

STEYNING PARISH COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S SKATEBOARD FACILITY UPDATE

I am acutely aware that there is a great deal of confusion about the current situation with the Parish Council's proposal for a skateboard facility on the MPF and with the alternative site in the Leisure Centre car park proposed by the Friends of Memorial Playing Field (FoMPF), so I thought I would take this opportunity to clarify the current position.

The key things you should know are:

- The amended plans for the skateboard facility in the MPF have yet to be submitted to HDC but the council expect the planning application to be heard in November.
- However, at the time of writing, 6 residents called a public meeting at Springwells on Thursday 19th September at 7.00pm to put forward a motion for a town poll on whether or not the people in the town want the council to build the skateboard facility in the MPF. If 10 residents agree to the motion then a town poll is called. A town poll is a similar process to a local election and the council has offered the residents the option of a postal survey at less cost.
- The council is not obligated to abide by the result of the poll but will take the result into consideration before deciding on submitting its amended plans.
- An objector has issued two Judicial Reviews against the council's decision both of which have been dismissed by the courts. However, the claimant has applied to the High Court for an oral appeal hearing. This will be heard in November. If the council loses on appeal it will have to re-visit the decisions it made subject to its

decision to proceed or not, as a result of the town poll/survey.

- The FoMPF have submitted plans for an alternative site in the Leisure Centre car park and this planning application is due to be heard on the 15th October.
- Access to toilets can be made available in the existing MPF

Both sites have many issues that have to be overcome even if planning consent is given but the key issues are:

- MPF – if the council wins the support of the town it will need to ensure that any legal challenges over building the facility on what is now the Village Green are unlikely to succeed.
- Leisure Centre site – permission to build will be required from Steyning Grammar School and WSCC both of whom have strongly objected to the facility being built on this site.

How did we get here?

As you know Steyning does not have many open spaces suitable for a skateboard facility but the council went through a robust process of analysis on different sites around the town.

The Council decided on the MPF for the following reasons: safe access for pedestrians, good parking, non-isolated site (good casual surveillance of the facility), a safe environment for young skaters, rental cost, toilet access, planning permission and potential build costs. We have also looked at land acquisition, environmental issues, impact on housing in the vicinity, emergency access, disabled access

and above or, below ground suitability. The MPF 'ticked all the boxes.'

The MPF is a well-used sports and recreational field and there would be constant surveillance so young children could play in a safe environment; the site already has a small existing tarmac skateboarding strip and, on the least used part of the MPF on a sloping site that is considered unsuitable for any pitch-based sport; there are existing toilet facilities on site; skateboarding is a recognised sport and would fit well into the existing sports activities. The site plan shown indicates where the proposed facility will be, at the western edge of the field, in the location of the existing tarmac skateboarding strip.

Finally, the key factor was that in these times of financial constraint the council 'owned' the site and would not leave future generations the possibility of a rising cost burden, nor would there be any landowner permissions required. In making the decision for the MPF

the council was fully aware that this would likely cause some dissent in the town, but felt confident that following a public meeting held in January 2012 there was a groundswell of support for

it. The Town poll will also now give us further indication of the level of support for this facility.

The MPF proposal is being vigorously opposed by a group of objectors, particularly the FoMPF and two Judicial Reviews were put before the courts citing that certain

decisions made by the council, were 'unlawful'. The courts have dismissed both claims but the claimant has appealed against this decision and has asked for an oral hearing which will

take place in November. The council is confident that the courts will uphold the previous decision. However, even if the council were to lose the appeal this does not mean the end of the

skateboard facility in the MPF, merely that the council will have to re-visit its decision. Much has been made about the council being there 'to serve' the people of Steyning. The council is indeed here to serve ALL of the residents of Steyning and has a duty to ensure that the youth of the town have the opportunity to take part in non-team sports activity. I believe that a skate-park, talked about in Steyning for over 20 years, will deliver this opportunity and I also believe that there is support in the town for it.

I would like to mention the alternative site proposed by the FoMPF in the Leisure Centre car park.

Steyning Grammar School have repeatedly rebutted any approaches to build on this land and have numerous future plans for the school, and as you will see from the HDC planning website on the



FoMPF application, continue to do so. There are other issues that need to be resolved; the council does not own the land; the area is isolated and although overlooked by the all-weather pitches, the two would not necessarily be used at the same time which could pose a problem for young skaters and increase opportunities of vandalism and anti-social behaviour; the car park is busy and mixing young skaters and manoeuvring cars raises safety concerns. Finally, and most importantly, there is no funding available, for re-instating the car parking facilities through the funding avenues known to the council at this time.

At a meeting with the FoMPF on 23.5.2013 the council agreed to defer its planning application until the end of September to allow the FoMPF time to put their proposal together.

The council believed that in the spirit of conciliation, this was the right thing to do.

Just to be clear, unless the full council decide against it following the town poll, the council WILL go ahead with its planning application for its proposed site in the MPF - we expect this to be in November.

The FoMPF's alternative site in the Leisure Centre car park is due to go before HDC planning committee in October. You can view the proposed plans and documents supporting and objecting to the proposal, on the HDC planning website. The reference no. is DC/13/1296. The FoMPF have now suggested the council take this project forward, if planning permission is granted but, this decision will firstly have to go through skateboard facility-

park working party and then on to full council for its approval. Planning consent does not give permission for the facility to be built so in the meantime we are talking to all stakeholders of this site to determine whether this is possible and this will depend on permission from Steyning Grammar School and WSCC, confirmed approval of the siting of the skate-park in the busy car park from the Police and RoSPA, the cooperation of DC Leisure who run the Leisure Centre for the use of their toilets and the management of the facility and, whether there is funding available for the re-instatement of the car parking spaces.

As a Town poll has now been called on the MPF site it will be less likely that the council will poll the town again. However, if the MPF as a site is not given approval by the town in the poll, and the council decides to abide by the result, and should all the necessary permissions be given to build the facility in the Leisure Centre car park, then the council will consult with the town through a survey, before it spends further tax payers money.

The youth of the town have been waiting for a skateboard facility in the town for a long time and I hope that the town will support the council in ensuring that the facility is sited in the best place.

