

Locating a Skatepark in Northampton

Following the approval by Cabinet on the 3/11/2010 of £250,000 for a Skatepark in Northampton, there is an initial need to agree a location for a Skatepark, to ensure delivery of the project in 2011/12.

The Borough Council in partnership with the Skatepark Action Group is looking at possible locations for a large scale Skatepark facility of approximately 900 sq m.

Methodology used to review Potential Sites:

The consultation and discussion so far indicates that there are a number of guiding principles for assessing potential locations, these are:

- Central town centre location preferred – although if the site is of significant quality, users will be prepared to travel.
- Fits with Policy and/or Masterplan for the area and the relationship with surrounding land use
- Level of residents, 'Friends' and Skatepark group support for the project
- Match Funding Availability (funding from HCA, WNDC, S106 and/or others)
- Ownership - Considers whether land is under NBC ownership, other public organization or private ownership – if not in NBC ownership or public ownership, costs of project may dramatically increase
- Crime and Community Safety as a potential risk
- Accessibility – To public transport routes, in accessible locations for population of Northampton, not in a particular 'neighbourhood', which could promote territorial issues reducing access from users who live outside the area.

Process

In order to ensure that a consistent approach has been used for the evaluation of sites, an assessment matrix has been designed. This ensures that all sites are measured against the same set of criteria.

The matrix includes a two-stage evaluation process.

Stages

Stage 1 - Table 1 Evaluation Matrix:

Potential Locations	Centrally Located	Rank Score	Fit with Policy/Masterplans	Rank Score	Resident Friends of Group Support Level	Rank Score	Match funding availability	Rank Score	Ownership	Rank Score	Crime and Comm. Safety	Rank Score	Accessibility	Rank Score	Total Score	Site Feasibility
Midsummer Meadow	1.07km Medium	2	Nene Meadows Strategy	3	Medium as unknown	2	Low	1	High	3	Med	2	Med	2	15	Include
Abington Park	2.3km Medium	2	Medium	2	Low - Historic Park	1	Low	1	High	3	Med	2	Med	2	13	Exclude
The Racecourse	970m High	3	Medium	2	Medium	2	Low	1	High	3	Med/High	2.5	Med	2	15.5	Include
Footmeadow	610m High	3	Low	1	Medium - unknown	2	Low	1	High	3	Low	1	Med	2	13	Exclude
Ladybridge	3.79km - Low	1	Medium	2	Medium - unknown	3	Medium	1	High	3	Med	2	Low	1	13	Exclude
Beckets Park	575m - High	3	Poor	1	Poor	1	Low	1	High	3	Med	2	Med	2	13	Exclude
Kings Heath Oval	2.6km - Low	1	Poor - Dallington Grange	1	High	3	Low	1	High	3	Low	1	Low	1	11	Exclude
Sixfields / Upton	2.6km - High	2	Medium	2	Medium - unknown	2	High	3	Med - HCA	2	Low	1	Med	2	14	Include
Studland Road	2.1km - Medium	2	Medium	2	Medium - unknown	2	Medium	2	High	3	Low	1	Low	1	13	Exclude
Eastfield Park	3.6km - Low	1	Medium	2	Medium Good	2	Medium	2	High	3	Low/Med	2	Low	1	13	Exclude

Key

Centrally Located (Market Square) - High - within 1km of the town centre, Medium - within 2km of town centre, Low - within the Borough Boundary

Fit with Policy/Masterplans - poor against policy/masterplan, medium - not ruled out or included in any policy masterplan, good – fits with masterplan or policy

Resident Friends of Group Support Level - poor against idea, medium - not ruled out groups would consider option / unknown, good - fits with group plans

Current funding availability - Low none available or below £25,000, Medium £25,000 - £100,000, High £100,000+

Ownership – Low not in NBC ownership, Med – Leased from NBC or other public body, High – Land wholly owned by NBC

Crime and Community Safety - Low isolated site with low natural surveillance, Med - Reasonable surveyed area has little history of ASB, High - Very safe low ASB, good natural surveillance

Accessibility - poor accessibility from bus routes or not seen as town wide, medium - on bus routes or close proximity to town centre, high – Prominent location, easily accessible

Stage 2 – Further Consultation

Stage two evaluates in more detail sites, which qualify from Stage One evaluation. This work changed the evaluation matrix as can be seen in table 2 at the end of the report.

Summary of Areas and Consultation of Locations remaining in Stage 2

Midsummer Meadow

Initially there was a perceived issue at the site around crime and community safety. These included there being little natural surveillance and security to ensure responsible use. The solution to mitigate this is the potential to place the facility close to the road, not hidden away, therefore taking full advantage of the surveillance from the busy road, reducing risk of crime and misuse.

Issue	Risk	Mitigation	Risk
Perception of Crime and Community Safety	Med/High	Place facility closer to road and therefore not hidden, to take full advantage of the surveillance from the busy road, reducing risk of crime and misuse. A site visit was undertaken with skaters who were reassured about the area.	Low
Topography and cost implications of construction	Med	Conversations with Skatepark contractors on cost implications of building above ground revealed it is likely to cost around 5% more to build above ground.	Low
Lack of Local and corporate support	Med	Need to promote the project and consult with local residents and businesses. Promotion and briefings within NBC and with partner organisations	Med/Low
Aesthetics	Med	Landscaping and facility placement will alleviate most concerns, although not having a prominent location for the Skatepark conflicts with crime and safety considerations.	Low
Planning	Med	Will require full planning permission and additional studies will be required - this will potentially include a flood risk assessment and extra costs.	Med

Midsummer Meadow is relatively level so there are no natural slopes or landscape features that would readily facilitate a Skatepark topography. Construction will mean using soil on already on site or importing soil to create slopes this will cost approx 5% more, but is required as the site is in the floodplain, digging below current surface will bring the facility surface within the water table. In reality if a facility was placed here it would need to be built above the current ground surface and this will have some cost implications. This is a gateway site into Northampton and in future becomes the commercial gateway and the aesthetics of a Skatepark at this location might not be seen as a good promotion for Northampton, especially if it is prominently built, above ground.

It is anticipated that this area, 'Nene Meadows' will become a strategically important leisure and recreation facility for the Borough as well as an integral part of the Green Infrastructure Framework; this project could potentially act as a catalyst for delivery of this vision. NBC

Planning Policy is developing the Nene Meadows Masterplan (CAAP Policy 31 - 2011) as part of a Supplementary Planning Document; this fully supports Midsummer Meadow as the location for a Skatepark. It is more likely that WNDC could support this site location with additional funding because it fits in with their focus on town centre projects (Avon Nunn/Mills and Waterside).

It should be noted that the construction of a Skatepark can be perceived as controversial for any immediately local residents, although this area currently has a low residential population, as land use in the area is predominantly either business use or greenspace. The project outline will need to ensure it addresses the issues of site size, standard and character, access and accessibility, revenue and maintenance costs, surveillance, security whilst also illustrating a demand for such a facility at this location. Clearly such a facility, unless self-financing, will require public sector finance from NBC for maintenance. This option is currently the Skatepark Action Group's preferred location.

Sixfields / Upton (2 options)

- a) **Near Housing Developments** - HCA is the main owner of the land in this area. Discussions about the potential for a Skatepark in this area took place in December 2010 with HCA.
- b) **Set aside land adjacent to Athletics track** - HCA may be able to set-aside some land in the Sixfields area for a Skatepark, but not contribute towards the project beyond that in this area. Discussions with HCA about the possibility of land being set-aside in the Sixfields area happened in January 2011 with HCA. HCA outlined the complicated past of the Sixfields area, including past applications for retail being refused (against PPS4) and the resolution in December 2010 by NBC Cabinet to support the aspirations of the Rugby Club and Football Club with developments in the area if they comply with planning regulations and law. HCA purchased much of the land in the area from NBC for the purpose of bringing forward development. Ideally, they would hope for mixed use development for retail, business premises and housing in the area. Though they would consider a Skatepark as part of a wider strategic scheme, the development of a scheme in the area may take many years to bring forward and consider. This approach although positive towards a Skatepark doesn't fit in with the timescales, we (NBC and Skate Park Action group) have for delivering a Skatepark.

Issue	Risk	Mitigation	Risk
Perception of Crime and Community Safety	Med/High	Place facility close to road and therefore not hidden to take full advantage of the surveillance from the busy road, reducing risk of crime and misuse. Site visits with skaters to reassure them about the area.	Low
Accessibility – Distance from town Centre	High	Good bus route and transport connections to area – although this would still be a barrier to many of the potential facility users, due to distance and cost of getting to the facility.	High
Land ownership	High	HCA are the main owner of land in the vicinity, which is to be used as a catalyst for	Med

		Regeneration and Development. Following discussions with HCA skate park usage of a portion of the land might be acceptable use, within the wider context of development schemes. Land leased to NBC at peppercorn rent.	
Timescale	High	As land may not be currently available, Skatepark would only be brought forward as part of either a wider strategy or scheme for the area. Development of either housing or business units has slowed down nationwide; therefore, it could be a number of years before a scheme is brought forward.	Med
Lack of Local Support	Med	Need to promote the project and consult with local residents and businesses.	Med/Low
Planning and wider context	Med	Will require full planning permission and additional studies will be required - assessing land contamination of the site and also compliance with PPS4. Issue with it being in the Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone conflicting with the wider policy for the area.	Med

It should be noted that the construction of a Skatepark can be perceived as controversial for local residents and business. The project will need to ensure it addresses the issues of site size, standard and character, access and accessibility, revenue and maintenance costs, surveillance, security and illustrates a demand for such a facility at the location. Clearly such a facility, unless self-financing, will require public sector finance for maintenance. Currently the Skatepark Action Group does not consider that the locations at Sixfields and Upton will fit within the programme of delivery.

Both sites at Sixfields and Upton are good locations regarding access; they are just off the M1 motorway and have a good road infrastructure and potential for car parking.

- a) **Near Housing Developments** - The discussions with HCA concluded that although there is potential S106 funding from the nearby housing developments, HCA wouldn't support a larger size Skatepark near the housing developments.
- b) **Set aside land adjacent to Athletics track** - The site falls within the Northampton Waterside Enterprise Zone and a Skatepark development would conflict with Northampton Borough Council's pursuit of this initiative. The site is not easily accessed for the majority of potential users in Northampton as it is located 2.3km away from the town centre, meaning two bus rides would be required from the majority of the potential users.

The Racecourse

This large town centre park could accommodate a skate facility in 3 or 4 locations. The Racecourse has recently (2009-2011) had a number of play facilities installed which met local opposition, mainly because members of the community wanted to keep the natural nature of the 'valley' area of the park. It is unlikely that the potential site of a Skatepark would encroach any further into the 'valley' area, a particular area community members want to protect, though any more development is likely to meet objection, 'spoiling' the

natural/aesthetics of the park. The 'Friends of the Racecourse' have discussed the potential for this project and they were generally happy with a 30 x 20m facility but if it is to be larger and more of a national attraction it was felt it might be better placed elsewhere considering traffic, community safety, landscape (cluttering) and parking issues. A larger facility is unlikely to be supported by the 'Friends'. Currently the size of the Skatepark being considered will be around 50 x 30m considerably bigger than the original size estimates.

Issue	Risk	Mitigation	Risk
Perception of Crime and Community Safety	Med	Place in well used area of the Park, therefore not hidden and will take full advantage of natural surveillance from other park users.	Med/Low
Timescale	High	As land isn't available, Skatepark would only be brought forward as part of either a wider strategy or scheme for the area. Development of either housing or business units has slowed down nationwide; therefore, it could be a number of years before a scheme is brought forward.	High
Lack of Local Support / Masterplan for Park	High	There will be a need to promote the project and consult with local residents and businesses; from past experiences of 'Friends' and Officers, this takes some considerable time and effort. Although the Chair of the 'Friends' supports the scheme, he does warn that it is highly likely there will be opposition. Other play schemes have recently been implemented at the Racecourse, there is a question about over development for this purpose and allowance/flexibility for expansion of the Skatepark is likely to meet further opposition.	Med
Planning	Med	Will require full planning permission and additional studies will be required - assessing the heritage context within the park, transport and parking strategy.	Med

It should be noted that the construction of a Skatepark is likely to be perceived as controversial by local residents. There will need to be extensive consultation with the local community and Friends of the Racecourse Group. The case for a Skatepark will need to ensure it addresses the issues of site size, standard and character, access and accessibility, revenue and maintenance costs, surveillance, security and illustrates a demand for such a facility at the location. Clearly such a facility, unless self-financing, will require public sector finance for maintenance.

Studland Road

Although this site didn't come out of the Stage One Evaluation Matrix exercise, the Council and the Skatepark Action Group have considered it. The Skatepark Action Group does not feel this site should be considered as, in their opinion, it would have a very high potential for crime and be a major risk for vandalism.

Table (2) – Matrix following Consultation and further consideration

Locations	Centrally Located - Rank	Fit with Policy/Masterplan - Rank	Resident / Friends of Group Support Level - Rank	Match funding availability	NBC Ownership	Crime and Comm Safety	Accessibility	Skate Park Action Group Support	Total Score	Site Feasibility Overall
Midsummer Meadow	1.07km – 3	Nene Meadows Strategy - 3	Medium 2	Low – 1	High – 3	Med – 2	Med – 2	High – 3	19	Proceed
Sixfields / Upton	2.6km - 2	Low - Development of Area – 1	Medium 2	Low – 1	Low – 1	Med – 2	Low – 1	Low – 1	11	Don't Proceed
The Racecourse	970m - 3	Low - Racecourse Masterplan - 1	Low/Med - 1	Low - 1	High - 3	Med/High – 2.5	Med - 2	Low - 1	14.5	Don't Proceed

Report updated by: James Ogle
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