

Wiltshire Council

Chippenham Area Board

10 September 2013

Item 9 – Chippenham Skate Park Task Group Report

Nick Murry, Chippenham Resident

Question 9

1. When will a full appraisal of the options, which will be essential before any site selection decision, take place?

For clarity; the 'site assessment' scoring that appears in your pre-meeting report cannot be considered an options appraisal in any professional sense for the following reasons:

- a.) it is series of subjective judgements and opinions, heavily weighted in favour of what seems to be a predetermined selection;
- b.) the criteria seem to have been drawn up to provide the desired answer and are lacking in a number of key areas that they would reasonably have been expected to cover;
- c.) the criteria have been applied inconsistently, so that some sites are rejected on grounds that apply equally or to an greater extent to the recommended site (e.g. proximity to a children's playground, the potential for skateboarders using paths and slopes, environmental (ecological) impact, loss of amenity to other users, disturbance to dog walkers and likely unacceptability to local residents, are all cited as reasons for unsuitability of other sites and not deemed to be reasons for rejecting Monkton Park, where their significance is almost without exception greater);
- d.) the 'assessment' takes no account of visual impact, floodplain and natural water storage issues, engineering issues or environmental impacts, which is a serious flaw and leaves the Area Board exposed to a considerable level of risk;
- e.) Neither does it take account of capital costs and on-going 'operational and maintenance' costs, which are likely to be substantially higher for Monkton Park than Bristol Road, for example.

These are not things that should be left to a planning application stage (where decisions become more difficult to reverse, more money will have been spent and the Board is likely to be pressured down a course of mitigation) and need to be considered up front. That they have not been is a serious flaw I the process that needs to be urgently addressed.

This implies a serious risk to the Area Board and the public purse, if a decision is taken to proceed with a planning application without a proper options appraisal.

2. Why has the Task Group focused, and been allowed to focus, all its efforts on promoting the case for a single site, with obvious prejudice and seeming disregard for the Area Board's own instruction to consider other sites?

In this regard:

- a.) there has been no proper appraisal of alternative sites;
- b.) there has been no public consultation on shortlisted sites;
- c.) there has been no transparency in terms of process;
- d.) there have been a range of concerns expressed about the above by a number of individuals and organisations, including, I understand the Civic Society;
- e.) the attitude of the Task Group on the rare occasions it has engaged with the public (once in Monkton Park school and once at the West End Club) has been to disparage any views that are inconsistent with its own and therefore don't support this site, which can only increase the risk of important factors being missed, resulting in additional costs or total failure of the project down the line.

3. Can the Area Board explain how it plans to manage the substantial risks involved in potentially applying for planning permission for this site?

These relate both to the feasibility of the site (flood risk, natural water storage, conservation, social and environmental impact, opposition from other park users), the costly mitigation measures that would be likely to ensue, to reduce noise, visual impact, environmental impact, antisocial behaviour, and the additional operation and maintenance costs that would be necessary for this site (and which would potentially have to be picked up by the Town Council when they take over the Park, and which they have not been consulted upon).

Response

- 1) A comprehensive selection process has taken place. The criteria used was created by adopting best practice from other Skatepark Projects, on line research and following advice from independent experts.
See Skatepark report 1.4.10, 1.4.11 and 1.4.12
- 2) The STG has followed the directions of the Area Board. The STG has not disregarded other sites.
See Skatepark report 1.4.10, 1.4.11, and 1.4.12