

I write to you in reference to a planning application of a skatepark at ROYDS PARK, LITTLETOWN, LIVERSEDGE. You are listed as the Case Officer.

I was recently completely unaware of this planning application until several residents local to Royds Park contacted me, concerned at plans to build a skatepark within the park.

On further investigation into this, I have found several pieces of information where it is suggested that local residents have been consulted regarding these plans. I quote from the Kirklees website:

“Wide-ranging engagement has taken place around the local areas of Liversedge, Heckmondwike, Cleckheaton and Gomersal areas and further afield in Batley and Mirfield. Feedback has been gathered from local residents, existing users of the park and skaters and potential future users of the proposed skatepark to help to ensure that the provision is fit for purpose and results in a positive impact on the park and its surrounding communities. The engagement contributes to achieving Kirklees’ shared outcomes of Best Start; Well; Independent; Aspire; Achieve; Sustainable Economy; Safe and Cohesive; Clean and Green.”

I would like to start by addressing this statement:

- Please could you provide evidence that wide-ranging engagement has taken place? As background, I have lived in this area for over thirty years and take great interest in the comings and going and changes in the area. I am passionate about, and have a personal interest in rejuvenating and improving the area. Since the demolition of the previous skatepark behind Spenborough swimming baths, I have not once been ‘engaged’ by anybody from the council or any other organisation for that matter in relation to a skatepark being built in Royds Park. I live at Eddercliffe Crescent, directly adjacent to the park – directly overlooking the large majority of the park. I have spoken with all other residents of Eddercliffe Crescent and not one other person has been approached for their views on a skatepark either. I suspect this is also the case on New Street, the only other street which overlooks the park from the opposite end. I am concerned that this could be an attempt by Kirklees council to push through a project without the support of local residents, as they know it is unlikely that it would be supported if engagement was undertaken.
- Leading on from this, if the local residents have not taken part in any engagement, then it is obvious there will have been no feedback, as stated by the council. Further to this, it mentions that existing users of the park have been consulted; this is also a complete fabrication. I walk in this park every single day, several times a day – early morning before work, after work in the mid afternoon and usually later in an evening. Not once have I been approached by anybody from the council for my opinion or feedback. I personally know most of the regular walkers and park users – they confirm that they have not been approached or consulted either. This is another fabrication by Kirklees council. If said engagement has taken place, please could this be provided for the perusal of the local residents?
- It is all well and good saying that the people of Heckmondwike, Cleckheaton, Gomersal, Batley and Mirfield have been engaged with – **they are not local residents** and will not feel the negative impact that this skatepark will surely bring. I only have to reference the issues caused by the previous skatepark which this is proposed to replace. This will be on another scale. These people do not need to live next to the park and suffer the trouble it will bring day in, day out. Royds park was designed to be and should remain a country park, with open green spaces and formal woodland. That is what is required in this area.
- This brings me to the point of the skatepark resulting in a positive impact on the park and surrounding communities. I can assure you with certainty that this skatepark will bring nothing

but criminality, damage and deterioration to the park and local area. I will evidence this later in my email.

- Finally, with regards to Kirklees' shared outcomes, I would like to address a couple of those, in particular; Sustainable Economy, Safe and Cohesive and Clean and Green:
 - Kirklees council already professes to be cash-strapped. I speak with the Parks and open spaces team (based within the park) probably on a weekly basis about the falling standards of maintenance and upkeep of the park; emptying of bins, upkeep of trees and hedges, vast amounts of litter, graffiti on outbuildings etc. They attribute this to cuts in funding and a lack of staff. The system is already unsustainable. Adding further strain on this would bring things to breaking point.
 - On the subject of Safe and Cohesive – The park is already subject to anti-social behaviour on a daily basis. The tennis courts which are adjacent to where the proposed skatepark will be built attracts large groups of youths who engage in criminality; drug use, vandalism, criminal damage (including arson), graffiti, assaults, public order offence . I have reported dozens of instances to the Police but have also witnessed and dealt with countless situations myself, without being reported. To mention but a few instances, there have been times when I have challenged youths on the roof of the derelict Victorian pavilion, removing roof tiles to gain access to the building. I have caught them throwing rocks at the boarded up doors and windows to try and gain access. I have found youths inside the building lighting fires. On one occasion, a middle aged woman was approached by a group of three youths (under 16) one of whom
The woman ran away screaming and by pure chance, I was walking through the park and came to her aid. She was a middle aged woman, walking alone in the park in the middle of the afternoon. Things become worse during the hours of darkness. Safety is an issue now. This will be amplified if a new place for youths is created, I can assure you of that.
 - Finally, when it comes to Clean and Green – the proposed plans suggest the digging up of valuable green space and replacing it with copious amounts of concrete and metal. Councils nationally have an obligation (made by the Government) to create more green spaces and the planting of a set number of trees per council area. I know that this is the case for Kirklees. Instead of pouring a load of concrete and its associated carbon implications, why not plant trees and woodland in the park and put extra resources into the upkeep of the park?

As part of the proposed plans, a Victorian era stone pavilion will be demolished. Currently, this building is in a state of disrepair, with damage to the roof, all the windows and door have been boarded and the building has been vandalised and covered in graffiti. I understand that the proposal is to use the stone from the pavilion to make seating but in the process, the community of Littletown will lose a building of historical importance.

Rather than demolishing this building, it would be much better suited for renovation work and to be repurposed as a coffee shop or café, perhaps. I believe that if the building were to be restored then it would not attract the criminality it currently does. It would also provide jobs for local people and support local business. Park users would appreciate such a facility, as opposed to the overwhelming negatives which a skatepark brings.

Kirklees council and local Police are already cash-strapped and in a position of disadvantage, unable to cope with the demands of the park and ASB issues in the local area, without adding to that another ASB hotspot. Criminality ranging from anti-social motorcycles and quads bikes tearing up

the park and surrounding areas, to criminal damage to park buildings and land (including graffiti, simple damage and arson), to public order issues such as verbal abuse to members of the public passing by, ASB including drinking in public, drug use . I could go into detail regarding various instances of all of the above but I this brief report would become a much weightier volume. Why not avoid the risk of increasing this burden?

The planning documents mention that the proposed area benefits from good natural surveillance. This is not the case. The area is not visible from any main road, meaning that passing Police/council enforcement will not be able to passively monitor the area. Due to already unprecedented demand on emergency services, I can say almost for certain that Police will not divert in order to monitor this area. Indeed, why put that additional strain on those organisations at all?

In the same breath, the planning documents state that the skatepark is shielded from view to local residents by trees. This is simply not true. I live at the Eddercliffe Crescent side of Royds Park and will have a clear, almost unobstructed view of the proposed site. The residents of New Street will look directly onto it from a mere 50 metres away. What is currently a pleasant woodland park view will be replaced by a concrete eyesore. This is unacceptable.

Kirklees council has an obligation to plant more trees within the area. This is mandated by the Government. This is to create greater biodiversity and help with carbon targets nationally. This plan involves removal of green space and the pouring of tons upon tons of concrete into the site. Concrete is an incredibly carbon intensive material. Not only does the proposal destroy green space but also adds to national pollution levels. The area is home to vast amounts of wildlife; squirrels, hedgehogs, bats, birds, insects and many others. This proposal takes away valuable habitat for this wildlife.

Reviewing the plans, no mention is made to safeguards against quad bikes, off-road bikes or scooters entering the area and causing safety issues and anti-social issues. Currently, quad bikes and off-road bikes can enter the park at will (and commonly do), tearing around the park, causing a lot of noise and damage to the land itself. It is also a serious safety hazard to park users. This clearly has not been considered by the planning officers/council architects. The park would benefit hugely from a series of 'kissing gates' being installed on all entrances to the park. This would allow the flow of pedestrians and dog walkers but prevent anti-social vehicles such as quads and off-road bikes.

There is mention of the site being "sufficiently distanced from residential premises". This is not the case. The noise caused by anti-social groups of youths congregating in the children's playground area of the park can be horrific at times (through into the early hours on occasions), so I dread the think about the noise and other disturbance this new skatepark would cause.

In summary, it has been painted by Kirklees council that plans for this new skateboard have gone through consultation and are supported by everyone, from the local residents, to park users, to councillors and the wider community; this is simply not the case. The concerning point is that it looks on the face of it that the council have tried to push through an ill-thought-out plan before the local community have a chance to object it. This looks dishonest. What is being portrayed by the council is not a true reflection of the feeling of the local community, and take my word for it, opposition to these plans are strong.

Following on from this report, please could the requested information be made available and disseminated for the perusal of the local community and residents. I hope I have managed to convey the strong feelings against the plans and would welcome discussions with planning and councillors to discuss any points further.