



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Lancing Skate Park Action Plan

The origins

The new Lancing skate park on Beach Green was finished in June 2017 and officially opened in July. The original inspiration for the project had come primarily from two local skaters from Sir Robert Woodard Academy, who were unhappy at the lack of local facilities, especially after the closure of the Test Road site in Sompting, which had become problematic and a target of anti-social and criminal activity.

After the students initially approached me, I organised a meeting at Lancing Parish Hall with the then Chairman of Lancing Parish Council (LPC), James Butcher, together with parents, other councillors and the police. Subsequently, James Butcher agreed to take this forward as a LPC project, although funding was predominantly secured through Adur District Council using S106 funds from the Brighton & Hove Training Ground.


LPC contributed a small amount to the overall £100,000 cost. There was extensive public consultation and, after a delay, the original plans were modified and the location moved, due to reservations from the owners of The Perch and local residents.

In common with the successful Shoreham skate park, it was felt that the new park should be in a busy and overlooked area with plenty of footfall from people using other facilities around Beach Green in order to minimise the opportunities for anti-social behaviour. Notwithstanding a spate of problems at Shoreham near the end of last year, the Pond Road skate park has been deemed a great success and has been particularly welcomed by local police, since it has helped to provide a distraction for people who would otherwise been conducting anti-social behaviour.

The new facility was largely welcomed by the local community also and enthusiastically championed by various local councillors and me, not least to help address the perceived lack of facilities for local young people. At the time, Lancing village centre had fallen victim to a surge of anti-social behaviour and vandalism, particularly focussed around New Monks Rec. I received a great many complaints from constituents and attended meetings with the police, local councillors and churchgoers, whilst many people came to see me at my surgeries and street surgeries. There was also a problem with skaters using the newly renovated Queensway as a skate park, which caused annoyance to traders and customers and again it was hoped this would provide an antidote.

The problem

Subsequently, through the autumn, there was a string on incidents of anti-social behaviour and criminal damage reported on Beach Green, including damage to beach huts; late night bonfires on the beach; repeated stoning of windows at The Perch; intimidation of evening staff at The Perch; bullying of younger kids using skate park; damage and theft of bicycles; amplifier equipment brought on to Beach Green to play loud music late at night; and motorbikes being driven at pedestrians and children using the playground on Beach Green.



As a result, I received a number of complaints from constituents concerned that Beach Green was becoming a 'no-go area.' These concerns were taken up with the police and I attended a meeting of the Safer Lancing Partnership only to be told that "everything was in hand", there was not a significant problem and that, with agreement from the police, LPC would be adopting a 'Broken Window Syndrome' approach and not reporting these incidents to the media.

In fact 'Broken Window Syndrome', pioneered in New York in the 1980s, is quite the opposite of stifling publicity about crime and is rather about nipping it in the bud and demonstrating a robust approach. The theory states that maintaining and monitoring urban environments to prevent small crimes, such as vandalism and public drinking, helps to create an atmosphere of order and lawfulness, thereby preventing more serious crimes from happening. That is very different from just attempting to 'shuffle it under the carpet' and denying there is a problem.

Given the continued concerns from constituents that nothing was being done about the problem and a perception that there was insufficient police intervention, I recorded a podcast, having spoken to local police chiefs, asking for people to come forward with their experiences of the problem and suggestions for solutions. This brought about substantial feedback, the vast majority of which was constructive, with the extraordinary exception of the Chair and Vice Chair of LPC, who seemed to resent anyone outside of the Parish Council taking action to try to address the problems.

A brief survey produced the following headline responses, one of which makes it clear that fewer than 10% of people were aware of any initiatives being taken to address the problem, hence the need for greater publicity and engagement with local people. The police briefing on Lancing Beach Green held on November 26th was welcome but most of those attending were in fact elected representatives. No other action was proposed by LPC pending a public meeting in January, which had been arranged some time earlier and was not brought forward.

The survey

Are you aware of incidents/criminal damage at Beach Green? – 27 No / 24 Yes

What sort of incidents are you aware of?

- Damage to beach huts
- Incidents at the skate park
- Bullying in the skate park of young children

What should be done?

- CCTV
- Lighting the area
- Increase police presence (particularly at night/regular patrols)

Greatest concerns?

- Public safety – people feeling unsafe to walk through the area
- Parents fearing for kids' safety. Number of people mentioned their young children being bullied by older teens
- A negative reputation of the community developing as a result of vandalism and anti-social behaviour



Would you be prepared to help out with solutions? – 31 Yes / 16 No

Aware of initiatives to deal with the issue? – 5 Yes / 47 No

Other comments?


- Added income from the Car Park could be used toward solutions.
- Are the Lancing Youth Council involved?
- Are a lack of local youth activities at the heart of this?
- 'People also need to be given a sense of community however. The work being done by somewhere like Lancing Football Club in engaging with young people is a perfect example of giving people a sense of belonging. Once people take pride in where they are from they are likely to treat it with increased respect'
- 'I agree with you wholeheartedly. Something must be done NOW not next year after one meeting after another just delaying any solutions arrived at being put in place. Act and act fast is what the Council should be doing. The added income from the car park could help towards costs.'
- 'Have Lancing Youth Council been contacted about the issues? As far as I am aware they haven't and surely, since some of these young people instigated the building of the skate park, they should be included in looking for a solution to the issues arising from it.'

Further action taken by Tim Loughton and local people

- Following the survey and police surgery, I published a further podcast giving updates on what further action had taken place, as well as publicising this in my constituency e-newsletter and through the Herald.
- I held a closed meeting at the Perch on January 11th, primarily for young skaters to listen to their experiences with the problem and what action should be taken. Also attended by Electric Storm Youth (ESY), a police sergeant, a PCSO and local councillors.
- I arranged site visits to The Level Skate Park in Brighton and meeting with Ricardo Atxukarro who helps to run the facility through the City Council. I also visited skate parks at Lewes and Shoreham to discuss with local users.
- I held discussions with skaters on Lancing Beach Green and with a small group of parents and local skateboard equipment providers; managers of the nearby car wash; Perch owners and staff.
- I corresponded with Rampion about accessing funding for enhancements to the skate park through Sussex Community Foundation fund dedicated to East Worthing & Lancing projects.

Proposals for finding a solution

Whilst a lot of planning and consultation went into the design and building of the skate park little thought appears to have been given to its ongoing management once the ribbons had been cut.



It is clear that someone needs to take ownership of the running of the skate park, who acts as a known and trusted overseer of activity in and around it and is clearly plugged into Adur and Lancing Councils, police, Beach Patrol and The Perch. They would act as a go-between with the skaters and various local agencies and would report more serious incidents and information direct to the police.

At Shoreham an individual called Paul Parsons has informally taken on this role and is trusted by the skaters and authorities alike. A similar individual involved with skating has come forward at Lancing and spoken to me and Sompting Councillor, Paul Mansfield, and is ready to help. He needs to work with a group of younger skaters to form some type of 'management group' and communicate to the wider user-group. One resident suggested appointing/voting in responsible youngsters to be 'skate buddies', who are there to support the younger kids and report to assigned adults any issues. One of the local councils would need to help organise appropriate safeguarding checks here for example.

- Lancing Skate Park Facebook page has now been set up by one of the skaters who attended the meeting at The Perch. A simple App could also now be developed.
- Discussions with the skaters confirmed widespread support for enhanced CCTV beyond what The Perch is installing to monitor the skate park and wider area.
- Skaters also favour lighting which could be run off lighting on the promenade if LPC take forward initial proposals to light the prom to help combat anti-social behaviour. This would have to be low level and directional to avoid complaints about light pollution from nearby residents and set to turn off at a certain time as with The Level. They would also like to see some basic concrete surfaces round the skating area rather than the muddy patches at present. The potential coordinator has offered to organise a community day to build this to minimise expense whilst any Rampion funds should be approached for more substantial enhancement funding in addition to local councils.
- Requests for a shelter on the site were strongly contradicted by experts at other skate parks as they act as a focus for anti-social behaviour and vandalism.
- There needs to be a noticeboard (probably metal to avoid vandalism) with an agreed code of conduct and reporting contact numbers.
- In early spring a competition day events should be established to bring the wider skating community together to again help cement ownership of the facility. This would need to involve separate categories to include both scooters and skateboards where the former is very much in the majority with younger children dominating. The Perch and other interested parties have offered, in principle, to sponsor such an event and would be prepared to do much more if there is evidence of improved behaviour and safety on Lancing Beach Green.
- Police should be encouraged to make regular patrols at busy times and provide site managers with a hotline for reporting anti-social and criminal behaviour. There were strong complaints that police were not following up leads about trouble makers with several cases of where clear identities had been provided yet the complainants heard nothing further. Police communication, visibility and feedback needs to be much better and this should include an informal group of parents and residents who have offered to be 'eyes and ears' on Beach Green. Prosecutions need to be pursued and publicised to show they are serious.



- ESY would like to play an enhanced role if they can recruit a youth worker and Worthing Youth Council have also offered to help through Shirley Robinson-Viney.
- Local schools especially Sir Robert Woodard Academy need to be involved in educating their pupils who use the skate park. Various organisations have also approached me with offers of help including 'Surf Solace' who work with kids on water safety issues and who want to extend and adapt their activities to Lancing. There is clearly a lot of goodwill to make sure this facility succeeds and Lancing Beach Green continues to be Lancing's 'jewel in the crown.'

I am happy to discuss these outline proposals with councillors and others who are prepared to take them forward constructively.