

## CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

**AGENDA ITEM**

**REPORT TO CABINET**

**8 MARCH 2012**

**REPORT OF CORPORATE  
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

### **CABINET DECISION**

**Arts, Leisure and Culture – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Dixon**

#### **WHEELED SPORTS: PROVISION OF PURPOSE-BUILT FACILITIES AND USE OF THE PUBLIC REALM**

1. Summary

This report sets out broad proposals for the future development of wheeled sports facilities in the Borough, catering for the needs of those who use skate boards, BMX bikes, in-line skates and scooters. It also explores how certain areas of public realm might be managed and developed in the future to accommodate wheeled sports.

During 2011 the Council received representations from many local young people and adults, requesting that the Council provides some purpose-built facilities for wheeled sports. Through subsequent consultation work it has been possible to gain an improved understanding of the needs and aspirations of users, and this has helped to inform the recommendations set out in the report. This suggests the Council should work in liaison with users, local communities and any potential public, private and third sector partners to develop a diverse range of facilities and opportunities for wheeled sports across the Borough.

The report provides a broad framework for future action. Specific projects and initiatives will be developed with the active involvement of young people and other users. Successful delivery of projects will also be subject to securing any additional capital and revenue funding.

2. Recommendations

1. That the Council utilises funding identified in the Medium Term Financial Plan to work in partnership with other public, private and third sector partners, to provide a complementary range of facilities and spaces for wheeled sports. Subject to further consultation and securing the necessary capital and revenue funding this should include:

- a) Development of skate parks, including:
- one major 'destination' skate park (possibly in the vicinity of the Tees Barrage, Preston Park or central Stockton);
  - one or more smaller 'neighbourhood' skate parks (at John Whitehead Park, Billingham and possibly other locations in the Borough).

These could all be outdoor facilities, or might include the provision of an indoor skate park operated by a private or third sector partner.

- b) Management and possible development of selected areas of public realm to accommodate wheeled sports.
  - c) Development of dirt jumps and small pump tracks for BMX / mountain bikes in the Borough's country parks or other 'natural' green spaces.
2. That more detailed proposals for the development of facilities and spaces for wheeled sports are prepared by autumn 2012, and that delegation is given to the Corporate Director of Development and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with relevant Cabinet members to determine the final programme of work, subject to wider consultation.
  3. That the Council seeks opportunities to promote and encourage participation in wheeled sports; for example, through events and activities and by identifying appropriate third parties to operate the Council's existing mobile and semi-static skate facilities.
  4. That users and other local partners and stakeholders should be actively engaged in the development, delivery and on-going management of any facilities, and any events or activity programmes.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

To authorise officers to progress with the delivery of schemes during 2012/13 and beyond, working in liaison with users, local communities and public, private and third sector partners as appropriate.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (**paragraph 8**) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (**paragraphs 10 and 11 of the code of conduct**).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (**paragraph 12 of the Code**).

**Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or**

**Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.**

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**SUMMARY**

This report sets out broad proposals for the future development of wheeled sports facilities in the Borough, catering for the needs of those who use skate boards, BMX bikes, in-line skates and scooters. It also explores how certain areas of public realm might be managed and developed in the future to accommodate wheeled sports.

During 2011 the Council received representations from many local young people and adults, requesting that the Council provides some purpose-built facilities for wheeled sports. Through subsequent consultation work it has been possible to gain an improved understanding of the needs and aspirations of users, and this has helped to inform the recommendations set out in the report. This suggests the Council should work in liaison with users, local communities and any potential public, private and third sector partners to develop a diverse range of facilities and opportunities for wheeled sports across the Borough.

The report provides a broad framework for future action. Specific projects and initiatives will be developed with the active involvement of young people and other users. Successful delivery of projects will also be subject to securing any additional capital and revenue funding.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the Council utilises funding identified in the Medium Term Financial Plan to work in partnership with other public, private and third sector partners, to provide a complementary range of facilities and spaces for wheeled sports. Subject to further consultation and securing the necessary capital and revenue funding this should include:
  - a) Development of skate parks, including:
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  - b) Management and possible development of selected areas of public realm to accommodate wheeled sports.
  - c) Development of dirt jumps and small pump tracks for BMX / mountain bikes in the Borough's country parks or other 'natural' green spaces.

2. That more detailed proposals for the development of facilities and spaces for wheeled sports are prepared by autumn 2012, and that delegation is given to the Corporate Director of Development and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with relevant Cabinet members to determine the final programme of work, subject to wider consultation.
3. That the Council seeks opportunities to promote and encourage participation in wheeled sports; for example, through events and activities and by identifying appropriate third parties to operate the Council's existing mobile and semi-static skate facilities.
4. That users and other local partners and stakeholders should be actively engaged in the development, delivery and on-going management of any facilities, and any events or activity programmes.

## **DETAIL**

### **Types of activity and provision**

1. A diverse range of equipment is used, such as skate boards, BMX bikes, in-line skates and freestyle scooters (there is an increasing number of scooter users and these tend to be younger children who may convert to skate/BMX as they get older). Wheeled sports comprise many types of activity, utilising a variety of environments and settings, including:
  - *Freestyle* - technical flat ground skateboarding / BMXing. Often a freestyler will need little more than a board/BMX and a smooth, flat surface.
  - *Street* – where a skater/rider overcomes obstacles on paved surfaces such as streets, shopping centres and car parks. Other challenges include using stairs, curbs, ledges and handrails.
  - *Purpose built park or plaza* – where a purpose-built plaza is designed to emulate and improve upon the street style experience. Obstacles in a street plaza are styled to look like natural street terrain such as stairs, railings, planters and benches. They also include other elements such as bowls, 'vert obstacles' and mini ramps.
  - *Indoor skate parks* – generally managed as a private enterprise, sometimes as part of a larger leisure facility.
  - *DIY skate areas* - which are constructed, developed and manipulated by users.
  - *BMX tracks and courses* - these can take several forms, including dirt jumps for BMXing (where hills and jumps are manipulated by users) and courses used for racing (from small 'pump' style tracks to large international race style courses).

### **Current activity and provision in the Borough**

2. Wheeled sports are popular with many children, young people and adult residents across the Borough.
3. Apart from a small BMX track at Tilery Park there are no purpose-built permanent facilities for these wheeled sports within the Borough. However, informal activity does take place in several locations including:
  - parks and other open spaces,
  - areas of public realm and shop parades,
  - public and private car parks,
  - other areas of private land.

4. In addition Stockton Borough Council owns some semi-static and mobile skate park equipment which has been used on an occasional basis when resources have been available to operate these facilities.
5. Through recent consultation work (see paragraphs 33 to 38) officers are developing a better understanding of wheeled sports activity in the Borough, and the needs and aspirations of users. This reveals that:
  - Most people that took part in these consultations were male, and either skateboard or BMX users.
  - Almost all users skate/ride somewhere near their own home, although many will also travel to different locations within the Borough, perhaps using obstacles/opportunities along the way.
  - Most people skate/ride after school and at weekends.
  - Some users travel outside the Borough to purpose-built facilities. For example, Prissick Plaza Skate Park in Middlesbrough is a popular destination, but some users travel more widely in the north east and beyond.
  - Most people would like some purpose-built facilities near their home but most also recognise that this might not be possible.
  - Most users say they would be willing to travel to use good facilities.
  - Many young people are prepared (and already do) travel up to around 3 miles on BMX bikes or even skateboards. Younger children may need to be transported by parents or carers. For many good public transport is helpful, but bikes can only be transported on trains.
6. Overall the consultations reveal that people are very keen to see some facilities provided and many are willing to play an active role in helping to achieve that.

### **Providing facilities and opportunities for wheeled sports in the Borough**

7. The Council will seek to work in partnership with others to cater for the needs of these users. Subject to further detailed consultation and feasibility work four broad approaches are to be pursued:
  - Development of purpose-built skate parks.
  - Management and possible development of selected areas of public realm to accommodate wheeled sports.
  - Development of dirt BMX tracks and courses.
  - Events, activities and use of existing mobile and semi-static skate facilities.
8. In developing more detailed proposals under these broad themes the Council will:
  - work closely with users and other potential delivery partners;
  - consider both the needs of users and other stakeholders such as local residents, business and other users;
  - give full consideration to the capital and on-going revenue costs associated with providing and maintaining appropriate facilities, which will inevitably place a limit on the number and scale of those facilities that can be sustained across the Borough. (It should be noted, however, that there may be costs associated with a lack of provision, e.g. damage to street furniture);
  - consider how facilities can be designed and sited to be complementary and avoid duplication, either within the Borough or with facilities provided in neighbouring local authority areas.

9. The Council will take into account both to the potential benefits this activity brings, and any potential negative impacts it may have. For example, participation in wheeled sports can improve people's health, well-being and physical development. It can enhance people's levels of concentration and self-confidence. Importantly it can promote social interaction and teamwork. However, groups of skaters/riders can be perceived as threatening to some people and may cause injury to themselves or others. Street furniture or surfaces can be damaged, and businesses, residents and other landowners may not welcome this activity due to the noise and disturbance it can cause.

#### Development of purpose-built skate parks

10. Based on consultation findings to date, and the experience of other areas, the ideal level of provision for the Borough would include:
- Provision of at least one large, 'destination' skate park to serve the Borough as a whole.
  - Provision of one or more smaller 'neighbourhood' skate parks, serving more local needs and complementing facilities at the larger park.
11. The Council will work in partnership with other public, private and third sector partners with the aim of achieving this level of provision. This may include a combination of outdoor and indoor skate parks, with private and third sector partners perhaps better placed to deliver and manage any indoor facilities.
12. Any facility, especially a larger 'destination' park, should be easily accessible by public transport (bus or train), on foot or bike (traffic free routes preferred) and by car. Outdoor skate parks are also best located in safe and secure environments, and away from residential areas to minimise disturbance due to noise or other factors. They also benefit from having supporting infrastructure on site (e.g. toilets, café, shop, parking for vehicles and bikes) and complementary facilities (e.g. other play and sports provision and open space).
13. Based on these broad criteria, potential locations for a 'destination' skate park include: Preston Park, the area in and around the Tees Barrage, and central Stockton. These could also provide suitable locations for smaller 'neighbourhood' skate parks, as does John Whitehead Park, Billingham where young people have already been actively involved developing proposals for a skate park. Other urban parks should also be considered.
14. The Council will undertake more detailed work to determine the most appropriate sites for outdoor 'destination' and 'neighbourhood' skate parks, and seek to secure possible external funding to match with any Council funds to deliver one or more schemes. Given that the Council is already working with local young people and other partners on the development of a skate park at John Whitehead Park, Billingham, it is proposed that this scheme goes ahead; subject to consultation on the final design and securing the necessary funding.
15. At the same time the Council will liaise with any potential private and third sector providers, and if an indoor and outdoor scheme can be delivered in this way the Council will review its wider approach. It should be noted that the Council is currently providing support in response to two recent enquiries from people looking to establish indoor skate parks. Initial discussions have focussed on the possibility of finding suitable premises for such a use. Whilst these proposals are at a fairly early stage of development, the potential for joint working and the provision of complementary facilities between the Council and a third party should be considered.

#### Management and possible development of selected areas of public realm to accommodate wheeled sports

16. Careful thought should be given to how the Council and its partners manage wheeled sports in town centres, parks and other areas of public realm. In some cases there may be

conflicts between skaters/riders and other users of these spaces, and local businesses. However, it may also be the case that wheeled sports can be accommodated through positive management and that this activity can add to the vibrancy of our public spaces.

17. In developing detailed proposals for the design and future management of Stockton Town Centre the Council should give consideration to this issue. For example, by anticipating how areas of public realm might be used by skaters/riders and designed to either accommodate or discourage such use.
18. Consideration should also be given to providing appropriate street furniture and other features along key routes which link to significant skate/BMX destinations. For example, if a skate park was developed around the Tees Barrage it might be appropriate to provide such features along the riverside between the Barrage and central Stockton.

#### Development of dirt BMX tracks and courses

19. Groups and individuals already make their own dirt jumps on areas of open space, and informal trails have been created in places such as Quarry Wood Local Nature Reserve. This activity can have some negative impacts on trees and other natural habitats, and may not be welcomed by other users.
20. However, it should be possible to identify some suitable areas in country parks or other greenspaces where dirt jumps and tracks for BMX / mountain bikes could be developed. Although full BMX race courses can be costly and require relatively large areas, smaller dirt tracks with hills and jumps could be developed at relatively low cost and can be reconfigured or expanded by users over time.

#### Events, activities and use of existing mobile and semi-static skate facilities

21. Stockton Borough Council owns some semi-static and mobile skate park equipment, purchased several years ago with funding from the New Opportunities Fund and the Youth Fund. However the equipment has been used very little since 2007, largely due to the high costs involved in transporting, setting-up and managing the equipment and a lack of revenue funding to support this (e.g. the semi-static equipment takes three hours to assemble and dismantle, while a vehicle capable of carrying 1.8 tons is required to transport the mobile equipment).
22. The mobile and semi-static equipment was deployed by the Council's Integrated Youth Support Service for a 'taster session' on 3 December 2011 at Elm Tree Community Centre, which was attended by 18 young people. Following this Elm Tree Community Centre has independently secured £53,649 from "Community Action Against Crime: Innovation Fund" to deliver a programme of wheeled sport sessions at the centre through to 2013, utilising that equipment at selected times.
23. Meanwhile other options for operating the mobile and semi-static equipment in other parts of the Borough are being explored with partner organisations, provided the necessary resources can be identified.
24. In the future planned events and activities could be a useful way of raising wider public awareness of wheeled sports and addressing any negative perceptions of these activities. Events could encourage more people to become actively involved and promote responsible skating/riding. They could be organised in town centres or parks, and possibly make use of the existing mobile and semi-static equipment.



## **Involvement of young people and other users**

25. It is essential that young people and other users are actively engaged in any projects or other initiatives, and indeed users will contribute to the successful operation and on-going management of any facilities.
26. The network of people involved in the consultation process to date will be invited to work with the Council in taking any proposals forward. Linked to this, the Integrated Youth Support Service will work through the various Area Youth Boards to shape projects and activities in different parts of the Borough. For example, the Billingham Youth Forum will continue to be involved in the development of the planned skate park in John Whitehead Park, and the Central Area Youth Board will be engaged along with specific groups from Stockton town centre and Elmtree / Grangefield. Elsewhere groups interested in wheeled sports will work through the Eastern and Western Youth Boards to develop their ideas and proposals in those areas.
27. Maintaining effective communications with users and wider stakeholders will be important and the Council will use its website and social media to keep people informed of progress and encourage participation and feedback.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

28. Council resources of £200,000 identified in the Medium Term Financial Report, approved by Council on 29 February 2012, will be used to match fund future bids for external funding in order to deliver a range of facilities.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

29. There are no legal implications at this stage. Before implementing specific projects or initiatives any relevant legal issues would be considered.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

30. The development and management of wheeled sports facilities is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

## **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS**

31. Providing facilities and greater opportunities for wheeled sports will impact on several themes under the Sustainable Community Strategy:
  - **Economic Regeneration and Transport:** Good quality sport and leisure facilities contribute towards 'quality of place', form part of the area's tourism offer, and enhance the image of the Borough as a place to invest and work. Facilities should be easily accessible and in developing any project consideration will be given to the need to promote sustainable transport.
  - **Safer Communities:** Evidence from other areas suggests wheeled sport facilities can, to a large extent, be self-policing. High levels of use will help to deter anti-social behaviour and promote positive attitudes and social interaction.
  - **Children and Young People:** Wheeled sports make a positive contribution to the children and young people's physical and psychological development. Children and young people would also be given opportunities to input into the design, develop and management of any facilities, creating a greater sense of 'ownership' and ensuring

these spaces genuinely address the needs and aspirations of children and young people.

- **Health and Wellbeing:** Wheeled sports help to keep people physically active, and make a positive contribution to mental health and well-being.
- **Environment and Housing:** Well-designed wheeled sports facilities will add to the quality of the urban and rural-fringe environment, helping to make spaces more vibrant and complementing other recreational facilities.

#### **Supporting Themes:-**

- **Stronger Communities:** Wheeled sports encourage people meet and interact in an informal and positive way. Communities will be encouraged to work together to help plan and assist with the management of wheeled sports facilities, helping to promote community cohesion and engendering a greater sense of local pride.
- **Older Adults:** For some older adults participation in wheeled sports contributes to their quality of life, health and well-being. Older adults may also accompany children in their care to skate parks and other facilities.
- **Arts Leisure and Culture:** Wheeled sports facilities would add to the Borough's current leisure offer, complementing other recreational facilities. Skate parks can incorporate graffiti art and wheeled sports represent an important aspect of youth culture.

#### **EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

32. An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken at the stage when specific project proposals are being considered.

#### **CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS**

33. The Council has received various requests from individuals and groups wishing to have some purpose-built facilities for wheeled sport provided in the Borough. Many people would also like to be permitted to enjoy wheeled sports in areas of public realm.
34. In 2010 the Safer Billingham Partnership carried out an extensive consultation on cycling in Billingham, including proposals for a BMX track. 425 people of all age groups took part in a survey. This demonstrated strong support for the development of a BMX track and after further local consultation partners have agreed that a facility suitable for both BMX bikes and skateboards should be developed within John Whitehead Park.
35. Following some representations made to the Council in autumn 2011 and the submission of a large petition, the Council's Integrated Youth Support Service organised a range of events to engage with young people. A number of venues were targeted including the area outside of Splash (1 November), Sainsbury's car park (2 November) and Ingleby Barwick Community Centre (10 November). Ward Councillors from Grangefield and Bishopsgarth & Elmtree wards were involved in the Sainsbury's event. There has also been a consultation with the Billingham Youth Forum 'Stand Up and Shout' (11 November) and the Egglecliffe and Eaglescliffe Parish Council Recreational Committee, including some ward councillors, have met with young people to discuss this issue (16 November).
36. As part of the above process young people were encouraged to complete an on-line survey to express their views on wheeled sports. 388 young people completed that survey, which was followed up with a workshop session at Stockton Central Library on 10 January 2012.

75 young people and adults attended that session, and some ward councillors were also in attendance.

37. Collectively this work has helped Council officers to gain a more detailed understanding of the issues involved, and to begin the process of developing better spaces and facilities for wheeled sports.
38. Ward councillors and local residents will be consulted on any detailed project proposals that emerge from this work over the coming months.

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#### Background Papers

None

#### Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

Not ward specific.

#### Property

Until the details of specific schemes have been agreed it is not possible to fully assess the implications the report has in relation to the Council's property. However, the general approach outlined in this report is in accordance with the Council's Capital Strategy and Asset Management Plan, which outlines the Council's commitment to working in partnership with others to generate inward investment and maximise external funding to achieve the aims for the Borough.