

Project D Annual Report May 2013

Well into our 4th year of the project, which has now been running since November 2009, we have still been unable to secure a suitable/ workable site for a skatepark within our existing community assets, namely the Recreation Ground and DVH&PFT.

There is still a desperate need for a skatepark, which can be supported by both written and anecdotal evidence. We have received letters and messages encouraging us not to give up despite recent frustrations from parents who still have to drive their children to neighbouring towns and villages in order for them to participate in their chosen sporting/ recreational activity – not easy when you have to transport bikes! Take the time to look around and you will see young people using what is available to them – sloping driveways and steps of unoccupied houses, brick walls, kerbs, pavements and roads, the Co-op car park and the existing pad of the old skatepark site to name but a few.

The young people who started out on this journey are now on new journeys - work, university, college but they are being followed by a new group of young people who want the same thing and this will only continue to be the case as the children in our community grow up. It will not go away!

The community on the whole recognise and support the need for a skatepark within the village. Let us not forget that until January 2010, there existed such a facility at the leisure centre, installed in 1999 courtesy of Eddy Alcock who managed the project and the then trustees who allocated land for the project. It was the young people using this facility that approached the Parish Council to ask for new equipment, forming a group to facilitate this project, thus stepping up to help themselves instead of relying on others to do it for them. How disappointing it is therefore, that the adults who are in a position to help them achieve this have, instead of encouraging and embracing this for mutual benefit, been unable to find a way to positively help them progress their project. What is the lesson that our young people are learning from this?

All looked promising when in 2011, an agreement had been reached with DS&L to regenerate the old site (reported in their Annual Parish Report) but sadly negotiations between DS&L and the Parish Council failed to reach a satisfactory outcome. This resulted in the consideration of the Recreation Ground as a possible site.

When considering the Recreation Ground as a possible site, it became clear that the site was not large enough to accommodate a skatepark while taking into account the recommended distance for minimising noise nuisance. One complaint could have resulted in the closure of the facility. It would have been irresponsible of Project D to have pursued this site. There were also the concerns of the neighbours to take into account. It was disappointing for our young people to hear so many negative comments from adults based on the behaviour, not of our young people necessarily, but on that portrayed in the media and in larger towns and cities. We would like to note that our young people behaved admirably and impeccably in the face of this negativity and in some cases, unpleasant behaviour exhibited by adults at the presentation evening at the Recreation Ground.

Subsequent negotiations between DS&L and the PC for a site at DVH&PFT resulted in the offer of one site only. Taking into account noise nuisance, safeguarding, RoSPA recommendations and the

overall available space, this site was considered unsuitable, meeting neither the users' needs nor safeguarding DS&L from potential inconvenience, for instance any emergency vehicle summoned would take the shortest route to the facility this would involve driving over 2 football pitches which could be potentially damaged incurring loss of income and costly repairs. It was also located approx 60m from the only residence neighbouring DS&L with the potential for noise nuisance complaints. It would therefore have been very irresponsible of Project D to have pursued this site.

No real reasons why the existing site (which was chosen by a working group consisting of DS&L, local police and Project D as the preferred site in 2011) is no longer an option have been given.

The Way Forward:

Following the lack of success in securing a suitable site at either of the 2 logical choices for such a recreational/ sporting facility, we now need to hold a land appeal/ investigate other possible sites within the village.

Project D are currently in the process of identifying possible portions of land within the Debenham area which are independently accessible (very important to our young people) and satisfy all the known criteria associated with creating a skatepark.

When this has been completed the Parish Council will be consulted and in the case of land in private ownership, a letter outlining support and responsibilities will be requested to support the initial enquiries to the land owner.

We will also be launching a land appeal using the various local media available to us, including EADT and Suffolk Radio.

On another note, Project D has to date only been associated with the Skatepark project; however our motto has always been "Supporting Our Young People". To this end (and because the skatepark project is potentially an even longer term project now) we have decided to broaden our horizons and expand our aims to include improving the overall recreational provision for our young people.

We would like to see improved provision for young people at the recreation ground and are currently working up a project proposal to present to the Play areas working group for a multi use area to be created specifically for young people. Other recreation areas within Debenham also will need to be considered as some young people living on the Meadows are not allowed to go to the existing recreation area because of concerns of safety from some parents – particularly those of young girls. It is felt that the current recreation ground is too enclosed for safeguarding by these parents – it lacks a second exit point, is enclosed on all 4 sides and is relatively isolated. We would ask that these comments and thoughts be taken into account when addressing provision for young people within the draft parish plan, especially as developers continue to want to build family homes within Debenham.

There is currently a clearly defined lack of provision for young people which will only become more of an issue, resulting in bored teenagers looking for an outlet. Young people are a vital part of our community and have the same rights to public space as everyone else within the community. It is the community's responsibility to value these young people and treat them with the respect they

deserve. We need to encourage them to become and feel valued members of our community. They are our future after all (and future customers of local business and leisure facilities).

Sadly, they are the most ignored members of our community (especially when they are behaving themselves) and they have the least provision.

Jane Baldwin

Chair of Project D