

QUESTIONS FROM PAUL HOOPER

The residents and neighbours of Alice Park have some concerns regarding the skatepark, and I wondered if you could answer some questions and provide some background information to allay their concerns.

1. It appears that the skatepark has been constructed.

Response

Yes, the skatepark has been constructed.

Paul Hooper Response and Question

Is this true? Fencing has to be added along with planting, landscaping and repair to the access route. Legal requirements such as a Risk Assessment have to be produced and Health and Safety checks conducted. This project is not just about a lump of concrete.

Response

Yes the skate park has been constructed, but the final landscaping and fencing is still to be completed. No date for completion of this work is yet available.

2. At Ref. A, Ref. B was approved.

3. Ref. B, Project Scope: "design to include maximum possible noise attenuation within the available budget"; "design to incorporate include necessary, suitable and sufficient screening and planting"; "soft landscaping to soften edges and provide some visual screening". £1500 was included in the Preliminary Budget to address this. When will the promised landscaping and planting be completed?

Response

The landscaping and planting will be completed at the end of the project and when nature takes its course.

Paul Hooper Response and Question

So when will this take place? Dates should be easily obtained from the project plan which I expect would have been risk adjusted to cover problems associated with COVID, etc. e.g. supply of materials, labour, plant, etc.

Response

No specific date is available, this has been influenced by supplier delay.

4. Ref. B, Agreement for 'Works': "c) Any damage caused to the property as a direct result of the work will be made good by the tenant and/or its appointed contractors." When is the contractor going to 'make good' the damage to the grassed area caused by plant accessing the site?

Response

This work will take place at the end of the project.

Paul Hooper Response and Question

But when is this going to happen? Suggest looking at the project plan again.

Response

This work will take place at the end of the project.

5. The change in design (from Ref B, Page 25) has altered the size, shape, and location to the originally approved skatepark and thus introduced considerable Health and Safety risk due to the close proximity to the Victorian boating pond/sandpit, which I believe is the subject to a preservation order, and the rest of the children's play area. Had a formal Risk Assessment been conducted? I assume this is a legal requirement for a construction in the public space. Are both BANES and The Trust liable or just The Trust? How do you plan to manage this issue? It appears that either the skatepark should be changed back to the original approved design or there has to be a fence between the two facilities. Was the original design formally Risk Assessed? If the design had not been changed this may not have been such an issue but clearly, in its current form, there is an accident waiting to happen.

Response

This will be reviewed at the completion of the project.

Paul Hooper Response

Really? Your response suggests this work won't happen. This needs to be done before the end of the project to avoid rectifying work and additional/duplicate costs.

Response

The matter is in hand, the very reason for the delay is the supplier delay on the fencing that will divide the skatepark and the sandpit, an obvious safety provision.

6. Whilst the skatepark is yet to open, it is in use every day into the early hours. The serious concern is that people over fourteen, including adults, are using the facility which I believe breaches the covenant. I have also heard of adults 'pushing' young children off the facility, so they have sole use. Ref B, Project Scope and Objectives: "The upper age limit for the skate park usage is 14 years (so the design

should reflect this)". How do you plan to ensure **only** under fourteens use this facility? Maybe, comms stressing the age limit would be helpful rather than pictures of adults grasping skateboards!

Response

The skatepark is for all ages but the design is aimed primarily at the younger age groups. Use by over 14s is not illegal. Any anti-social behaviour in this area is a matter for the police. The construction area is fenced off and checked on a regular basis. Steps are being taken to prevent people gaining access to the skate park site until it is officially open.

Paul Hooper Response and Question

I was appointed to the Alice Park Trust Sub-Committee for its inaugural meeting and remained a member for the permitted three years. For the vast majority of this time (estimated in excess of 95%) all that we discussed was the skatepark. Never was the skatepark described or campaigned as a play facility for adults or teenagers over 14. It was always identified as a facility for young children to develop and improve both their confidence and skills before moving on to the more challenging skatepark at Royal Victoria Park. Interestingly, the Lambridge Ward Cllrs article in the Oct/Nov 2020 edition of Focus concluded with: "This facility will give many children on the east of Bath a place to play, a place to be and place to learn to fall over and get up again.". There is no mention of adults or even teenagers! **How do you think the parents and children who supported the Alice Park campaign would feel if they knew it was always the intention to allow adults and teenagers over 14 to use the facility at the expense of younger children?** Exposing young children to the social graces that this demographic would bring, examples of which have been evident even before the facility is officially opened, would be of huge concern to parents. Is this not a clear case of misleading people to achieve a personal objective?

When former Cllr Geoff Ward and I proposed the current site for the skatepark we thought the location, within the children's play area, would keep all the children's play facilities together within a fenced (controlled) area making safety, including child safeguarding, easier to manage and implement. Allowing adults and teenagers over 14 to use this facility introduces significant risk to the young children in this area. The change in design, bringing the facility closer to the sand pit, has clearly increased the risk. Even if the facility is now fenced off, this risk still exists with the commuting to and from the site by the demographic. Not least with the increased likelihood of young children being exposed to bad language.

The Approval of Heads of Terms re the Skatepark Lease dated 4th September 2019 clearly states, "The upper age limit for skatepark usage is 14 years". Once again, I ask, what controls are you going to put in place to control usage of the skatepark?

With regard to antisocial behaviour, as a sub-committee you decided to host the skatepark in Alice Park. Therefore, your decision has introduced the issue i.e. you have caused the problem. Do you not feel that you should take some responsibility

for your actions and assist with providing a solution? Given the Lambridge Ward Cllrs knowledge of the local skateboarding community, maybe they could have a word with them and discourage such activity in the future especially, in the current climate, getting them to obey the law and observe COVID regulations.

The residents and neighbours of Alice Park would be pleased and surprised to have their concerns being addressed by the committee, especially action being taken to mitigate this issue.

Response

This question is asking for an opinion and not a confirmation of fact.

7. Significant antisocial behaviour is already taking place: mobile floodlighting; loud music; the constant 'clatter' of skateboards; breach of COVID restrictions; behind the cafe and hedgerows being used as toilets. Residents and neighbours are becoming more and more stressed with this, especially at 1 am! What policing and controls do you plan to put in place to mitigate these significant issues, through life?

Response

Anti-social behaviour is a matter for the Police.

Paul Hooper Response

Please see comments above.

Response

This question is asking for an opinion and not a confirmation of fact.

8. In Cllr Wright's campaign to get the skatepark built, she highlighted that skateboarding is now considered a sport and is to be included in the Olympics. As BANES charges for **all** its sporting facilities, including those used by children, does this policy not introduce an opportunity for the Trust not only to control access to the facility, as highlighted at 7 above, but make some money for the Trust? A fence with electronic gate control (needing a skatepark membership to gain access?) is a possible solution. This would provide a degree of age control but it is still open to abuse. Tony Hickman could possibly help with this?

Response

There are no plans to charge for use.

Paul Hooper Response and Question

Clearly precedence is being set here. How can the Trust charge: the tennis players, for such awful facilities; the footballers; and the pétanque players and not the skatepark users? All are sports, with only pétanque not in the Olympics. Is this not

positively discriminating in favour of skatepark users and their brand new £100k facility? Given this, should the Alice Park Trust not make all sport in the park free of charge? As stated before, BANES charges for all of its sporting facilities and the Alice Park Trust uses BANES charging structures as a bases for charging park users. Maybe people and sports clubs who use BANES sporting facilities could use the Alice Park skatepark model to support an argument to make all BANES sporting facilities free of charge to the public!

Response

B&NES Council does not charge for the use of skateparks within the authority.

9. Ref. B, identified the need for a fence to compartmentalise the skatepark from the play area in the following sections: Resource Implications (Finance, Property, People); The Report; Constraints. Ref. B, also identified that the £25k set aside for other park improvements would need to be used to complete the skatepark. Resource Implications (Finance, Property, People) identified that the budget was insufficient to complete the project without this money. Risk Management highlighted that BANES' contribution would be capped at £97k. However, Risk Management also stated that there was a risk that project costs could exceed the allocated budget. Design changes significantly increased the Health and Safety risk and the need to fence off the facility. Was this additional risk premium added to the project costs? How did you plan to pay for this? Is it possible that it was known that there were insufficient funds to deliver a safe skatepark when construction started?

Response

As this is a council project it is for them to comment, but we are assured the facility and appropriate fencing will be provided within the project cost.

Paul Hooper Response and Question

Not true. The Approval of Heads of Terms re the Skatepark Lease dated 4th Sept 2019 clearly stated that BANES contribution to the project would "be capped at £97k and for Alice Park Trust to reasonably contribute to costs in order to facilitate this project being delivered". Also, that "the budget was insufficient as a fence to compartmentalise the skatepark from the play area was advised and vehicle ground protection will be required during construction".

Following two Freedom of Information requests (never even acknowledged by BANES, which is against the law), and all my time on the subcommittee, I have yet to gain any visibility of project documentation which I appreciate is under BANES control and it could have been argued that I had 'no need' 9k and it may have been commercially sensitive. Where is the Alice Park Trust going to obtain the additional funding needed, given it is broke, and why should Alice Park Trust money be used to bale out the skatepark which was clearly underfunded? Whilst, no doubt, there would be an attempt to blame the previous administration, it is clear that no due diligence was conducted during the concept/approval phase of this project. This is when a

number of issues would have been identified, not least legal and Charities Commission requirements. I believe, this was during the previous Lib Dem administration and before the Alice Park Subcommittee was formed. Please remember that the survey of park needs, conducted by the cafe, identified the need for a skatepark as the lowest user priority. Why spend money on a skatepark at the expense of higher user priorities?

Response

The sub-committee has made its decisions, and although frustrated with the impact of Covid-19, feels confident that a safe and compliant facility will be provided and we look forward to inviting you, as a past sub-committee member, to its official opening later in the year, conditions permitting.

If you have not received a response to your Freedom of Information requests then please contact the Information Governance Team regarding this issue.

10. This is not a great start to living with the skatepark 24/7. There are huge concerns as to the safety of young children using the play area, especially the sandpit, and the users of the skatepark. What is going to happen when the skatepark is actually open and lighter nights and warmer weather arrive? If controls are not put in place early this is going to be a nightmare to live with.

Response

Thank you for your comment, the use of the skatepark will be monitored and we look forward to skaters making full use of the facility.