

Skate park set to get go-ahead despite pedestrian reservations

Grace Hammond

PLANS for a BMX and skateboarding park at the entrance to Harrogate's historic Valley Gardens that have divided cyclists and residents are set for the go-ahead today.

More than 200 people are backing the proposals to develop the site, west of the existing tennis courts, and north of the existing playground in the gardens.

But there have also been objections to Harrogate Council that the gardens are the wrong place for the amenity and fears it could lead to anti-social behaviour in the park.

Valley Gardens is a grade II listed historic park and garden that lies within Harrogate conservation

area and is identified in conservation strategies as a significant area of open space containing important trees.

The Gardens also contains several listed buildings including – closest to the application site – the grade II Magnesia Well building and grade II refreshment kiosk.

The concrete skate/BMX park would include a range of ramps, rails and other features.

Unlike metal prefabricated or modular skate parks that provide ramps almost entirely above ground, the proposal is to build this one with concrete sprayed at the site.

Using the existing natural contours, the form of the park would be created using steel mesh and

then sprayed with concrete coloured mid-charcoal.

Surrounding earthworks would create grassed boundaries with natural contours instead of eye-sore walls.

No trees will be felled and additional planting is proposed. The entrance would be from the main footpath that crosses the garden from Harlow Moor Road to Cornwall Road.

There would be no flood lights since the skate park will only be open from dawn to dusk.

The site would not be staffed and there are no immediate proposals for fencing, although the plans include a proviso for 2m high fences if they are needed in the future.

Planning officer Neville Watson

said: "Over 200 letters of support have been received not only from skaters and riders but also from the community who see the benefits to the town as a further visitor attraction."

Harrogate Civic Society has welcomed the facility in principle and says if it is to be in Valley Gardens the proposed site is the correct one.

But there is concern among members about potential conflict between cyclists and pedestrian on the footpaths in the gardens.

The society has underlined that landscaping is crucial to the success of the scheme and fencing must not be included.

Seven complaints had been received about adverse impact on

the listed park and garden, noise, anti-social behaviour, access issues and conflict between pedestrians and cyclists.

Developers Harrogate Council say a landscape assessment was carried out to identify any mitigation measures required and there has been a long process to identify Valley Gardens as the best site.

This included forming a skate/BMX user group that will continue to work on issues such as ensuring youngsters do not cycle or skate through Valley Gardens and annoy other people.

In recommending approval of the scheme at a planning meeting today, officials are underlining that the area cannot stand still in time.

Mr Watson added: "The character of Valley Gardens has changed over time from being a landscaped area for spa users to promenade and drink from wells to a multi-use town park which attracts a diversity of users from the local area and further afield.

"A skate/BMX park would add to the existing mix of activities within Valley Gardens and would be a further step in the Gardens' evolution from a spa facility to a community park."

While "inevitable" that an area of hard standing will to a degree harm the lush green character of the historic park, the public need for the new amenity had to be balanced with the need to maintain Valley Gardens, he added.