

CREATING A CENTRE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF SAFFRON WALDEN.



SAFFRON WALDEN COMMUNITY HUB AND SKATE PARK EXTENSION REPORT

The Why, What and How.

The Skate park as a COMMUNITY

Before the Skate park was opened in 2006, there was very little for young people in Saffron Walden to do. Skaters were forced to skate in car parks and on pavements. This was both a nuisance for pedestrians and residents and dangerous for the skaters themselves.

Since it's opening, the skate park has been immensely popular, not just with skaters and BMXers but also as a social place for all young people. In other words it created a young community of people with the same or similar interests.

The Skate Park's function as a community makes it a place where youth work and community police initiatives can flourish. It is a place where respect, waiting your turn and looking after the less able or younger members is paramount as well as being a place where many of the non-skaters can learn a new skill by getting into the sport. These are skills that transfer back into the whole community with the benefits felt by all.



You can even get to meet your hero at the skatepark – Luke and professional skater Chris Haslam

Why do we NEED to extend the Skate park?

At times the skate park is overcrowded, particularly at the weekends. Crowded skate parks are dangerous for skaters and in time, competent, dedicated skaters move to other less crowded places and the skate park becomes the hang-out destination for gangs and anti-social behaviour.

Our skate park is currently hugely popular but could become a victim of its own success with new houses and a supermarket planned nearby, which will result in added pressure of numbers wanting to use the skate park. Now we have a unique chance to build upon our current success and plan for a sustainable future for the One Minet Skate Park.

The skating lessons at the weekend and in the holidays are bringing in younger members and their families and are very popular with parents and grandparents. There is nowhere else providing tuition outdoors that has free admission. Children travel long distances to attend the lessons.

The Tourist Information Centre report an upsurge of skaters coming into the town and parents whose children are at the lessons now get a Saffron Walden brochure so that they can use other facilities and shops in the town centre. Thus the skate park has a measurable impact on the prosperity of the town. For example in recent weeks two shops have come into the town as a direct result of the skate park.

Fat Face chose Saffron Walden for their new shop as a direct result of “the incredible skate park which embodies the brand’s motto of ‘life is out there’”. Two management positions and eight store crew positions have been created in the shop. The new skate shop, Skate 87, is finding its feet in Debden Road – again another retail opportunity created by the proximity of the skate park.

However, not all young people in Saffron Walden can or have a desire to learn to skate. Expanding the Skate Park to include a community/youth hub would give us a chance to create a fantastic space that can be used by non-skaters of all ages. It is a great opportunity to create a new facility offering art, photography, music and film-making. At present this sort of community facility is not available in Saffron Walden.

What we LACK at the moment

Toilets.

Other than a drain at the back of the small maintenance hut, complete with a modesty board, we lack toilets. The drain may be a basic solution for the many males who use the park, but it is highly unacceptable to expect young girls to use this. It is not right to expect young people and children to use these totally primitive unsanitary conditions. There are certainly health and safety issues and child protection issues to be addressed here.

Shelter.

In the summer heat the outdoor facilities make the skate park an ideal place to socialise. However when the weather is cold and wet it is impossible to be sitting outside. Most sports have some sort of clubhouse or building, which they can use when the weather is bad.

Refreshments and Seating.

Skating is thirsty work and as a result of that, the skaters need somewhere to get drinks and refreshments without having to walk up to the shops. Although most of the skaters are from Saffron Walden and are old enough not to need accompanying adults, many of the park-users rely on parents for transport, or are young enough to need accompanying parents. The site is attracting more and more young families who come to join in, picnic and enjoy the fun. It would be good if there was somewhere for skaters and adults to sit in comfort with their children if the weather is cold, somewhere to sit in the warm and get a coffee or access the internet. Parents tell us again and again how much they would appreciate and use a cafe.

This principle is the same for those socialising with their friends and visitors; there is nowhere to sit and talk in comfort. Visiting Councils, and we do get a lot wanting to know about the park and so benefit from our experience, have to huddle in the plastic bus shelter looking at facts and figures.

There are very, very few facilities in the town for young people in particular and few for young families on a budget. The skate park is free and encourages healthy, outdoor exercise, therefore expanding it can *only* be a good thing.

THE COMMUNITY/YOUTH HUB

So the real centre of this new area would be the building of a community/youth hub with adjustable space – this would be situated at the top of the site looking down over the new skate park extension.

The Hub will contain space for:

- A social enterprise café, where all sections of the community can gather.
- Space for performance, particularly music and dance and art and theatre.
- Toilets.
- A shop selling skating and bike gear, (especially the safety equipment needed and it would provide first aiders on site).
- There would be room to socialise with friends in the dry and hold the Skate Group meetings (at present we huddle in the plastic shelter or gather under Turpin's overhanging porch.)
- Room for lessons indoors if the weather was wet
- Somewhere for parents and visitors to enjoy a cup of coffee whilst watching the skaters.
- Some film editing facilities are envisaged; skating and filming go hand in hand and this would bring in other voluntary, community bodies such as the S/W Camera club and the Saffron Screen, whom we have worked with in the past.

At a point in the future it may be that more youth activities presently provided by the Croft may be re-located there with a music studio complete with disabled access (the cellar at the Croft, which is presently used, can be only accessed by a flight of steps) and meeting rooms for youth and voluntary bodies and the community as a whole.

Creating space for activities other than skating would be a huge boost to the town and increase the usage of the park to more than just skaters, BMXers and bladers.



We have been researching facilities around the country and in Bristol a similar community/youth hub is already in use, which you can see above.

We would hope that our facilities will have a bright, fresh appearance and we want the building to be as “green” as possible with features such as water harvesting, SUDS and alternative energy sources.

The Bristol Hub is designed to make the space flexible with different modules (known as an Armadillo structure) for different purposes, which if needed, can be opened up to create one large space. For example the individual spaces can be used as rehearsal spaces for different art forms, and once opened the large space will make an ideal performance area for shows and music performance.

We also envisage a parking area and a picnic site with lots of benches, green space and trees. One of the exciting features of the picnic/amenity area would be the inclusion of SUDS, which are now the preferred approach to managing rainfall from hard surfaces. These are shallow ditches and water features which make great places for paddling, making mud pies and having a fun time and have the added benefit of being beneficial for wild life. We want to make the whole site sustainable and very “green”. Add some exciting skate-able paths around the trees for the younger scooter and tricycle riders and everybody has a fun space to enjoy. It will be a real community asset.

Our PLANS for the SKATEPARK EXTENSION

The Skate group plan to extend the skate-able surface to include:

- a snake run (long, shallow skate-able bowl)



An example of Southsea Skate Park's Snake run

- and a full pipe (like the one illustrated in Bonsor Skate Park, Vancouver)

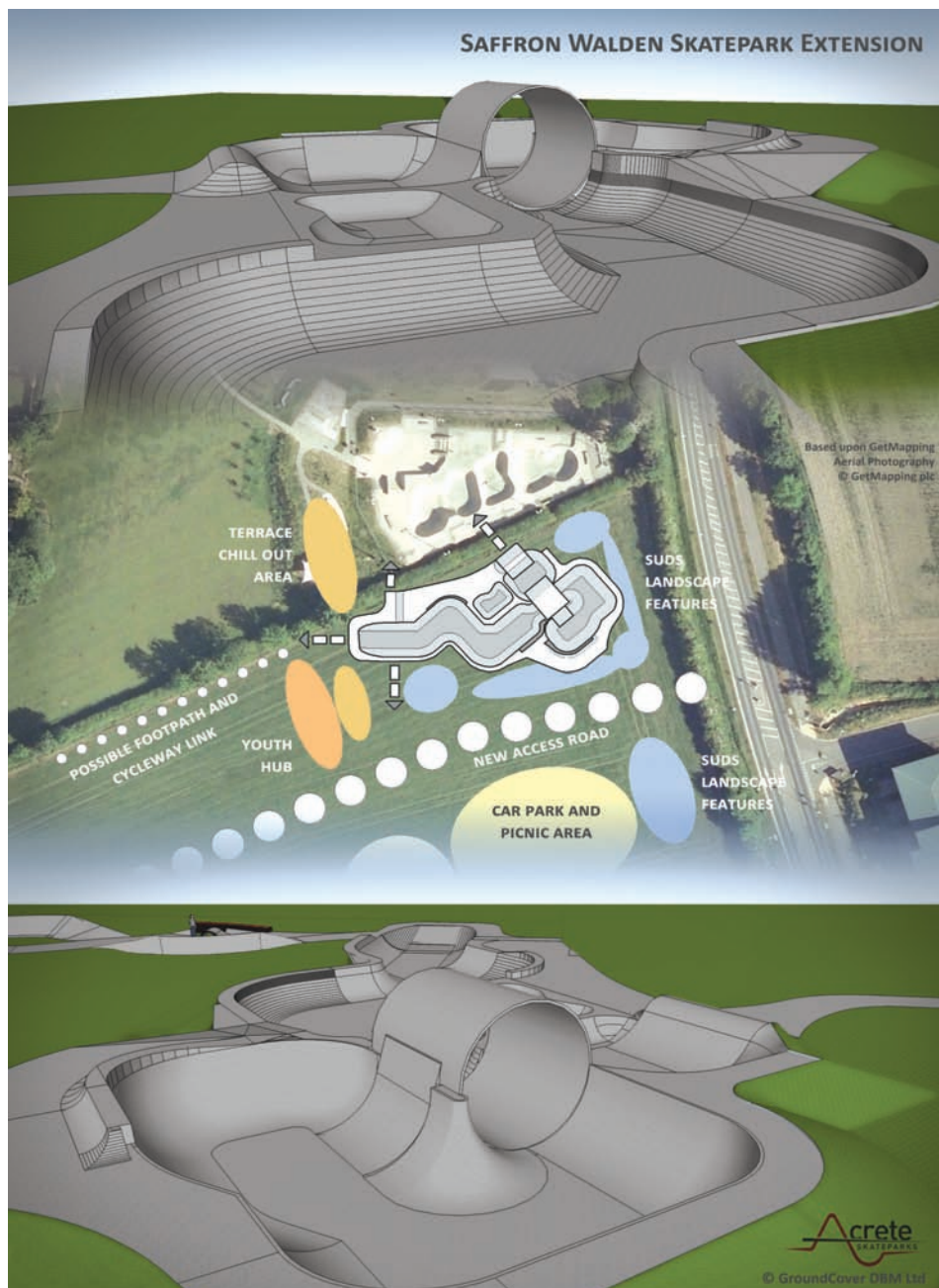


Both these would further increase the world-class reputation we have.

The opportunity for the community and the skatepark

As we are bordered by the Thaxted Road, Turpins and the green space jealously guarded by Tukes Way, the area in the adjoining field is the only direction in which the skate park can expand. We are asking for much needed facilities for a highly successful skate park. In addition we will have the advantage of formally bringing film, music, performance and art to many more people in the neighbouring community. We already have many projects growing and happening at the park but we are very weather dependent and this hub would mean we could pursue so much more. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity that will benefit young people and families and the whole community.

We feel that is the right time to bring this project forward so that it can be included in the Neighbourhood Plan, which is being currently formulated. The Skate Group ask that you give your blessing to this enterprise and seize this ground-breaking opportunity.



Masterplan

