

# The Coggeshall Society

## Statement on the proposed provision of a skateboard ramp

The Society would like to record its strong support for enhancing recreational facilities for young people locally, potentially including a skateboarding facility. However, the Society feels that the issue requires, and deserves, more thorough and extended consideration than it has yet received.

The need for such facilities is not doubted and many of the arguments in favour are fully accepted, but the Society wishes to record its concern about the discord that the issue seems to have created locally. Further investigation and development are needed to remove or reduce this, and to test the wider viability of the project.

The following points are offered for consideration by the Parish Council:

- The project seems to have arisen out of the possibility of acquiring a second hand skate ramp and thus has taken on a life of its own. It needs to be considered more widely, and it would therefore be better to allow initial enthusiasm to be tested against the somewhat longer term;
- It is not clear that due process has been followed; whatever the need for the facility, it remains necessary to retain confidence by going through the correct channels;
- The consultation process should be carried out by a neutral entity, rather than the group campaigning for the ramp;
- At the Parish Council meeting of 29/06/2021, the point seemed not fully realised that noise objections do not mainly concern human voices, so much as the repetitive and intrusive ‘roar’ and clatter that comes from the boards, especially when used on hollow surfaces. Abatement measures need to be demonstrated to the satisfaction and reassurance of those living in the vicinity;
- The physical impact on the Recreation Ground (The Rec) is of concern. The overall footprint will inevitably be greater than the physical size of the ramp. The limited potential locations place it close to the children’s playground;
- The Rec is the only large, open green space in central Coggeshall, and it also represents a still largely intact mature Victorian civic space. While exercise facilities are entirely in keeping with the spirit of this, the impact on the open space (and its wider viability for other events such as local festivals) needs to be considered; this seems not to have been addressed. Neither has the “landscape impact” on one of the few open vistas in central Coggeshall. A visualisation of what the ramp would look like *in situ* is important;
- There is also a risk of this project becoming “the thin end of a wedge” with one development being used to justify the next, with the open space and character being progressively eroded and degraded;
- It is not fully certain that there is enduring demand for this facility, and this should be tested. The young people of Coggeshall have either not been adequately directly consulted, or they have not expressed a particularly strong opinion. This needs to be rectified;
- The Society supports this project to the extent of believing that it is worth doing well. Therefore, the sustained demand and impact need to be fully assessed. Ideally, a more

challenging and extensive facility should be considered, that might also accommodate other teenage activities. For example, a concrete skateboard park integrated into a suitable terrain, might prove more appealing than a relatively limited ramp. It would take longer to realise such a facility, but it might be more worthwhile in the end; Challenging young people locally to raise some of the funds over a moderate period would be a way of testing genuine support for the facility. Hopefully, those of them strongly in favour would see the merit in this. We also need to remember the large number of new houses being built here;

- Given that the main local objection is location rather than need, other options should be explored, including the use of private land, and seeking donations of a suitable site. Vicarage Fields seems to be a popular alternative, and the Diocese could be approached to gauge its response. Likewise the schools. The objections raised to this approach need to be more persuasive.

In conclusion, the Society suggests that the issue needs longer and more inclusive consideration. It should be conducted by a neutral body to ensure greater community confidence in the process. Wider possibilities should not be dismissed without more extensive investigation. Given the tensions that issue has created, we suggest that the Parish Council could consider a cooling-off period of perhaps six months before the matter is re-visited in a more thorough and inclusive way.

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