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The purpose of this report is to update the Shirley/Papanui community on the outcome of the skateboard ramp trial in St Albans Park.

BACKGROUND

The previous Board resolved to shift the wooden skateboard ramp from Sheldon Park to St Albans Park following the construction of a permanent ramp at Sheldon Park. The Parks Unit notified local residents of the proposal on 17 July 1998 which resulted in a number of local residents contacting the Council with concerns over the proposal.

A public meeting was held with local residents to discuss their concerns. The outcome was that a monitoring group consisting of local residents, Council staff and elected members was established to assess the trial.

The Board resolved that the skateboard ramp be installed for a trial period of up to six months. The ramp was subsequently installed on the park in late October 1998.

TRIAL PERIOD

The monitoring group has had regular meetings during the trial period to discuss issues and monitor use of the ramp.

Concerns regarding after hours activity around the ramp have been raised by a local resident on a number of occasions. The resident advised that the late night activities around the ramp were disturbing their sleep and that of their young children. In acknowledging the residents’ concerns and to deter any night time skating the Parks Unit placed a large mesh gate across the bottom of the ramp to make it unskateable. The gate is locked and unlocked daily by the security firm that locks the toilets in the park. This has generally been successful at preventing late night skating, however the residents advise that they are still disturbed from time to time by people who choose to congregate around the ramp late at night. In addition to the locking, the Papanui Community Watch has also assisted by carrying out regular night time patrols of the area, to ensure undesirable night time activity around the ramp is prevented. However, they cannot be everywhere at once and I am aware that the odd occasion still occurs when groups mingle around the ramp which disturbs the resident.

TRIAL RESULTS

It would be fair to say that there is not unanimous agreement within the monitoring group as to whether the trial has been a success. However a clearer picture emerges when the individual components of the trial are considered.

NEED

On this point there is unanimous agreement within the monitoring group that the trial has confirmed there is a real need for skateboarding facilities in the St Albans area.

An inspection of the ramp will confirm this as there are very few occasions when the ramp is not in use. The ramp is used frequently after school and at weekends. Discussions that staff have had with users of the facility have all indicated a keen desire to retain the ramp on the park. Local skaters have been conscious that the ramp was there on a trial basis and have generally acted in a very responsible manner so as not to jeopardise the project and ensure the facility is retained.

SITE SUITABILITY

There are differing views within the monitoring group as to whether the current site is a suitable location for a skateboard facility.

At the time the Board resolved to put the ramp into St Albans Park there were no other suitable sites available in that general area of St Albans. All the other reserves in that area are smaller neighbourhood reserves and are unsuitable for this type of facility due to insufficient land area and proximity to neighbouring residents.

However, since then the redevelopment of English Park has come forward and there may be potential for the Board to consider this site if it felt St Albans Park was an unsuitable location. This would of course not be possible for some time.

OTHER FACTORS

There have also been a number of adverse incidents in the area since the ramp was installed that some residents believe, rightly or wrongly, can be attributed to the presence of the ramp.

The Edgeware Croquet Club building was broken into on Friday, 4 December 1998. The club believed there was a connection with users of the ramp. However, there is no evidence to support that and to date I am not aware of anyone being apprehended or prosecuted for the break in.

There has also been an increase of graffiti around the ramp and local area. Some residents feel that skateboarding and graffiti go “hand in hand”. The graffiti may or may not be attributable to the presence of the ramp. It is fair to say that the level of graffiti has increased right across the city as a whole. Notwithstanding that, the Council has taken a proactive approach to the graffiti in and around the park and arranged for “painting out” of graffiti on some neighbouring residential properties as well as that within the park.

MONITORING GROUP RECOMMENDATION

In recognition of the differing views within the monitoring group the group felt it would be unfair to form a position on whether the proposal should or should not go ahead, without any further consultation. Therefore it is the view of this group that the Shirley/Papanui Community Board meet with local residents, sports clubs and users of the ramp to discuss the issues prior to making a decision regarding provision of a permanent facility on the site.

END OF TRIAL

The six month trial period will be completed at the end of April this year. The Board will need to make a decision regarding the future of the temporary ramp at this meeting, given that by the May meeting of the Board the ramp will be outside the six-month trial period.

Some members of the monitoring group feel that the ramp should remain in its present location while the Shirley/Papanui Community Board is consulting with the local community prior to making a decision on the ramp. If the Board resolves to extend the trial to cover the period of consultation with local residents the Parks Unit will ensure monitoring of the ramp is continued during that time.

FURTHER REQUEST FOR THE RAMP

The Kulcha Trust has requested that the ramp be relocated to MacFarlane Park when a decision is made regarding a permanent facility in the St Albans area. However, the Board may wish to leave a decision on this matter until the outcome of the ramp at St Albans is known.

Without pre-empting the Board's decision it may be that the ramp is required elsewhere in the St Albans area for a trial period if the Board resolves not to proceed with the permanent ramp at St Albans Park. Alternatively if the proposal does go ahead then it is likely that the ramp would remain on site until the construction of the new facility, as in the case at Sheldon Park.

CONCLUSION

The high and frequent use of the ramp at St Albans Park has clearly demonstrated a need for skateboarding facilities in the St Albans area. Local youth and children using the facility are very enthusiastic about it and are eager for it to stay.

The Board will need to consider these factors alongside the other issues of concern to local neighbours such as, graffiti, noise, litter etc when making a decision on a permanent facility and the site. However, I am confident that the matter will be resolved through further consultation with all interested stakeholders. It is also appropriate at this time that the voluntary time and effort given by members of the monitoring group is acknowledged. The group has operated in a very professional and responsible manner and while there has not always been unanimous agreement within the group, members have respected and acknowledged each other's right to hold an alternative point of view. The Parks Unit has appreciated their contribution and input.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the Shirley/Papanui Community Board consult with local residents and park users regarding the provision of skateboarding facilities on St Albans Park.
 2. That the Board decide whether or not to extend the trial period of the ramp or to remove the ramp at the end of April 1999.
 3. That the monitoring group be thanked for their efforts and contribution.

Chairperson's

Recommendation:

1. That a questionnaire be circulated to local residents seeking their views on St Albans Park being an appropriate venue for a skate board ramp.
2. That the Shirley Board members undertake extensive consultation through local forums.
3. That the trial period be extended until the June Board meeting when a decision be made.