of Skating facilities in Longparish

## Report for Parish Council Meeting 13 May 2002

### 1 Summary

This document reports on the research trip made to 6 Hampshire skating facilities. This was followed up by a meeting to discuss the visit and Fiona Gould was asked to write this report. It proposes the provision of a basic half pipe in Longparish and discusses some of the issues around siting, funding and managing the project.

### 2 Background

There are few facilities available for the young people in Longparish and significant interest has been shown by some of the youngsters in having a skating facility in the village. Most of them do 'blading' (in-line skating) or bmx biking, with only a few skateboarding ('skating'), so the facility must be flexible enough to allow for this. Any facility should provide somewhere safe for teenagers to hang out, chat to their friends and enjoy themselves, whilst minimising the disturbance to other villagers.

The Parish Council have made a budget provision of up to £2000 and Test Valley Borough council say they will provide £3 for every £1 raised by the Parish – suggesting a potential 'starter pot' of £8,000 before fund raising. Initial research suggests we will need between £6,500 and £9,500 for a basic half pipe and obviously more if we need to clear a site or want ancillary equipment.

The young people who have been involved to date are very supportive of the idea and would be prepared to assist both with the initial fund raising, and with any ongoing maintenance of any facility.

### 3 Review of Hampshire skate parks

On 24<sup>th</sup> March, Will and Phil House, Aaron Burns, Matt Bell, Fiona & David Gould and Jeremy Barber undertook a research trip around various skating facilities in Hampshire.

#### 3.1 Kings Somborne

This metal half pipe is loaned by TVBC to parishes for periods of 6 months (it has just moved to Broughton) and in Kings Somborne it was placed on the edge of the playing fields near the recreation centre.



Our testers thought the half pipe was OK – clearly better than nothing, but by no means perfect. It was very noisy and the metal was particularly painful if you fell. Also, the surface had a tendency to be slippery and was not very good for bmx'ing, for which a slightly larger pipe would also be better.

In its favour was a relatively low expected cost and low maintenance requirements.

Users that we spoke to appreciated the half pipe and were disappointed that they were soon to lose it. They said they were hoping the Parish Council could be persuaded to build a permanent skate facility.

We met the chairman of Kings Somborne Parish Council and he commented that the half pipe had provided a focal point for many teenagers in the village and had therefore reduced disturbance elsewhere. They would be looking very seriously at providing a permanent facility.

Some of the users of the recreational area were less pleased – apparently it should have been set up in a different place but, because it was wet on the day it was delivered, the contractors erected it very near the cricket square. There were also some comments about litter, but no major complaints that we heard.

### 3.2 North Baddesley

An area of hard-standing (12 by 24 m) on the playing fields by the cricket field and recreation centre in North Baddesley provided space for several items of primarily 'street' equipment – a fun box, grind pole, small quarter pipe and what was described by our experts as an 'insanely large' quarter pipe. They felt that the site was poorly designed – too large a distance between pieces of equipment, and they didn't fit together in a sensible sequence for use.



We spoke to some users who said it was a pretty good facility – several of the users came here from Romsey to avoid the intimidation and some drug taking that apparently occurs there. The Baddesley site was open and had no near-neighbours so did not cause a nuisance. However, it had been targeted on a couple of occasions by vandals who had ripped the metal surface of one of the quarter pipes. This had taken a long time to be mended and had resulted in the only injury they remembered having occurred on the site – a nasty fall.

### 3.3 Hythe



This was one of the larger sites we visited and which had been constructed about two and a half years ago. An area of waste ground had been tarmacked and fenced to house a range of equipment including a spine. The equipment was wood coated with metal and the site was well designed, including things to do while you were waiting to use the spine, and an open area where people could practice. When we visited, the site was extremely busy and there were many excellent skaters – it was all a bit intimidating, particularly for our less experienced testers. However, apparently when it was quieter, the more experienced users would coach the younger ones.

The project had been led by a local youth worker, Candy Huxham, who worked with the young people, the local authority, the police and local residents to get it established. The nearest houses were separated from the site by trees and a road, but were probably only about 30 meters away. Residents had expressed significant concerns when the facility was being built and it was they who requested the high fencing so that the site could be locked every evening. However, the site was so popular that it effectively ‘mopped up’ young people who had previously had nowhere to go and had just wandered the streets, sometimes upsetting the residents. When they were locked out of the skate park, they went back to wandering the streets – and after a couple of months, the local residents said that they’d prefer the site to remain open.

It had cost £15,000 to clear the site and put in the hard standing. The equipment itself had cost about £17,500 and the fencing about £3,000. Even without the local residents’ concerns, some fencing would have been necessary to prevent loose skateboards accidentally causing damage to cars parked nearby.

There was clear 'ownership' of the site by the users. The location had been chosen by the youngsters themselves from two or three options, and was right next door to the police station. It gave them confidence that they wouldn't have any drug or bullying problems, and would have somewhere close in an emergency (one broken ankle in over 2 years). They are responsible for keeping the area relatively free from litter and also for repainting the equipment every 6 weeks or so, during the summer. They were also heavily involved in fund-raising. The police were very supportive of the whole project and even donated £2,000 towards it.



Overall, this site is way out of Longparish's league, but it was most interesting to learn about how the facility had been developed and the interactions with users and the local residents. The demand for similar facilities is such that Candy is now working on two other sites nearby. She said she would be happy to come and talk to people in Longparish about her experiences.

### **3.4 Bartley Park**

A substantial facility comprising a sunken fenced area of concrete with half pipes and a vert, as well as a good variety of boxes, ramps and poles which was being used by skaters, bladers and bmx'ers. Most of the equipment was covered in graffiti murals that actually looked quite attractive – and this is part of the whole skating culture. The area is lit at night and there are toilets nearby. Our testers expressed concern at the concrete surface as being the most painful option should anyone fall.



The users were enthusiastic about the facilities, although they said that the vert pipe was too steep and dangerous (a view shared by our testers) and therefore hardly anyone used it. They recommended that, if we didn't have much money, the best bit of kit to go for was a half pipe like the one shown below.



The site itself was in a recreation ground and there were toilets and a covered area like a bandstand, which was useful to just hang around in. The main problem mentioned was that a group of people regularly came to the bandstand in the evening to drink and they then threw the bottles onto the skating area. However, Bartley had a youth worker who inspected the site at 6.00am every morning and cleared up any broken glass!

Our users felt more at home here than at Hythe, but it was still clearly way out of our league.

### 3.5 East Woodhay

Of all the places we visited, East Woodhay was the closest to Longparish in terms of size, population etc. The Parish Council has installed a half pipe on an area of grass between the children's play area and a tennis court. This site got the warmest reception of all from our testers – who described it as 'the best thing they'd seen on the entire trip' and 'pretty near perfect'. The half pipe was wide and long enough for bmx'ers and had 2 different heights, which made it excellent for beginners but also offered something for the more experienced.



The half pipe was made of wood, which our testers liked as a surface. It did not seem to suffer from splintering and was much quieter than the metal ramps and pipes. It had been in place 5 years and does not seem to have suffered any significant damage in that time. There was a path of paving slabs between the pipe and the car park, although muddy areas suggested that maybe a few more slabs would be a good idea. There was no fencing directly around the pipe, but the children's play area nearby was already fenced in.



Users we spoke to said that, when the pipe had first been installed, a few people had come from surrounding villages. This happened less often now, but there was a steady stream of youngsters from the village who used it regularly.

### 3.6 Whitchurch

Our last port of call was the new skate park at Whitchurch. This is a large area of tarmac on some wasteland behind the school and one of the housing estates. There is a half pipe and a range of 'street' ramps, boxes and grind rails and it was being used by significant numbers of skaters, bladers and bmx'ers. The equipment was all metal and it was noisy.



In our testers' view, this site was better for the older and more experienced – it is a bit intimidating for the younger ones, particularly in the early evening when it is busy, and they didn't think it was particularly good for bikes. The site seemed to be covered in litter, but this may have been because it was after a busy Sunday.



This was the only site where we saw any significant numbers of girls playing on the equipment

Since we visited, the site has been fenced in to prevent motorised scooters getting in.

### **3.7 Key lessons learned from our trip**

- Get the users involved early and get ownership – they can really be quite sensible, keen to have a safe place to play, and will be prepared to get involved with maintaining the facility
- Don't have equipment that is too advanced – get something more suitable for beginners
- Having to provide hard-standing for skating equipment is very expensive – but half pipes can be placed on grass and only need a path for access
- Wood is much quieter than metal
- When they have the choice, young people tend to choose to be somewhere safe and visible and they don't want their facility damaged
- Our testers thought East Woodhay was brilliant.

## **4 Initial Proposal for Longparish**

We recommend that the Parish Council provides a facility for the young people (9 – 18 years) of Longparish where they can develop their skating skills in safety (blading, bmx'ing and skateboarding) without causing undue disturbance to other villagers. It should provide a potential meeting place where they can hang out without being chased away for being a nuisance. Ideally it should incorporate some seating for people to spectate and have things nearby for people who are not skating to do whilst waiting.

### **4.1 Equipment**

A wooden half pipe that is big enough for bmx'ing. Preferably with 2 height levels – one suitable for beginners (maybe 1m) and the other (maybe 1.5m) to give some increasing challenge as the users get more skilled. We should use the East Woodhay half pipe as a model.

It was noted that this option not only avoids the cost of creating an area of hard standing, but it is also reversible. In discussions with manufacturers we would consider if some sort of shelter could be included.

## 4.2 Site

We need a flat area – grass is quite suitable – big enough for the half pipe. The East Woodhay half pipe was 10.5m x 7.3m., which is about a third of the size of a tennis court. We would need to provide a path, which could be a simple set of paving slabs. Depending on the location, we may need to fence the area to prevent stray skateboards causing damage or injury to bystanders or to deter young children from wandering onto the equipment.

## 4.3 Costs

We have not done exhaustive research, but initial indications are that a dual height half pipe as described above would cost in the range of £9,000 - £10,000.

## 4.4 Usage

Current estimates suggest that about 25 people from the village would use the facility, with a limited number of their school friends from Whitchurch and Barton Stacey. We do not expect a significant influx of youngsters from outside the village as most would prefer to use the more substantial skate parks in Whitchurch or Andover.

## 5 Safety

We recognise that there may be some concerns about the safety of youngsters using the half pipe, however we believe these issues can be adequately addressed.

On our research trip we only heard of a few significant injuries having occurred such as a broken wrist or broken ankle. Clearly all skaters/bikers will have an occasional tumble, hence the importance of the choice of material for the facility – a wooden half pipe on grass appears to be the safest (as well as the quietest) solution. We will ensure that the equipment and the installation are independently inspected.



The choice of location will be influenced partly by the ability to get assistance should anyone be injured. Many of the youngsters now have mobiles, but the site should not be too isolated from either houses or a phone box. We would need a notice telling users what to do in case of an emergency.

RoSPA (the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) recognises skateboarding as a hazardous activity, but also says that the majority of injuries are minor – bumps, bruises and sprains. Whilst RoSPA acknowledges that accidents will occur at a skating facility – it believes that the number and severity of accidents to skaters and bikers will actually be higher if facilities are not provided [see Appendix]. Young people will practice where they can, and if this is on the road, accidents can be serious.

As a home-grown example – the picture to the left shows the result of one of our testing group practicing mini-biking on Southside hill.

## 6 Location

When considering the ideal location for the half pipe, we recognise that there is likely to be a need for compromise, but some of the factors that will need to be considered include:

- Can we get permission from the landowner?
- Central/accessible to the users
- Visible – ideally from the road
- Not too near to houses where people will be disturbed
- Near to a phone/good mobile signal in case of emergency
- State of the land – clear, flat, drained etc

We have identified a number of potential locations that meet the physical requirements of the half pipe:

- The children's play park
- On the waste ground by the football field car park
- Behind the allotments
- School field
- Village Hall Car Park
- The Common
- The cricket club field area

All these except the Common (which is owned by the Parish Council) would need the permission of the owner. Our preference was for the play park followed by the football field. Clearly there is a great deal of discussion/clarification required, but we have started to look at the pros and cons of these two locations:

Location	+++ Pros +++	--- Cons ---
Play Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closest to the majority of the potential users</li> <li>• Not many neighbours</li> <li>• Visible from the road</li> <li>• Somewhere for spectators to sit down and things to do when waiting to skate</li> <li>• Near home and near a phone</li> <li>• Good mobile signal</li> <li>• Parents often there and families can stay together</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential concerns that small children might feel slightly intimidated (though there parents will be with them, so that shouldn't really be a problem)</li> <li>• Would probably need a fence between the half pipe and the play area</li> </ul>
Football field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visible from Gladstone Terrace and to people using the footpath or the football field</li> <li>• Could kick a football around while waiting</li> <li>• Near enough to the pub and houses in case of accident</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Might be too close to the people living near the village hall</li> <li>• Would be cost involved in clearing the scrub</li> <li>• Not so visible (not on the road)</li> <li>• Footballs coming in – fence?</li> <li>• Bit further away from the bulk of the users (but there's the path down the back so access safe)</li> </ul>

## **7 On-going management**

### **7.1 Routine maintenance of the half pipe**

As we do further research with the manufacturers of half pipes, ongoing maintenance will be an issue for discussion. We currently do not expect a wooden half pipe to require much more than painting regularly, although this may be with a special material to enhance the surface of the half pipe for the users. Our group of testers has already expressed a willingness to do this painting.

### **7.2 Safety checks**

We will need a process whereby damage is reported rapidly, and a group of supporters, possibly parents of the users, who would be prepared to take action fairly rapidly, especially if the damage poses any danger.

### **7.3 Insurance**

We will need to explore if the half pipe would be covered under the Parish Council's insurance and how much extra it would be.

### **7.4 Litter**

Any site will need to have a litter bin – the user group has volunteered to keep the site relatively litter free.

### **7.5 Potential intimidation**

It was recognised that some skate parks have a problem with drug taking and/or intimidation. The initial view is that Longparish is unlikely to suffer from this, but we recognise that we should address the potential. We recommend that we involve our local police as we progress and take advice about planning and siting the facility, and processes for handling any issues that might arise.

## **8 Fund raising**

The Parish Council has budgeted £2000 towards potential skating facilities. Test Valley Borough Council will give us 3 times the amount we are able to raise; hence we have an initial budget of £8000 before extra fund raising.

### **8.1 To date**

Jo Clear organised a raffle and tickets were sold in the shop. This has already raised £50

### **8.2 Planned**

Jim Neal has offered to organise a 'race night' in the village hall in September, from which up to £500 will go to the Skating fund

### **8.3 To come**

The teenagers are already talking about doing their own fund raising. Ideas to date include:

- Sponsored run/skate/bike ride
- Concert in the village hall (they know some bands)
- Running some fund-raising activities at one of the village fetes or other events
- Auction of promises – with the skaters offering to do things like wash cars, gardening etc
- Car boot sales – either organising a sale, or a boot at Picket Piece

If the Parish Council gives the project their support, the whole area of fund raising can be taken forward. This will include looking for companies to sponsor the project.

## 8.4 Grants

We believe there are a number of grant funding bodies that might be prepared to contribute to such a scheme and these need to be explored.

## 9 Potential concerns and objections

There are two main areas of concern/objection:

- General concerns about spending money on a skating facility – from different perspectives such as noise; safety; vandalism; importing trouble-makers from outside the village; better things to spend the money on etc
- Specific concerns or objection about potential locations for the facility

Both areas will need to be addressed – a start is made below.

	Concern/Objection	Response
General	“Skateboarding is just a fad”	<p>The proposed facility would be suitable for blading and bmx'ing as well as skateboarding so although each activity may have periods of greater or lesser popularity, the facility should remain of interest. Skateboarding has been popular for over 15 years now, and it could be argued that, with major sponsorship now behind such sports, it is unlikely to decline any time soon.</p> <p>The youth worker who co-ordinated the establishment of the Hythe skate park nearly 3 years ago, is currently involved in setting up others to cope with the demand.</p>
	“The site will be vandalised and damaged so all the money spent will have been wasted”	<p>It is always possible that we may suffer damage through vandalism, but there are a number of things we can do to minimise that risk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choosing a location which is open to a regular stream of passing traffic and that is overlooked by other facilities</li> <li>• Constructing the facility with vandalism-prevention in mind - e will take advice from the police and the manufacturers on how to minimise the risks</li> <li>• Involving the young people from the village to ensure they would value and feel a sense of ownership for the facility will minimise the risk of any locals damaging it – if they've helped raise the money and especially if they maintain/repaint it they're not going to damage it. (NB the damage to the Andover skate park was caused by travellers, not by the young people)</li> <li>• The lack of transport facilities work in our favour here – we're unlikely to get random strangers stopping by and damaging it!</li> </ul>
	“We'll get an influx of trouble-makers from outside the village”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our proposed facility will be very basic and unlikely to attract youngsters from very far away who could visit the bigger facilities at Whitchurch or Andover</li> </ul>

	<p>“It will get covered in graffiti”</p>	<p>Strange though it may seem to some of us, graffiti is something of a cult art form for the global skating community – not the scribbling of obscenities, but murals etc painted colourfully on the wall of skate parks or on the end of a half pipe. The photos we’ve got of the site at Bartley Park can give you an idea of what can be done to decorate the site.</p> <p>As far as our proposed site is concerned, we would expect the youngsters to act as guardians of the equipment and ensure it doesn’t get covered in obscenities – or to paint them out if it happens. We would hope that people would have fewer concerns about painting murals on the end of the half pipe, but if our consultations show a major concern, we would need to discuss this with the user group. For example decoration could be limited to the end away from the road.</p>
	<p>“The teenagers are just trouble-makers who cause a lot of noise and disturbance – why should we do anything to help them?”</p>	<p>People between the ages of about 10 and 18 are something of a neglected group in Longparish. They’re really too big to play on the swings and they can’t drive to the leisure centre in Andover or to the skate park in Whitchurch. Any youngsters whose parents are unable to drive them to events outside of the village really have no choice but to hang around in the village, kicking a football around the garages or practicing their blading on the road.</p> <p>We believe that giving the teenagers facilities that they would use and value is the best way of ensuring they don’t mess around where they cause frequent annoyance.</p>
	<p>“It’s too much money – there are not enough young people to justify the expense”</p>	<p>We estimate there are about 25 young people who have actively expressed an interest so far – more would probably give it a go if the facility existed. Given what we’ve seen at other sites, each would use the facility several times a week.</p> <p>There are over 80 children at the school, several of whom will probably skate, as they grow older, and with the plans for developing the playgroup and school, this reservoir of children is unlikely to diminish.</p> <p>If we invested in a facility costing £16,000, of which we had to raise £4,000, that would be the equivalent of less than £6 per person in the village (or just over £1per year over 5 years). The Parish Council has already earmarked £2,000. The rest would come from fundraising and the grant from the Test Valley Council.</p>
	<p>“Skateboarding is terribly noisy”</p>	<p>Skating can be noisy which is why we will be trying to locate the facility a significant distance away from people’s homes.</p> <p>However, some materials are noisier than others, with metal being the worst and wood the least noisy – our proposed half pipe is wooden. Also, because the half pipe will be on grass, you won’t get the noise of the boarders flipping their boards on the pavement or road.</p>
	<p>“You’re going to get bullying and people taking drugs”</p>	<p>We don’t have a significant drug problem in Longparish and we will be working with the police to ensure we don’t develop one. The location of the half pipe where it is visible to passers-by will reduce the risk of criminal and anti-social behaviour. Any seating facilities will be open-sided ..</p>

## 10 Way Forward

How to take these ideas forward is for the Parish Council to decide. We think it would be sensible to

- do more research about costs and fund raising
- discuss these proposals with the owners of the sites
- hold a public meeting and invite potential users, anyone else interested from the village (whether they support the idea or have concerns they would like to air), our Test Valley Councillors and officials, our Community Police Officer, someone from East Woodhay and the youth worker from Hythe.

## APPENDIX

### ROSPA REPORT ON SKATEBOARDING SAFETY



It should be appreciated that skateboarding is a hazardous activity and that accidents will always occur. Indeed in some parts of the world, California for example, it is officially recognised by law as being a “Hazardous Recreational Activity” alongside such sports as Hang Gliding, Skydiving etc. This has the side effect of giving considerable legal protection to skate park operators and helps to encourage provision of sites.

ROSPA will normally Risk Assess all skate parks as being high risk. That does not mean that we do not approve of them, Just that we recognise that accidents are going to occur.

Whilst acknowledging that in putting in a skateboard facility you are going to have accidents occurring, it should also be recognised that the number and severity of accidents that will occur to participants in wheeled sports in the area will be much higher IF such a facility is not provided. The main statistics for skateboarding are from the USA. They show that between January 1992 and June 1995 there were 25 deaths due to in line skating and 100 deaths involving BMX bikes etc. 90% of these involved collisions with motor vehicles. The numbers of fatalities on skateboards was too small to be recorded nationally and are almost exclusively due to collisions with motor vehicles.

To put things into perspective, there were 35,788 skateboard injuries in 1996 and 156,681 football (soccer) related injuries (again in the USA). However skateboarding injuries tend to be more serious than football related ones. 1/3 rd of all skateboarding injuries occur at weekends.

The average age of skateboarders is between 13 and 14 and they participate in the sport on average 50.8 days in the year. 90% of them are male and 60% are under 15.

Sprains, fractures, contusions and abrasions are the most common form of injury. 74% of injuries were to the extremities. Among these broken wrists (19%), ankles (11%), face (16%) and long bone fractures are the most common injuries. Head Injuries accounted for around 20% of all injuries. Serious injuries, concussion, blunt trauma, skull fracture or closed head injuries represented 3.1% of all injuries to skateboarders. Most serious injuries would have been prevented if correct protective gear had been worn.

About 1/3 of those injured have less than one week’s experience of the sport - so keep a close eye when you first open a new facility. The most commonly hurt participants are those with over one year’s experience.

Accidental falls due to loss of balance are the most common with about half of falls due to rough riding surface. Small stones, sticks bumps and holes in or on the riding surface is the leading cause of falls of experienced riders.

Underdeveloped motor co-ordination is the main cause of falls to younger and less experienced riders. In addition, the smaller the child the higher is their centre of gravity due to the larger proportion of their head to body. Because of this, and the inability of less developed children to brace properly for a fall, head injuries account for a much higher

proportion of injuries for skater under 10.

However not all skateboarders are young. In the USA in 1996 there were 165 participants hospitalised who were aged over 65!

You are only liable for damages, under UK law, if you are negligent. If you take all recommended steps it is unlikely that you will be deemed negligent and therefore if litigation occurs, you are unlikely to be have damages awarded against you. You are not exactly fireproof but you are certainly strongly flame resistant.

There is a new Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 35 about to be issued by BSI which covers skateboarding facilities.

RoSPA recommend the following action:

- site the facility so that it is overlooked (this gives some informal supervision) and is away from overhanging trees etc.
- make sure that there is good access for emergency vehicles.
- inform your insurance company
- ensure that correct signs are displayed (see PAS35 for an example)
- ensure that all equipment is built and installed to PAS35
- obtain a post installation inspection from a suitably qualified body such as RoSPA to ensure that all safety standards are met. (Your insurance company may well insist on this in any case)
- inspect your site as regularly as you can. Even in a small parish this should be a minimum of once a week.
- obtain an independent annual inspection of the site. RoSPA can undertake this inspection at the same time as it is inspecting play areas.
- document all inspections and keep records for as long as possible. (RoSPA recommended a minimum of 15 years)
- undertake all repairs/maintenance problems as soon as is practical.

In addition you can take the following precautions with regard to users.

- encourage the wearing of correct "gear". Research has indicated that kids tend to wear helmets, or fail the wear them in groups. If one child is wearing a helmet there is an 85% chance that the next child will wear one. If the first child is not wearing a helmet there is only a 3% chance that the second child will.
- wearing of wrist protection will greatly reduce accidents and may be perceived as 'more cool'
- on new sites encourage the more experienced skateboarders to show the less experienced ones how to fall.
- remind the children that "IT IS NOT COOL TO BE DEAD OR CRIPPLED"

For general safety guidance see the RoSPA web site [www.rosaplaysafety.co.uk](http://www.rosaplaysafety.co.uk)

Further information on site inspections can be obtained from  
RoSPA, 40 Stockham Park, Wantage, Oxon OX12 9HQ 01235 768479