



CHIPPENHAM CIVIC SOCIETY

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Chippenham Area Board (by email)

copy to

Chippenham Skatepark Task Group

Wiltshire Council
Monkton Park
Chippenham,
Wiltshire, SN15 1ER

The Skateboard Task Group And Its Recommended Option For A Site In Monkton Park

The Area Board has requested comments on the proposal prior to its meeting on 10 Sept.

General Comments

Irrespective of the choice of location, we believe that both the process by which the recommendation was reached and the conduct of the Task Group are seriously flawed. If its recommendation is accepted we consider that Wiltshire Council will be wide open to a legal challenge. We believe there is a serious risk of history repeating itself and that the possible outcome of such a challenge is that the Council could have acted unlawfully. The reasons are given below.

The mode of operation of the Task Group.

The discussions of the group have been veiled in secrecy with virtually no information in the public domain regarding its meetings, rationale, conclusions, way forward etc. There has been virtually no information on the Wiltshire Council website or any press releases about its progress or conduct. We understand that a decision was made that the task group meetings would not have any minutes taken of its meetings. Even if these meetings were

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considered to be in confidence until there had been a public consultation, it is extraordinary that even the members of the task group have had no record of its proceedings. This gives the distinct impression that some members of the group were determined to arrive at a certain outcome no matter what the facts might show. This lack of any record of discussions is surely quite contrary to the code of practice that elected councillors are required to fulfil.

The process by which the recommendation has been made

The Civic Society has on its committee a number of members who have extensive experience of conducting options studies. The first stage is to ensure that the terms of reference are crystal clear, relevant and deliverable. From what we have seen of the TORs, they satisfy none of these.

The first stage of such a study is to generate a good range of options, then reducing them down to a shortlist of three or four. What is then required is a thorough systematic analysis of each on the shortlist (pros, cons, constraints etc.) and finally coming up with a preferred option. We can see no evidence whatsoever that the task group have adopted this approach. They seem to have gone from 23 options to one at a stroke, without any serious analysis of why some perfectly reasonable options should not be further investigated. Comments such as "the police don't like this option" are not a good enough reason for discarding an option. We base this on the Summary of Public Consultation Meeting 26 November 2012 which does not look either very competent or professional, particularly the way in which some options are summarily dismissed. We have no idea whether this information has ever been published properly for discussion. This seems to confirm the climate of secrecy and poor presentation of arguments.

Having arrived at the Island Park site as the preferred option in late 2012 which met with considerable opposition, the task group rather than examine an alternative option to Monkton Park (which we understand it was tasked to do at the Area Board in January 2013), doggedly carried on and now recommend Monkton Park which was not even one of the options presented on the 26 November 2012 Public Consultation!

The choice of Monkton Park

Because of what we consider to be serious flaws in the evaluation and selection process we are very concerned about the choice of Monkton Park. By common consent this park is one of the jewels in the crown of Chippenham. The environmental impact of locating a skateboard park between the play area and the river will be very severe, effectively cutting the park in two. It is simply ducking responsibility for the task group to state that environmental issues are not part of its remit and that the planning application process will expose these issues. The environmental, social, cost and economic impacts should all have been key determining factors in examining all the options and arriving at a preferred site.

The distinct impression is that the task group have been determined to pursue the Monkton Park option without any proper consideration of other options. For example:

- Where is the balanced score card on the plus and minus merits of Monkton Park? The rationale for the former proposal of the Island Park Site is not a balanced appraisal.

- If there is no public money available to buy redundant land for a skateboard site, then why should it be provided at the expense of other irreplaceable public amenities like green space?
- Perhaps the Council should insist on section 106 money to fund a skateboard park e.g. as part of the Langley Park Development.
- The general assumption seems to be that parkland is 'available' and will cost nothing. Is that realistic given that these are prime public areas?
- No account seems to have been taken of Monkton Park being one option for the proposed Community Campus site.
- Why have no indoor options been considered, such as the empty police station, disused Westmead School or even the Olympiad Sports Hall on some days when it is not used much? The indoor skateboarding at Malmesbury Abbey is a precedent.

Civic Society Recommendation to Area Board

Because we believe that the process by which the task group has made its recommendation is deeply flawed, we have no confidence that Monkton Park is the best or the only option. We recommend that the Area Board does not accept the recommendation of the task group and that it initiates the following:

- a. The task group be re-formed and a trained impartial facilitator be appointed to the group to ensure that all shades of opinion are properly recognised and considered and that all valid options are systematically evaluated.
- b. The terms of reference be reviewed (particularly to ensure that some valid options are not dismissed on a whim).
- c. The group be mandated to produce proper minutes.
- d. The group be required to re-examine the longlist and to produce a shortlist of (say) 4 options to be properly evaluated.
- e. The cost, environmental, social and economic issues to be properly evaluated for each option.
- f. Should there be no practical option (without excessive cost) or if the best option is the most costly, the group should be required to say so.

Isabel Blackburn

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