

Title of Report:	Skateboarding in Portrush
Committee Report Submitted To:	Leisure & Development Committee
Date of Meeting:	19 March 2024
For Decision or For Information	For Decision
For Discussion In Committee	NO

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Healthy & Engaged Communities
Outcome	Citizens will have access to a range of leisure, recreational, green and play environments which support better physical and mental health and wellbeing
Lead Officer	Head of Sport & Wellbeing

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	Circa £10,000 (equipment)
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	Capital
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	YES/NO
Legal Opinion Obtained	YES/NO

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to update Council on the temporary designated space at Station Square, Portrush, designed to create a safe, controlled and inviting environment for skateboarders, whilst maintaining public access to the surrounding businesses and established Rights of Way.

2.0 Background

In October 2022 Council approved the creation of a temporary designated space at Station Square, Portrush for skateboarding, subject to;

- Council providing Public Liability Insurance for the site as a designated skateboard park.
- Signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Working Group Parties.

The establishment of the temporary designated area for skateboarding at Station Square was considered necessary whilst the Recreation Grounds construction was nearing completion and the site at the Metropole Corner is being considered.

The MOU contained the following stipulations;

Council will:

- Retain ownership of the site, managed through the Tourism and Recreation Service Area.
- Undertake a Risk Assessment and Method Statement specific to the activity.
- Install suitable fencing (with rubber skirts to retain skateboards).
- Provide public liability insurance.

RAWEE will:

- Apply the necessary RAMS mitigation measures including the inspection of the site weekly (minimum) to ensure that only equipment (ramps, rails and jumps) which are deemed fit-for-purpose by RAWEE are onsite. Any equipment deemed to be outside of safe parameters will be removed by RAWEE staff.

CAUS will:

- Act as a conduit for information / communication between all stakeholders in the skateboarding / urban sport community.

The Working Group will:

- Work together to protect the reputation of the Council, CAUS and RAWEE (relevant to skateboarding / urban sports).
- Agree any press statements or other forms of public communication before publication / posting.
- Meet monthly to ensure that the terms of the MOU are being applied as agreed.
- Consider the use of the site by other users / events as and when required.

The recommendation referred to a 12 month period of time for the MOU to stand, with a 6 month review / break period if required by Council.

3.0 Current position

The 12 month MOU is now expired – no 6 month review was requested.

RAWEE, who (as above), were responsible for weekly checks and monitoring of the site no longer wish to participate in the Working Group arrangement because of business commitments. They have stated that they are willing to continue to work with Council in an advisory role, if required.

Working Group meetings have become sporadic and, since the absence of a Director of L&D, the group have not met.

3.1 Feedback Received

The Head of Sport & Wellbeing met with Working Group members and feedback was that they all value the designated space at Station Square as a safe place for locals and visitors to the area to practice and enjoy the sport of skateboarding. Some concerns were expressed as to the general upkeep of the area, the requirement for more bins in the area, and increased signage for pedestrians. Due to the infrequency of meetings and RAWEE no longer having responsibility for their element of the MOU, members of the Working Group would be content to liaise directly with Council and report any maintenance / health & safety issues.

Feedback was sought from internal stakeholders in respect on the current provision and consideration for the future. The following is noted;

- Land & Property Officers require full details of roles and responsibilities in any subsequent MOU between Council and another party in respect of Station Square.
- Health & Safety personnel state that any MOU should be regularly checked against what equipment is in place to ensure compliance and is adequately inspected and appropriate records kept.
- Estates recommend an appropriate barrier system is installed if the designated skateboarding area continues in this location. A system that is removeable but secure enough to withstand being knocked over/damaged.
- If Council was to agree to the continuation of the site, control of operations should sit with Council to ensure adequate and regular checks, record keeping and upkeep and repair of ramps etc.

3.2 Equipment Onsite

Ramps were purchased by RAWEE (via grants) for use at the facility. However, they are wooden ramps primarily designed for indoor use. The wet weather experienced over the past year has impacted on the condition of the ramps and resulted in ongoing repairs and concerns over safety.

There is evidence of additional structures being added to the site which have been constructed by local residents, with no control over the standard of construction.

Estimated cost for replacing existing ramps and potentially increasing official provision to replace unauthorised ramps is circa £10,000.

Station Square is a high profile location recognised by many as a Council responsibility. The public perception as to who is responsible for the site tends to rest with Council.

The Urban Plaza at Portrush Recreation Grounds is complete and local skateboarders regularly make use of the facility, although there is no noticeable reduction in the use of Station Square.

Council has approved a Letter of Comfort for Causeway Association of Urban Sports in respect of leasing land at Metropole Park in Portrush for the development of a Skateboard / Urban plaza, subject to funding being secured. CAUS are in the process of applying for funding from the Community Ownership Fund.

4.0 Next Steps

Without an MOU in place, there is no local responsibility for checks, upkeep, and repair of the ramps etc, and inevitably responsibility will fall to Council until the situation is resolved.

As per the original MOU, Council will have to consider the requirement for a more robust barrier system around the designated area, increased signage, and litter bin provision. Consideration will also have to be given to inspection and record keeping requirements, plus maintenance of ramps.

Consideration needs to be given as to whether;

a) The designated temporary space for skateboarding continues at Station Square, with a review of the current MOU, and securing another party to undertake weekly checks and monitoring of the site.

or

b) Council takes full responsibility for the site to ensure a consistent approach to inspection, upkeep and repair and maintains the original agreement regarding regular meetings of the Working Group to improve communication and cooperation with the skateboarding community.

or

c) Station Square is returned to its original state as a public thoroughfare (although there can be no guarantee that skateboarders do not continue to practice their skills there).

5.0 Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to note the content of the report and recommend to Council one of the following options;

Option 1 The designated temporary space for skateboarding continues at Station Square, and a review of the current MOU is undertaken, with the intention of securing another party to assume responsibility for weekly checks and monitoring of the site. (MOU agreement to be shared with Land & Property officers/Sub-committee as appropriate)

Option 2 Council takes full responsibility for the site to ensure a consistent approach to inspection, upkeep and repair and maintains the original agreement regarding regular meetings of the Working Group to improve communication and cooperation with the skateboarding community.

Option 3 Station Square is returned to its original state as a public thoroughfare (although there can be no guarantee that skateboarders do not continue to practice their skills there).