

Dear Louis,

Thank you for your open letter. I would make the following points.

Firstly, the city council has been committed to providing places for people to skateboard in Norwich for many, many years.

We have a number of skateboarding facilities in our communities and, at the same time as we embarked on our restoration and refurbishment of our war memorial and gardens, we invested heavily in a large new national standard skate park.

We did this in consultation with skateboarders who helped us choose its location and design the park. As the skateboarders had got into the habit of using the memorial gardens as a skate park we were absolutely clear that in return for them not disrespecting the new memorial we would provide them with the national skate park they had craved and campaigned for.

1. The area you described in your first letter is not the area we are suggesting. The area we are suggesting is a tiny part of our city centre around our civic buildings. In doing this we are seeking to protect our Grade 2* star listed war memorial, our grade 2* Listed city hall and some public art. Over a number of years we have tried to speak to young people asking them not to skate in these areas. But sadly some of them have not listened.
2. The publicity has not prevented people using the war memorial for skateboarding indeed very recently my deputy spoke to some young people who were polishing the war memorial in order to facilitate their skateboarding. When he explained that there are a number of skate parks in Norwich they said they would use those instead. But skateboarding on the memorial persists.
3. One problem we have is that a large number of young people using the area do not come from Norwich and so do not know where the local skate parks are. It was proposed at cabinet that we look at making information on these sites available at places of public transport such as the bus station and railway station. However this information will not reach those young people who are transported in by car but we will use the local media to raise awareness of these sites.
4. Another suggestion at cabinet was that we seek to work with our neighbouring district councils to encourage them to provide facilities nearer to where many of the skateboarders live.
5. One of our cabinet members also suggested that we look again at another site for a skate park in an area suggested by many of the young people. But I should stress that when we looked at building our national standard skate park we looked at every possible site in the city with the skateboarders and could find no alternative site to the one we built on.

6. We discussed the possibility of “self-policing” with a leading member of the skateboard community who told us that there are many discrete groups of skateboarders who do not speak to each other and so this was not a viable option.
7. I would stress again that we are not banning skateboards from the whole of the city centre and if you have access to the local press you will be able to read the comments made by the cabinet member clearly stating this.

As an authority I believe we have a responsibility to be clear that we need to protect our heritage and also show respect to the memorial that commemorates the thousands of young people, and most were young, who died in two wars. We also have a duty to protect that heritage which the people of Norwich are so rightly proud.