

PMRA SKATEPARKS & ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Paxcroft and Castle Mead now makes up a community that numbers close to 2,500 households, many of them young families.

The country park was designed to be the outdoor leisure space for the whole of that growing community – yet there is nothing on the park for older children or teenagers.

When we held the inaugural meeting of the Residents' Association (then known as Paxcroft Mead Community Forum) in November 2009, the lack of provision for teenagers on the country park was the very first issue raised.

This is a picture of the leisure provision for teenagers currently available on the country park near to the children's playground – a basketball hoop on a square of tarmac, alongside to a teenage shelter that is just a circular bench with a lid on.



A lack of good leisure provision for teenagers is a problem across West Wiltshire.

Wiltshire Council's own **Leisure & Recreation Development Plan** says: "Teenage provision is too often limited to rather forlorn basketball hoops... and some teenage shelters" — they clearly came to Paxcroft Mead.

The population of local teenagers is rising all the time. Children from 10-15 years of age are old enough to spend long periods away from home, spending time outside with their friends, but are not really safe to go into town alone.

With nowhere to go and nothing specific to do, boredom and alienation can take hold, and this is when problems with anti-behaviour can begin.

A modest-sized skatepark on the country park (accommodating up to 30 users, with plenty of space around for onlookers) will give this age group a destination to meet their friends and a healthy focus in an exciting physical leisure activity.

It will help to build a sense of community, and instil pride and respect for the country park among local young people that will benefit everyone.

In fact, the second issue raised at the inaugural meeting in 2009 was a problem with anti-social behaviour from local young people. You didn't need a degree in sociology to understand that there might well be a connection between the two circumstances.

But when we held an on-line poll about the skatepark project in 2010, alongside a string of Saturday coffee-mornings, the chief concern was that a skatepark might actually bring more anti-social behaviour onto Paxcroft Mead.

The last thing a Residents Association would want to do is to bring problems onto our own estate, so we did a great deal of research about the relationship between skate parks and anti-social behaviour before deciding to press on with this proposal.

Local Neighbourhood Police Team Beat Leader, PC Mark Hough, found that there was no evidence that anti-social behaviour reports had increased in the areas in the Trowbridge district where there were skate parks and BMX tracks.

Hearing that we had visited a new community skatepark in Tilehurst, near Reading, PC Hough got in touch with Reading NPT to see what their experience had been.

He was pleasantly surprised to hear the Reading NPT Beat Manager say that he had "no problem with skate parks".

They had developed a strategy of building positive relations with local youth by making impromptu visits to the new skate parks at all times of the day and evening.

This underlined that any reports of antisocial behaviour would quickly result in a robust response from the local police.

PC Hough has every confidence that adopting a similar strategy at Paxcroft Mead will be successful.

At Dorchester, where the Town Council had built a new skatepark in 2009, the local police soon found that it had reduced anti-social behaviour in the local area by 33%.



Dorchester Skatepark - BBC 'Street Patrol UK'

The success of the skatepark featured in a BBC programme in 2014—*Street Patrol UK*—by this time, anti-social behaviour in the town had decreased by 45%.

It is a popular concern among local residents that a new skatepark will bring a lot of older youths into the area, who might engage in anti-social behaviour and be a bad influence on their children.

In fact, older more experienced skateboarders act as very good role models for younger teenagers. As well as impressing with their skills, they model safe skatepark etiquette, reducing the chances of collisions.

When we worked on planning the skatepark with groups of young people, in 2012 and 2013, we learned the importance of building challenge into the design, to bring in older, more experienced skateboarders.

Far from undermining the new facility, older skateboarders—by their very presence—give a new skatepark value among younger teenagers, confirming it as a facility to be proud of and inspiring them to self-police it and keep it as a safe and tidy environment.

There is a culture of mutual support and comradeship on popular skateparks. Members of the skateboarding community learn from each other and help one another, in a calm atmosphere of shared endeavour

In 2014, when Romford Skatepark gained listed building status, as the first skatepark in Britain, Channel 4 News ran an item about the social value of skateparks. This what 14 year-old Henry Weathersbee had to say about the “amazing community” he had joined at a local skatepark in Ealing:

“Since I started skating, I have become increasingly part of the most amazing community. A day at a skatepark is so much more than a sport. Meeting old friends and making new ones, the challenge of testing yourself against the ramps.

“Skateboarding is often misunderstood. My involvement with the campaign to get a skatepark built in Ealing showed the prejudice of those who don’t understand. Their fears of crime, graffiti and anti-social behaviour have been shown to be completely unfounded.



In Autumn 2011, we leafleted all the houses on Paxcroft Mead, advertising a public meeting. We launched a new initiative called People in the Park to improve the park for everyone, with new benches, strategies to address the litter problem and an aspiration to develop an outdoor gym, as an exercise facility for all ages.

It was a high profile meeting, with a good attendance and several local councillors in the audience. We shared our research about the true relationship between skateparks and anti-social behaviour and the skatepark proposal received a strong community mandate.



So far, we have installed three new benches to help older people access the park, with three new litter bins alongside to help address the litter problem.

We arranged help from the local Community Payback Team with regular litter-picks over 2012-2013, which sadly fell victim to funding cuts. In recent times, we

have gone back to basics, with community litter-picks, supported by the congregation of the local Kingfisher Church.

The plan for the outdoor gym has been delayed by unexpected difficulties, but we haven’t given up on it.

IN SUMMARY...

The idea that skateparks mean an increase in anti-social behaviour is a popular misconception.

A well designed skatepark on Paxcroft Mead can improve life on the country park for the whole community.

A good skatepark, planned with the involvement of local youth, can reduce ASB by:

- Taking young people off the streets to engage in an activity they enjoy
- Inspiring them to be proud of their local facility so that they will want to keep it as a happy, safe environment

The teething problems of a new skate park can be controlled by careful policing by the local Neighbourhood Police Team and an accessible location with good visibility.