

**DCNC2006/0277/F - PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION OF  
SKATE PARK AT SYDONIA RECREATION GROUND,  
CONNINGSBY ROAD, LEOMINSTER**

**For: Sydonia Skatepark Community per Mrs C  
Bromage Leominster Town Council Town Council  
Office Grange Walk Leominster HR6 8NS**

**Date Received:**  
27th January 2006

**Ward:**  
Leominster South

**Grid Ref:**  
49810, 58674

**Expiry Date:**  
24th March 2006

Local Member: Councillors R Burke and J P Thomas

## **1. Site Description and Proposal**

- 1.1 The site is located on an area of open space known as the Sydonia Recreation Ground. The Leominster Leisure Centre and swimming pool lie to the south west of the application site with residential dwellings to the north east, south east and north west, the closest being those on Battlebridge Close and approximately 45 metres away. Public footpaths cross the recreation ground and the precise location of the application site has been amended since its original submission to ensure that one of these is not impeded should planning permission be forthcoming.
- 1.2 The application is for the creation of a skate board park. The site area measures 30 metres by 19 metres and will comprise a tarmaced surface enclosed by a chain link fence to a maximum height of 3 metres. It includes general details of the type of structures that would be installed should planning permission be granted and also indicates that lighting is proposed at either end of the site. With regard to the first of these two points, the applicants have included details of a sound attenuation system that can be incorporated into the design of ramps to minimize noise impacts in sensitive locations.

## **2. Policies**

### **2.1 Leominster District Local Plan**

A54 – Protection of Residential Amenity  
A61 – Community, Social and Recreational Facilities

### **2.2 Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan (Revised Deposit Draft)**

DR13 – Noise  
DR14 – Lighting  
RST1 – Criteria for Recreation, Sport and Tourism Development

## **3. Planning History**

- 3.1 None relevant to this application.

#### 4. Consultation Summary

##### Statutory Consultations

- 4.1 None required

##### Internal Council Consultations

- 4.2 Transportation Manager - No objections
- 4.3 Public Rights of Way Manager - No objection to the proposal in its amended location
- 4.4 Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards - comments as follows:

'Due to the nature of skateboarding, there is a potential for noise nuisance, not only from the impact of the boards on equipment when carrying out jumps and tricks but also from the associated noise from people congregating around the area. Currently there is no recognized guidance relating to noise or nuisance from skate parks and therefore assessing their impact on an area can be difficult.

Visits have therefore been made to comparable skate parks in Newton Farm, Ledbury, Malvern, Perdiswell and Tipton. The site at Perdiswell comprises concrete structures and so has been largely discounted. However all of the others use equipment of a modular design similar to that proposed for Leominster.

The site at Malvern is very similar to the proposal due to its location on recreation land, in close proximity to a children's play area and residential accommodation. The Environmental Health Officer at Malvern Hills District Council advises that complaints were received regarding noise from the park, although no formal action was taken.

A 15 minute noise measurement was taken at the application site on 3rd March and the background level (L90) was recorded at 36.5dB. Noise levels recorded by St Albans Council at a skate park in Maidenhead were recorded to be 60.7dBA (Laeq) during the measurement period and dropping only to 59.2dBA at 60 metres. Although these measurements can only be a guide as each park is different, I believe complaints from the application site if approved are likely.

The additional acoustic information that has been submitted detailed the use of acoustic foam as a way of reducing noise levels at skateboard sites which are in noise sensitive locations. Although the absorption co-efficients of this material are quoted as high as 0.8 (1.00 representing complete absorption), the results shown from testing completed at the University of Salford show the absorption to be no higher than 0.57 at any of the frequencies measured.

Although I believe a final decision has yet to be made with regards to the supplier of the proposed skate park, as the additional acoustic information submitted to Planning was from GBH Ramps, I contacted this company for further information. I am led to believe that this company is the only UK supplier of acoustic foam for skate parks and they have already installed the material at a number of parks around the country including one in Victoria Park, Tipton, Sandwell, West Bromwich.

I have also visited the skate park at Tipton and noted that the park appeared to be slightly larger in size to the one proposed at Leominster and I would estimate that the closest residential properties were approximately 85-90 metres from the skate park. At the time of my visit, only one skateboarder was using the facilities, with all other users being BMX riders, as the noise from BMX use is negligible in comparison to skateboards I was unable to assess the full noise impact of the facilities. However, even with only one skateboard user the noise is clearly audible at 45 metres. I would also note that the background levels at this site are likely to be similar to those found in Leominster, due to the type of land use and distance to roads.

The Environmental Health Officer at Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council advises that they have been advised that residents can hear the noise from skateboarders using the ramps inside their properties, although no official complaints have been made. Although there has been some concern regarding general noise from the use of the park, for example shouting and screaming. It must also be noted that this park is primarily used by BMX riders and the skateboarder users are in a minority, which I believe differs from the type of riders likely to use the park in Leominster and makes a direct comparison difficult.

I have met with the senior project manager with GBH at the proposed Leominster site and discussed the location and GBH equipment. Although he advised that the location is not ideal due to the proximity of residential housing, he advised that GBH have installed parks at similar distances (45 metres) previously with no concerns arising following their use. In this location he advised that acoustic foam was advisable and that landscaping options may also be considered, such as bunds or tree planting to reduce the and noise and visual impact of the site.

I would advise that in terms of reducing the noise impact from this development, the ideal location for the site would be as far away from all residential housing as possible, this would mean relocating the proposed site approximately 16 metres North of its current location. This would allow a minimum distance of 46m to a residential boundary could be achieved and 47.5m to a residential property itself, in comparison to 42.5m at its current location. However, I realise that other factors such as lighting, safety, access and CCTV must also be considered and that relocation may not be possible, however noise must be considered as a key factor when choosing a location for the site.

#### Recommendations

Should Members be minded to approve this application then I would recommend that the following conditions be attached to any consent in order to protect residential amenity:-

#### Acoustic Foam

I have been advised by the designers, GBH, that they would advise all ramps to be fitted with this material if the site is in a noise sensitive location, especially considering the distance to residential accommodation. I would therefore advise that should the skate park be approved, acoustic foam (or a similar material) should be used on every ramp to reduce the impact noise as far as possible.

#### Details of floodlighting/ external lighting

Details of floodlighting shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority before the use hereby permitted commences. Development shall be carried out in accordance with approved details and there shall be no other external illumination to the development.

Scheme of measures for controlling noise

Before the development hereby permitted commences a scheme shall be agreed with the local planning authority which specifies the provisions to be made for the control of noise emanating from the site. The use of the site shall be carried out in accordance with approved details.

I would advise that the scheme should include the installation of acoustic foam or a similar material which is designed to absorb sound and reduce reverberation.

Minimum distance from residential properties

Any equipment with the potential to cause noise nuisance should be located at a minimum distance of 40 metres from residential accommodation, any additional equipment should be approved by the local planning authority prior to its installation.

Restriction on hours of use

The hours in which the facilities shall be open for use shall be restricted to 8.00am to 9.30pm.

**5. Representations**

- 5.1 Leominster Town Council - No comment as the Town Council is acting as agent.
- 5.2 Ramblers Association - Note that a public footpath is close to the site and trust that it will not be impacted by the development.
- 5.3 West Mercia Constabulary - Comments as follows:

'With the area bordered by sheltered accommodation for primarily elderly people at Eaton Close on one side, and new housing at Battlebridge Close and Lammas Close, one has to question the suitability of placing a skate park within this environment.

The activity being considered is one that has a noise factor associated with it. The boards themselves make a noise and with the excitement of the young persons involved as well then the noise level escalates.

In the Sydonia area we are currently experiencing complaints where youths are gathering, making large volumes of noise, drinking alcohol and generally causing a nuisance in the evening. We have received at least 17 complaints from residents or people in the Coningsby Road and Eaton Close areas alone since 1st January 2006, regarding such complaints as noisy groups of youths, litter, criminal damage and burglaries.

We would welcome the provision of activities for young persons in Leominster, we certainly do not believe that the activity of skateboarding brings about criminal activity. In fact the vast majority of youths involved are there for one purpose only and that is to enjoy their sport, but careful consideration must be given to the issues they may raise as a consequence.

If ultimately a skate park is sited where proposed I would envisage a large increase in the number of calls to the Police regarding noise, damage and crime issues.

- 5.4 Six letters of objection from local residents and a petition signed by 44 people have been received. In summary the points raised are as follows:
1. Location in a residential area will be detrimental to local residents, particularly because of the noise associated with skate parks.
  2. Inappropriate use in close proximity to sheltered accommodation for elderly people.
  3. Will encourage gathering of large groups and subsequent anti social behaviour including drug abuse.
  4. Structures would be out of keeping with the area.
  5. Question over how the park would be supervised.
  6. There are other more suitable sites such as Bridge Street.
- 5.5 In response to some of the objections raised, the following information has been submitted by the applicant's agent:
1. All of the equipment is capable of relocation. Information is provided indicating the type of equipment to be used and materials used in its construction.
  2. Happy to be bound by a condition requiring the precise details of lighting.
  3. The Grange was ruled out because of its location at the heart of Leominster's Conservation Area. The part of The Grange adjacent to the Millennium Walk and Priory Churchyard is fully earmarked for other recreational use, that being a football pitch and a young children's playground.
  4. Sydonia was considered to be suitable because it is close to the Leisure Centre and its parking area, and as such is not isolated.
  5. It is hoped that HALO Leisure Services will oversee the site. This will need to be confirmed through a service level agreement for inspection and custodianship, including direction to close the facility if there were any damage or health and safety risk. HALO has indicated that a service level agreement is acceptable in principle.
- 5.6 The full text of these letters can be inspected at Northern Planning Services, Blueschool House, Blueschool Street, Hereford, and prior to the Sub-Committee meeting.

## **6. Officers Appraisal**

- 6.1 The key consideration of this application appears to be the potential impact that the proposed skate park on the residential amenity of nearby dwellings. In particular these can be crystallized further to the noise that will result from the use of skateboards on the equipment, the noise created by groups of young people and a perception that a skate park will increase instances of anti social behaviour.

### **Noise from equipment**

- 6.2 This issue has been dealt with thoroughly in the comments of the Environmental Health Officer who has been able to make a full assessment of the proposal by making visits to comparable skate parks. Whilst the findings appear to be that the proposal will cause incidences of complaints about noise disturbance, they also indicate that the use of acoustic foam as part of the design of ramps will reduce the impact of noise. Its use could be ensured through the imposition of an appropriately worded condition.

**Noise created by users**

- 6.3 This relates more generally to noise created by individuals rather than the skateboards and equipment. It is inevitable that a congregation of people will result in some noise. This can occur presently as the area is available for general recreation use and it would seem unreasonable to attempt to impose conditions to try and limit this. However, a condition could be imposed to prohibit the playing of any amplified music on the application site at any time and also to restrict the times when the skate park can be used.

**Perceptions of anti social behaviour**

- 6.4 This is a very difficult issue to reconcile and there are clearly two directly opposing lines of argument. One is that a skate park will increase anti social behaviour as it encourages a gathering of young people in close proximity to residential dwellings. The other is that because it is in proximity to dwellings there is an ability for anti social activities to be identified and dealt with as the site is overlooked. In an isolated location there is greater potential for criminal activity to go un-noticed and escalate.

**Other Issues**

- 6.5 The visual implications of the proposals are limited and are not dissimilar to the creation of a children's play area or a tennis court on an area that is defined as being for recreational use. Conditions requiring precise details of equipment, fencing of the site and lighting will ensure that any visual implications are limited.
- 6.6 The proposed location of the skate park is also beneficial as it is sited in close proximity to the leisure centre. This offers an opportunity for the site to be properly managed if the application is approved. Other sites such as one around The Grange or at the Bridge Street Centre would not offer the same opportunity, the latter being privately managed.
- 6.7 In conclusion, the proposal will offer a facility to young people that will serve a local need in accordance with Policy A.61 of the Leominster District Local Plan and RST1 of the Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan. On balance it would appear that concerns relating to impacts on residential amenity can be mitigated through the imposition of conditions and therefore the application is recommended for approval.

**RECOMMENDATION**

**That planning permission be granted subject to the following conditions:**

- 1 - A01 (Time limit for commencement (full permission) )**

**Reason: Required to be imposed by Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.**

- 2 - F32 (Details of floodlighting/external lighting )**

**Reason: To safeguard local amenities.**

- 3. Prior to the commencement of development full details of layout of the skate park hereby approved and details of each piece of equipment to be installed on the site shall be submitted to and approved by the local planning authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To define the terms of this permission.

- 4. Before the development hereby permitted commences a scheme shall be agreed with the local planning authority that specifies the provisions to be made for the control of noise emanating from the site. This shall specifically include the use of acoustic foam in all of the approved ramps. The use of the site shall be carried out in accordance with approved details.

Reason: In the interests of nearby residential amenity.

- 5. Any equipment with the potential to cause noise nuisance should be located at a minimum distance of 40 metres from residential accommodation, any additional equipment should be approved by the local planning authority prior to its installation.

Reason: In the interests of nearby residential amenity.

- 6. The hours in which the facilities shall be open for use shall be restricted to 8.00am to 9.30pm.

Reason: In the interests of nearby residential amenity.

- 7. No amplified or other music shall be played on the site of this permission at any times.

Reason: In the interests of nearby residential amenity.

**Informatives:**

1 - N15 - Reason(s) for the Grant of PP/LBC/CAC

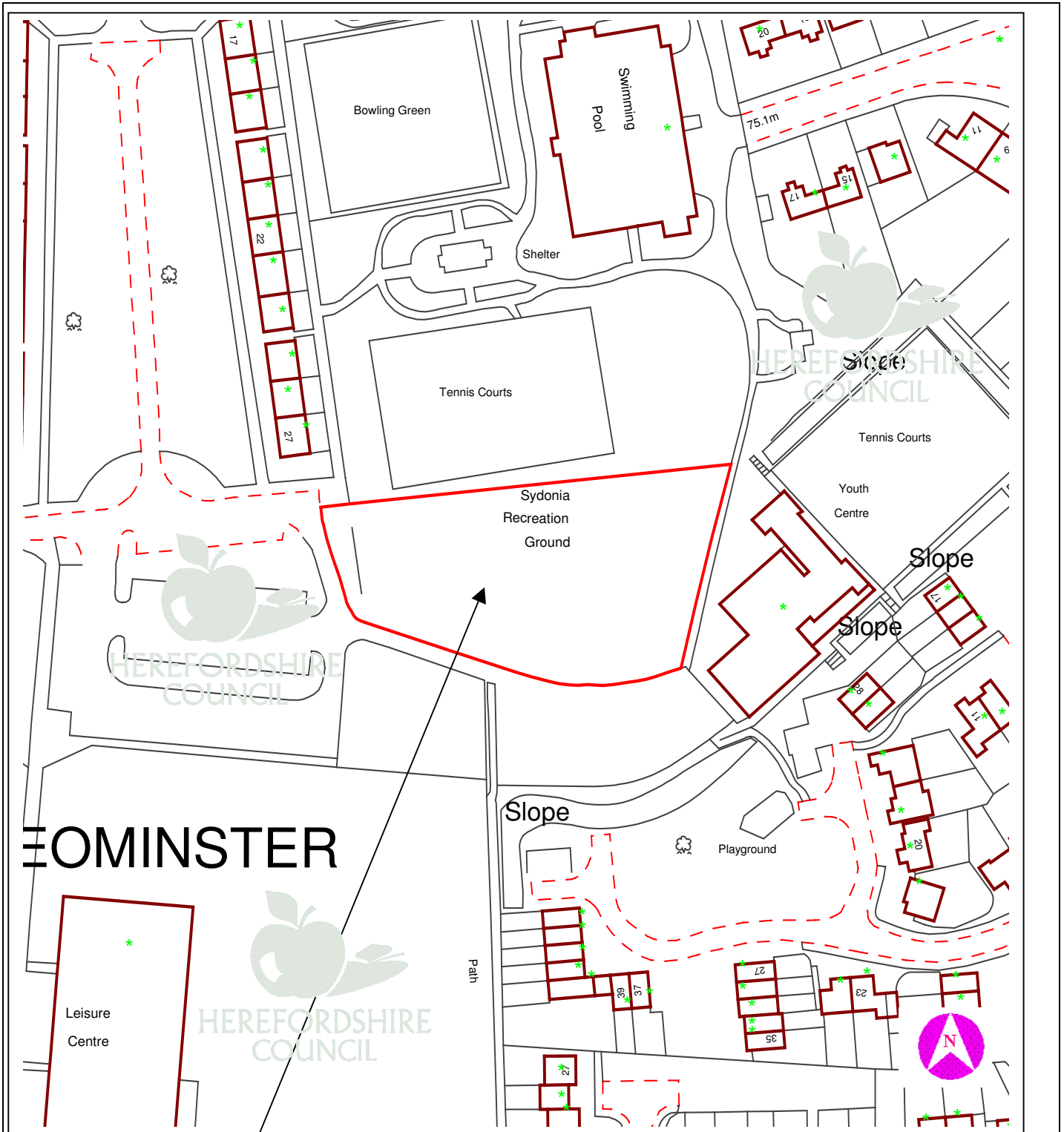
Decision: .....

Notes: .....

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**Background Papers**

Internal departmental consultation replies.



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**APPLICATION NO:** DCNC2006/0277/F

**SCALE :** 1 : 1250

**SITE ADDRESS :** Sydonia Recreation Ground, Conningsby Road, Leominster

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