

THE SKATEPARKS PROJECT: MAXIMISING THE PUBLIC BENEFIT OF SKATEPARK FACILITIES



Alex Jordan from The Skateparks Project shares guidance on how councils can maximise the benefit from skatepark facilities



Councils across the UK are wasting money on poor quality skateparks. Despite good intentions, a lack of information and support has resulted in councils treating skateparks as playground facilities, whilst public consultations are frequently inadequate to produce useful insight. Consequently, councils are investing in suboptimal skatepark facilities, leaving their users disappointed.

The Skateparks Project is a voluntary organisation, set up to help councils and communities across the UK avoid these pitfalls and build great skateparks by providing free impartial advice and resources.

INCREASING DEMAND

It is often reported that skateparks are the most requested leisure facility amongst young people. There has been an upward trend in the demand for skateparks since BMX made its inaugural appearance at the 2008 Olympics and, with skateboarding becoming an Olympic sport from 2020, demand has increased further in recent years.

The demographic of skatepark users has changed significantly over the past decade. Skateparks are no longer just for teenage boys. The proliferation of scooters has encouraged younger users to join in, an older generation are getting back into wheeled sports, encouraged by their children, and more women are getting involved.

It is not just an increase in skatepark users that is putting skatepark construction back onto council agendas. Many metal and

timber skateparks built 10-15 years ago are reaching the end of their service life. These materials were considered appropriate when commissioned, given available budgets. Unfortunately, metal and timber skateparks do not age well and many facilities have been demolished in recent years, without contingency for replacement. Concrete is now widely considered the most appropriate material for skateparks.

COMMON PITFALLS

Skateparks are frequently treated as generic playgrounds, rather than sports facilities. This means that tenders are often submitted by playground companies that lack sufficient experience, providing generic facilities without giving appropriate thought to who will be using them. A lack of experience amongst those involved in skatepark projects can therefore lead to skateparks that do not meet the actual demands of the local population. For example, inappropriate features and a suboptimal layout are all too common, whilst a discussion of the pros and cons of different materials and construction techniques is often lacking.

Whilst councils do try to discuss options with potential skatepark users, consultations are often insufficient. Most users do not appreciate the nuances of skatepark design, requesting features that may be unsuitable for the space being developed, or suited only to their own discipline. It is not uncommon for councils to assume that talking to 'young people' is sufficient, ignoring other user groups.

SOCIAL BENEFIT

There is considerable case study evidence that counters the common concern that skateparks attract antisocial behaviour, particularly when skateparks are built properly. Design and material choice can influence the amount of noise generated by a skatepark facility, its durability and areas of congregation. Skateparks have also been demonstrated to engage local communities and provide a safe environment for people who may otherwise cause a nuisance elsewhere. When a skatepark project involves the local community, it becomes a place of pride, enjoyed and maintained by its users.

THE SKATEPARKS PROJECT

The Skateparks Project has been helping councils and communities get great skateparks since 2014. The advice and resources we offer range from answering your skatepark-related questions, to generating publicity, running consultations and mediating meetings. We also maintain a skatepark directory to help anyone in the UK find their nearest skatepark. Please get in touch if you are considering a skatepark project and we will gladly provide as much assistance as possible. [For more information please visit www.skateparks.co.uk](http://www.skateparks.co.uk).

