

Twyford Village Skate Park and Ball Court

As early as 1997, letters on file in the Twyford Youth and Community Centre showed that young people in the locality even then were asking for more facilities for play and sport. Twyford Parish Council's 'Go Twyford' consultation showed little was provided locally for the over 12s. In the exercise, the young people identified a leisure centre, skate park, hard court area and youth shelters as the most wanted facilities. No fewer than three petitions were gathered by the young people from 1999 onwards in favour of this much-needed facility. Twyford Parish Council agreed to site it on the King George V Playing Field if the costs of the installation could be found.

Twyford Village Partnership, originally Twyford Village Centre Management Initiative (TVCMI), came into being in November 2001 and immediately adopted provision of the skate park as one of its initial projects. It was energised by information from a Steering Group Member, Elizabeth John, that the project would be eligible for reclaimed landfill tax. A regeneration charity, Groundwork Thames Valley, which was authorised to access the landfill tax, was commissioned to plan the scheme. This formed the initial funding base, along with Developers' (Sec. 106) monies and a contribution from Wokingham Borough Council. The idea was driven by the enthusiasm of Youth Leaders Lee Middleton and Trudi Collis, both of whom then TVCMI Steering Group Members. Vigorous encouragement was provided by Wokingham Youth & Community Services. The active project therefore dates from early in 2002. In June 2004, Twyford Parish Council added the requirement for a ball court and it was requested that these two facilities be built together.

Disappointment was experienced when some of the funds laid aside for the scheme were declared out of time and, for a while, plans had to be pared back. Also, there was much local opposition to the scheme on the basis of noise nuisance and spoiling the visual aspect of a public space. The design was sympathetically devised to minimise both these effects. Full planning consent was obtained in December 2005. The scheme was aimed at supporting skateboarders, in-line skaters, BMX bikers and the various ball games, all as unsupervised play.

Shortly afterwards, extra funds were identified via a successful application by Wokingham Borough Council to the Big Lottery Fund Children's Play Programme, the Youth Opportunities Fund, which young people apply for themselves, and a generous grant from the Louis Baylis (Maidenhead Advertiser) Charitable Trust. These funds made it possible to revert to plans for the full scheme as originally envisaged.

A setback was encountered when it was found that the site for the ball court was unstable owing to previous landfill. Remedying this ate into funds and now we are aiming to complete the scheme without the envisaged floodlighting and some other desirable features. Nonetheless, subject to satisfactory safety checks, a fully functional facility will be handed over to the care of Twyford Parish Council in July of this year and it is expected that money for the outstanding items will be raised very soon.

The children and young people exhibited remarkable patience and maturity during the development of the project and its unconscionable delays. They were entitled to frustration but barely disclosed it. We are pleased that the would-be skaters and bikers had the opportunity to plan the equipment they required in conjunction with manufacturers. This was to avoid the common mistake of installing ramps that are too big and challenging for the less skilled. Often, this is the reason for neglect of skate parks that have been ill considered.

In spite of the difficulties in bringing this project to fruition, it promises to be an excellent facility for young people for recreation and enhancing their skills, without either having to pay a fee for its use or to travel to other areas for anything comparable.

The project typifies what an organisation like TVP can achieve for the community. The skate park and ball court was a multi-agency project with efforts coordinated via our organisation. Tenacity was required to overcome obstacles. Funds were sought from disparate sources by us or in our name, showing the particular advantage of a community partnership operating in the village. My thanks are due to the young people of Twyford, the planners and all those who lent their strength to ensuring the project would succeed.

Cedric C. Gilson
Project Leader and TVCMI Chairman 2004 - 2007