2. MACFARLANE PARK PROPOSED SKATE PATH

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The purpose of this report is to seek a decision from the Council on the possible provision of a skate facility in MacFarlane Park.

CONTEXT

The 'Shirley Needs Analysis (2001)' identified a lack of teenage recreational opportunities in central Shirley and recommended the development of skateboard facilities in MacFarlane Park. The Board has allocated total funding of $45,000 since 2001/02 towards a skate facility.

Five sites were investigated within MacFarlane Park as potential locations for the skate path:

1. At the northern end of the park on Emmett Street.
2. Co-located with the existing playground next to the basketball court.
3. Between the Acheson Avenue shops and the community café.
4. Opposite the shops on Acheson Avenue.
5. Adjacent to the flying fox on Jebson Street.

All the sites have both positive and negative attributes. Visibility and surveillance are key factors in selecting a site and the first three sites were ruled out owing to lack of visibility, lack of space, and/or potential conflict with other facilities and buildings. Consultation has been undertaken on the other two sites.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is an identified need for youth recreation facilities in Shirley, especially for skateboarding. A skate path was designed with input from local skateboarders with the aim of providing a small facility for local young people. Five sites within MacFarlane Park have been investigated for the location of the skate path.

None of the sites are ideal, and there is no agreement within the community as to the preferred location. Improvements to the park and surrounds are required to create a suitable environment for youth recreation facilities.

RELEVANT CURRENT POLICY

- Recreation and Sport Policy
- Social Well Being Policy
- Community Policy

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL

MacFarlane Park was chosen for the skate facility because of its central location in the Shirley community, and the large population of young people living nearby. Other parks were also considered but are outside the community focus area and would not cater for local children unable to travel outside their neighbourhood.

A skate facility was designed with input from local skateboarders with the aim of providing a small, local facility for young people in the neighbourhood. The design consists of a street style facility, as opposed to large ramp structures, and includes five obstacles placed along a path plus a half pipe. The obstacles progress from intermediate to more advanced levels of ability, with some flat areas available for beginners.

The options for the skate facility are as follows:

1. Defer the skate facility and include youth recreation alongside wider issues to be investigated and addressed in the area.
2. Proceed with a skate facility opposite the shops on Acheson Avenue.
3. Proceed with a skate facility adjacent to the flying fox on Jebson Street.
4. Not proceed with a skate facility in MacFarlane Park.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

The layout of the park presents some difficulties, in that it is enclosed by housing and high fencing and lacks road frontage, visibility and informal surveillance, creating unsafe hidden areas in the park. Graffiti and vandalism are ongoing concerns. There are a number of social issues in the area, and some undesirable activities have been known to occur in and around the park. There is no ideal space available for a skate facility but some options have been discussed with the community.

In weighing up the options for a skate facility, the Council needs to consider (a) whether or not to develop skate facilities to meet identified youth recreation needs now, but in less than ideal conditions, (b) to promote future opening up of the park to create a safer, more useable environment, or (c) to accept that the park is not suitable for additional youth recreation facilities in its current form.

The advantages and disadvantages of each of the options are summarised as follows:

1. Defer the skate facility and include youth recreation alongside wider issues to be investigated and addressed in the area.

Advantages:

- Current preliminary investigation under way on the issues and options for the Acheson Avenue area.
- Potential improvements to the Acheson Avenue area could make the area more suited to a skate facility.
- Opportunity to promote opening up of the park.
- Portable skate ramps will be made available to the Youth For Youth group on a temporary basis as a short term gap filler.
- Remaining funding available for reallocation

Disadvantages

- Current investigation is only focussed on a small area for improvement and there is no intention as yet for a wider community renewal project. Therefore, there is a risk that it may have no impact at all on skate facility provision.
- This is a long-term option that does not meet current youth recreation needs, and existing expectations of a skate facility.
- Substantial capital input required to open the park up and create a more spacious, visible and safer area.
- This option has not been consulted on.

2. Proceed with a skate facility opposite the shops on Acheson Avenue.

Advantages

- High profile site.
- Meets existing youth recreation needs.

Disadvantages

- Very close proximity to housing could cause a nuisance (10 m from the boundary & 25–30m from most houses).
- Potential conflict with pedestrians.
- Concerns about existing social issues causing problems for skateboarders.
- Mixture of support and opposition within the community for this site.

3. Proceed with a skate facility adjacent to the flying fox on Jebson Street.

Advantages

- Meets existing youth recreation needs.
- Co-located with another recreation facility.
- Toilets and drinking fountain on site.

Disadvantages

- Limited informal surveillance.
- Close proximity to housing.
- Significant opposition to this site from some neighbours.

4. Not proceed with a skate facility in MacFarlane Park.

Advantages

- Avoids placing a skate facility in a less than ideal environment.

Disadvantages

- Does not meet identified youth recreation needs.

While a need has been expressed specifically for skate amenities in the Shirley area, there are also community groups that are operating with a minimum of resources but still filling recreational and social gaps. The Board and Papanui Advocacy Team have previously supported the 'Youth 4 Youth' Group and a need for a youth facility in Shirley has been recognised. Currently this group operates out of several locations, including the Neighbourhood Centre and the youth leader's home, but the size and multi-use nature of these facilities limit group activities. The Board discussed at its December 2003 seminar meeting its desire to support housing the 'Youth 4 Youth' Group. If the skate facility is deferred, the remaining funding could be reallocated for this purpose.

CONSULTATION

There is widespread support within the community for a skate facility but there is no consensus as to the best location. Several stages of consultation have been undertaken:

- Input on design and location of skate path from local school children and youth.
- Comments sought on proposed site at Jebson Street. Information was available at the community event in MacFarlane Park in February 2003, through a letterbox drop, and featured in local newspapers.
- Public workshop to gain agreement on a way forward.
- Information on amended site opposite shops on Acheson Avenue distributed to stakeholders.

The proposed site at Jebson Street, flanking the flying fox, attracted a mixed response and a petition was presented to Parks and Waterways staff (see Petitions) requesting that the skate facility be located elsewhere. Support for the facility was evenly distributed throughout the consultation area, while those respondents opposed to the facility were mainly clustered adjacent to the proposed site.

A successful workshop was organised to discuss concerns and to agree on a way forward resulting in a proposal to site the skate facility opposite the shops on Acheson Avenue.

Two thirds of the respondents to the Acheson Avenue site proposal were supportive, including Shirley Intermediate and Primary Schools, Shirley Residents' Group, the Shirley Community Constable, Shirley Community Trust and Youth for Youth Group. Support was especially evident from those residents who were previously opposed but had 'bought in' to the proposal after attendance at the public workshop. Five replies were received from Acheson Avenue shop owners/tenants with four against and one for the proposal. Reasons for non-support included a perceived increase in noise, graffiti and rubbish around the shopping centre. Amongst others opposed to the proposal were Housing New Zealand, who supported the facility but not the location, and the resident who lives right next door to the site.

CONCLUSIONS

There is general support within the community for a skate facility to meet identified youth recreation needs. However, no ideal site for a skate facility is available within Shirley, and there is no agreement within the community as to their preferred option. Improvements that open up the park are required to create a suitable environment for youth recreation facilities. Such opportunities may arise as a result of the review of the Acheson Avenue area.

Recommendation:

1. That youth recreation and a skate facility be included alongside wider issues to be investigated within the Acheson Avenue Urban Renewal Action Plan.

2. That options be explored to open up the park and create a safer environment suited to youth recreation facilities.

3. That staff be thanked for their consultation work to date.

4. That the Board's skate path Project Funds from the Parks and Waterways budget be reallocated.

5. That up to $20,000 from the skate path Project Funds be allocated to the MacFarlane Park Kindergarten for new fencing.

6. That up to $15,000 from the skate path Project Funds be allocated to Youth 4 Youth for re-housing the group and to go towards employment of a Youth Development Officer.